

The concept of conservation today extends far beyond the discussion of forests that occupied the last conference to which I have referred. When we think of conservation nowadays, we include the conservation of the soil, of the fisheries, of the water supply, of electrical power and even of wild life.

And for very good reasons. Canadian forests supply over 80 per cent of the total free world's export of newsprint, and 29 per cent of its lumber. Canada is the second exporter of wheat and live cattle, and an important exporter of other cereal and animal products which depend upon the productivity of the soil.

With a population of less than 1 per cent of the world total, Canada has more than 10 per cent of the world's development hydro-electric power, and three quarters of our water power potential remains to be developed.

Thousands of acres have been reclaimed and restored to productivity in Western Canada by the intelligent use of water resources.

Canada's fisheries, both coastal and inland, have made her the free world's fifth largest producer of fish and the leading exporter of this important food. The fisheries were our very first industry and they remain of great importance to our national economy.

You will understand from these few and well-known facts why the Government of Canada has played an active role in the field of conservation. In doing so, we have applied within our constitutional powers, the principle which I think should be the basis of any conservation policy. That is the principle that our renewable resources should not be depleted at a rate faster than they can be replenished by natural processes aided by human effort. As far as the federal Government is concerned, exceptions to this principle have only been made in times of grave emergency when the very existence of our society was at stake, or when changing times make it most unlikely that future generations will depend as largely as we do on certain resources.

The principle of conservation is such a simple and reasonable one, that people are inclined to take it for granted. But it cannot be taken for granted. It must be pursued constantly and with vigour. A heavy price will be paid by later generations for the lack of a proper consciousness of the need for conservation by their forebearers.

A heavy price is being paid now in many parts of the world because men did not adhere to sound principles of conservation. There are many reasons why proud civilizations of the past have declined and why areas once prosperous are now poverty-stricken. If you search their history well you will find that failure to prevent depletion of renewable resources played a major role in the process of disintegration.

One of the principal problems in Asia today is that of increasing the productivity of areas whose land and forests and other resources have been depleted to excess. I might say that our contributions to the Colombo Plan are to a large extent directed toward helping in a small way to correct that situation.