

Distinguished Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen, let me extend a welcome to all those attending the St. John's Conference on High Seas Fisheries. A particular welcome is warranted for those eminent legal and scientific experts who have come from the United Nations, the FAO and many countries to participate in this conference. Your presence today reflects, I believe, the importance you accord to dealing with the challenges facing the operation of the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention as it relates to high seas fisheries.

My colleagues and I in the Government of Canada believe that through the proper application of the principles of international law embodied in the U.N. Law of the Sea Convention, the international community can achieve effective conservation and management of living resources of the high seas.

We believe that the U.N. Law of the Sea Convention can provide the basis, as it was intended to do, for the sustainable development of the living resources of the high seas, for the benefit of current and future generations. We believe that through the development of practical measures to give effect to the Law of the Sea regime for high seas fisheries and, equally importantly, through international acceptance of those measures, we can put an end to ecological tragedies that are developing, or that have already occurred in the Northwest Atlantic, the North Pacific, the South Pacific and off the coasts of Africa and other areas.

My colleagues, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, and I wanted St. John's to be the site of this conference because of Newfoundland's vital and historic link with the fishery.

It was on June 24, 1497, the feast of Saint John the Baptist, that Giovanni Caboto, a Genoese explorer sailing under the commission of King Henry VII of England, entered St. John's harbour. Caboto reported on his return to England that the waters off this "new found land" teemed with fish, so that they could be taken merely by letting down a basket weighted with stones. Would that that were the case today.

From the earliest years after Caboto's discovery the fishery was prosecuted with great vigour off these coasts, including the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and the Flemish Cap, that extend almost 300 nautical miles to the East and Southeast of the island. Thus, for almost five centuries there has been a major fishery here. And, for almost three centuries, there has been permanent settlement based on the fishery.