

Mr. President,

It would be only natural, indeed it is almost obligatory, for me, as the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to tell an audience such as this one how important the government and the Canadian people think our ties with the rest of the hemisphere are. It would also be true the significance of our links with the United States are obvious and needn't be emphasized, but perhaps I could spend a moment or two explaining just why I think that the ties with the rest of the hemisphere are of increasing importance, and indeed are much more so than ten or fifteen years ago.

As I view the world over the past two decades or so I see an almost inexorable increase in instability - both politically and economically. In the nineteen fifties and early sixties the world was held in balance by the spheres of influence of the two major super-powers. In a manner not entirely dissimilar to the stabilizing effect of the imperialist powers in the age of colonialism, the USA and Russia for a period were able to exert a controlling influence on a very large portion of the globe. Through that influence, though it was not always appreciated by the countries subject to it, the powers were able to keep conflicting forces in a sort of balance. This balance was not complete, and certainly was not universal, but there is no question that it limited the scope for major conflict. Although there were outbreaks of intense animosities in various parts of the world, none of them approached global dimensions.

At the same time the empires of the European states were being disbanded, and most of the former colonies were gaining their independence. That process was not always peaceful, though often it was, but any conflict to which the process gave rise was pretty well contained within the borders of the states in question.

It was only natural that a country like Canada, a developed nation with no history of colonialism, would be called upon by many of the newly independent countries for support in a variety of ways. It was also only natural that we should respond. One unfortunate result of this may have been that in paying so much attention to these new countries in continents far away we failed to pay the attention we should to our neighbours in this hemisphere.

In any event we greatly increased our involvement and commitments in the new countries overseas at a time when the world was more or less stabilized by the spheres of interest of the two super-powers. But in the past decade those two powers have