

In the name of economic development, the rate of extinction of plant and animal life is increasing. Tropical extinction of plant and animal life is also increasing. Tropical rainforests contain, at a minimum, half of all the earth's species. Yet, present trends of forest destruction are estimated to spell extinction for 750,000 species in the next twelve years. The 2000 tropical forest plants identified as having cancer-fighting potential are among the species the world might irreversibly lose.

These are genuine world problems. But they are national problems too.

In terms of land mass, Canada is the second largest country in the world. Perhaps because we are thinly populated, we are perceived by others as having an environment that is pristine. Yet, pollution is now found in our Arctic. 300,000 Canadian lakes are vulnerable to our most important environmental problem, acid rain, and 14,000 lakes have already been acidified. Acid rain from the United States is threatening our apple and maple trees, each producers of important agricultural earnings.

The breeding grounds of northern caribou are threatened by resource development. Beluga whales in the Gulf of St. Lawrence are endangered by the flow of pollutants, including toxic chemicals, from the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes river system. The food supply of the loon, one of the symbols of the Canadian wilderness, is affected by acid rain.

That list is both incomplete and sobering. It is the context in which the Government of Canada has been working on a broad range of programs and policies, designed to heal past wounds inflicted on the environment and to prevent further deterioration in the quality of the air, water and soil on which human life depends.

Canada was, as Dr. McNeil indicated, a strong and early supporter of the World Commission on Environment and Development, headed by Prime Minister Gro Brundtland, of Norway. In addition to helping fund the Commission's work, we made a detailed submission on the issue of environmentally sustainable economic development. In the opinion of this government, as in the view of the United Nations when it accepted Dr. Brundtland's report, sustainable development is the key to the world's future economic well-being and environmental security.

In order to further the work begun by the Brundtland Commission, the Government of Canada is establishing a centre for environmentally sustainable development, in Winnipeg. Discussions about its exact focus and nature have begun within Government Departments, with the Province of Manitoba, and the United Nations Environment Program.