

Distinguished delegates:

Last year, the world witnessed an unprecedented series of wrenching human events. Whether inspired by great human courage or by a tragic and reflexive return to preoccupations of the past, these events will leave their mark.

The aftershocks of the events of 1991 have travelled around the world, changing patterns of human behaviour just as Pinatubo's ashes have changed patterns of global weather.

The most fundamental change brought about in our global order is to have freed it from its previous moorings. This has given us the opportunity to collectively reorient our world to more acceptable standards of behaviour, standards we have all acknowledged through the United Nations Charter.

As we have weighed anchor from past rigidities, we have seen barriers to the movement of goods and people and ideas collapse. We have seen distances between us close, but not all. Some of the distances -- between rich and poor, between aggressors and peacemakers, between those who conserve and those who waste -- have not been significantly reduced. If we are to achieve the kind of world conceived in the UN Charter, we must strive to reduce those differences.

Reducing distances and bridging gaps: that is, in the end, what you have all eloquently been speaking about this morning.

One significant step in reducing distances is the engagement of dialogue -- informal and formal -- on security issues. What we are trying to do is to enhance understanding, to identify and reaffirm common principles, and to build on the solid foundation of existing security arrangements both bilateral and multilateral.

There are many practical things that we can do, in support of the dialogue on security issues that we are opening at this meeting. For example, together with our Indonesian partners, Canada has been sponsoring informal talks on reducing tensions in the South China Sea. In so doing we are not trying to impose solutions from elsewhere, but simply trying to see if other experiences in the peaceful settlement of disputes might not be useful in the building of confidence among and between countries of the region.

As our dialogue on security issues evolves, there may be other areas where such co-operative ventures may be helpful, from traditional confidence and security-building measures, to a possible focus on non-traditional security questions: the drug trade, migration, perhaps even environment.

However it might be defined in future, the important thing today is that we have agreed that a security dialogue is in our common interest.