

Mr. Chairman,

The magnitude and depth of human suffering caused by the economic crisis in Africa has jolted us all. It has moved the international community from complacency to concern, and from concern to action. Our purpose here is to examine how well we have acted - and what remains to be done.

My responsibilities for Canada's Development Assistance program and my special responsibilities for Canada's relations with Africa have made me fully aware of conditions there. This last year, I have had the opportunity to travel to Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Zaire, Gabon and Mozambique. And I have witnessed there first hand, both the hardships and the courage of individual Africans and their governments. More recently, at the Francophone Summit in Quebec and at the Commonwealth Summit in Vancouver, I met with many African leaders and discussed with them the plight of their people.

For me personally, and I reflect the view of the Canadian government and people, these experiences have instilled an even firmer resolve to focus our own efforts on Africa. We are determined to do not only our part, but more. And, we intend to continue to work to focus the attention of the international community and our major economic partners on Africa. That is why I have made a point of coming to participate in this debate.

I would like to start by thanking the Secretary General for his thorough and insightful report on progress in the implementation of the African Economic Recovery Programme. He has provided us with a very frank and detailed review of how far we have come in the past year.

It is, to say the least, a very distressing report. We cannot express any great satisfaction at the results obtained from the combined efforts of the African countries and the international community in actually helping the people of Africa. Indeed, we can only express disappointment at the failure of our efforts to make significant changes in their lives.

However, at the time of the Special Session on Africa, when we discussed, considered and agreed on the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery and Development, no one anticipated the economic situation we are in today. For most countries, growth has lagged far behind expectations. Most commodity markets have remained in decline, in real terms. Commercial credit flows have virtually stagnated, and official flows barely improved. Clearly, the world economic situation has adversely affected our efforts.