

Mr. President,

Let me begin by thanking you and your government for the generous hospitality which France is extending to this conference. I am confident that the others here in this room share my appreciation.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the honour which has been accorded to Canada to preside over this conference of ministers with Venezuela. In fact, this is not an ordinary conference but a unique event. It is the beginning of a crucial dialogue aimed at establishing a sound basis for economic co-operation which will make it possible for all of our countries to face the future with confidence.

The challenge we face is tremendous and, I am sure, the historic proportions of the task are obvious to everyone here today. I believe we can meet this challenge. Each one of us is determined to do so, because each one of us knows that the consequences of inaction could be grave indeed. Thanks to your initiative, Mr. President, we have the solid foundations of two preparatory conferences to build on. Indeed, these preparations have already defined the framework in which we are to organize our work. The number of participants in the conference has been limited so that we may consider the issues before us in the most efficient and constructive manner possible. Its members are, however, broadly representative of the various interests at stake in the issues before us, representative of the views of industrialized countries and of developing countries, of consumers and producers.

Another reason for my optimism is that we have from the outset determined a practical and sensible framework for the dialogue we are starting. It has not been conceived in terms of issues to be hammered out in the space of a three-day conference, but rather as a longer, more serious process, which shall be divided among four commissions which will be working in the months ahead and examining the prospects of economic co-operation. That is our major task: to launch the commissions and to ensure that they will be able to carry out their work under the best possible conditions.

By getting the dialogue started in this way, we shall, I believe, be maintaining the momentum generated at the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly and we shall be carrying further the spirit of constructive pragmatism that characterized those discussions.