

I would like first to convey a warm and sincere welcome, on behalf of the Government of Canada, to all the men and women who have come here from abroad, particularly those who are visiting our country for the first time. We are proud that the Dakar Club has chosen to meet in Canada, and we are particularly honoured to welcome to Montreal such eminent persons, many of them ministers, who are contributing their knowledge, expertise and prestige to the cause of development. It is a rare privilege for me, so soon after taking up my position, to speak to such a distinguished group.

The theme of your meetings, the development of agriculture and agribusiness on the African continent, is particularly timely because in our view it is at the heart of what we commonly call the "African economic crisis", a crisis on which the United Nations General Assembly will be deliberating during its current session.

I do not have to tell you the causes of that crisis. Besides the climatic catastrophes there are the agricultural problems, indebtedness, unemployment, protectionism, some errors in orientation, and instability of prices for energy and basic products. You face those challenges every day, with the risk of losing in a few years the ground that has taken the last several decades to gain.

However, the economic aspect of this crisis does not affect only the developing countries, particularly the African continent. The industrialized countries have also been hard hit by it, and its effect is still being strongly felt today in our economies. Behind this recession, whose effects will be felt for a number of years yet, a profound transformation in the structure of the world economy is taking place. Old structures are crumbling, and we cannot yet tell what form will be taken by those structures that are to replace them. However, one thing is certain: besides the structural changes, there has been a change in our outlook - we have given up our utopian hope for continuous and unlimited material development.

To echo Paul Valery, not only have we had to re-learn that civilizations are mortal; we are realizing once again that they are fallible, and that the path of progress is a zig-zag one, which does not always follow an upward curve.

I have become Minister for External Relations at a time when Canada is slowly recovering from this crisis, the most difficult one it has experienced in half a century. The challenge facing our government is a formidable one, not only for our domestic policy, but also for our foreign policy: besides resolving problems inherited from the past, we must seek new solutions to new problems.

Thus, as you might expect, I personally attach considerable importance to the question of the role of women in development. I am