



Statements and Speeches

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UNCTAD V: THE SECOND ASIAN MEETING

Opening Statement by Mr Larry A.H. Smith, Deputy Head and Leader of the Canadian Delegation at the Fifth Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Manila, May 9, 1979.

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In the context of the Arusha meeting of the Group of 77 earlier this year, President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania observed that change is not only desirable but inevitable. This theme, from one of Africa's most distinguished leaders, sums up Canada's central approach to what have become the gross disparities in income levels between wealthy and poor. The spectre of hundreds of millions of people still living in absolute poverty cannot be tolerated by any thinking person. Change is also inevitable because we simply do not have the option of deciding whether to change or not. The process of change is evolutionary, continuous and, if we are to be frank with ourselves, frequently beyond the control of governments. What we must do is decide, within the limited ability of governments to intervene in these processes, and in the common interest of our increasingly linked economies, how we may attempt to influence the changes, prompting those desirable ones that can be accelerated, retarding those that need to be contained, steering those that can be redirected, to ensure that our evolving international economic order will bring benefits to all nations and all peoples. What we obviously cannot do is think that simple exchanges of words, or the drafting of elaborate resolutions, will in themselves have any impact on the world beyond our doors — unless they are based on the realities of those forces that shape our world.

In reference to his own experience in Tanzania, President Nyerere has also said "to plan is to choose". Here, within UNCTAD, and in our discussions on development in all institutions, choice is required, not only in terms of priorities but in the instruments — trade, financial or administrative — chosen to deal with change. Choice is required in the way we combine these instruments and in the manner in which we deal with their intended consequences, and with the sometimes serious side-effects they may produce on growth or distribution.

Given the inevitability of change and the possibility of choice, should we be encouraged or discouraged by our record to date? There are grounds for being both; without question there has been progress. The past 25 years have, in historical terms, been a period of unprecedented growth for the developing countries, measured by both their gross domestic products and their *per capita* incomes. Standards of housing, education, health, nutrition and life-expectancy have all climbed. It would be as foolish to ignore these signs of change as it would be to describe them as adequate. The challenges remain all the greater because we are moving.

That rates of change and economic progress vary significantly from country to coun-
