

Mr. President:

I welcome this opportunity to set out how Canada views the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. This is also the right occasion to speak to the role of the UN in the implementation of the Program of Action. Since this is the first time the General Assembly has considered the WSSD since the Copenhagen event, I start by expressing our appreciation to Denmark for hosting the Summit, and to Ambassador Somavia for the passion and imagination he brought to the whole process.

The WSSD took a comprehensive approach to social development. It expressed a people-centred vision of sustainable development in which economic, social and environmental objectives are interwoven for the purpose of improving the well-being of people. Beyond the nice words, what is new here is the emergent idea of individual economic and social security as an increasingly important factor in global affairs. From that comes a renewed focus on human development, both in domestic public policy and international cooperation.

The WSSD approach to enablement and empowerment merits mention. It recognizes that at the heart of policies to enable social development are democratic institutions, respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and respect for cultural diversity. This shows a profound understanding that these are policies that foster personal well-being and social and political inclusiveness. The emphasis on empowerment and participation of individuals and communities reflects the conviction that people should be able to participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives. Development must be by people, not only for them. Gender equality is central to this.

It is worth referring also to the principles and values which infuse the Declaration and Program of Action, notably solidarity, partnership and mutual respect as well as to the ethical underpinning of the key Commitments made. These principles, if acted out, offer the appropriate basis for national harmony as well as international cooperation in a world where interdependence is deepening at all levels.

High minded declarations of intent often engender skepticism, especially when not tied to concrete action. The acid test for our publics will indeed be the followup. In planning for that, it is worth keeping in mind the new elements that Copenhagen brought forward in the international approach to social development.

A key point is the universal relevance of the issues addressed by the Social Summit. Poverty is a main preoccupation, but the approach is not North-South. The reality is that all our countries are grappling, in different ways, with the central Summit themes: poverty reduction, employment creation and and social cohesion.