

Government Orders

• (1610)

Canada's National Task Force on the Environment and Economy prepared the earliest and still the most comprehensive national response to the challenges that were presented by the Brundtland commission. It was not all talk. There have been a lot of reports about the environment, but this was a very significant report. In response to the task force each province and territory in Canada and the federal government established round tables to address the pressing issues of sustainable development. This round table involved people from all sectors of our community coming together, sitting down at a table and building a consensus.

There are now dozens of local round tables across the country. Some municipalities have now established round tables. In my own constituency of Scarborough Centre, we have just recently started the process of getting this round table set up by bringing people together. These round tables are established all across the country in municipal and regional areas to discuss the conflict for the common good of bringing people together. These uniquely Canadian round tables have two things in common.

First, unlike previous associations and interest groups, their members have divergent interests and opinions, but a common interest in resolving problems of environment and economy. Second, they have a remarkable record of achievement, based on open discussion and consensus decision-making. While in 1987 it seemed terribly naive to suggest that Canada would launch dozens of new institutional experiments in democracy in response to a United Nations' report, a task force of industrial leaders, the environment minister, and environmentalists from all parties recommended exactly that and that is exactly what happened. Canadians right across the country in every province and the two territories formed an entirely new institution to address the new challenges of this new concept called sustainable development.

This past summer Canada was a very energetic and enthusiastic participant at the unprecedented earth summit held in Rio de Janeiro in June of last year. The delegation from Canada was extensive, made up of members from all the parties in the House of Commons, as well as numerous environmental groups and non-government groups. Many people gathered in Rio de Janeiro to discuss these issues some 20 years after the

Stockholm conference. It was truly the largest United Nations conference of any proportions and uniquely it was concerning the environment.

The Minister of the Environment led the delegation for that two-week conference in Brazil. Our Prime Minister was there to give an address on behalf of Canada and to sign two very important conventions, the biodiversity convention and the global warming convention. More important, we were leading the way. As other countries were concerned about signing the biodiversity convention, our own Prime Minister said: "We will be the first to sign this convention". Indeed, the Prime Minister did sign on behalf of Canada, the first nation to sign that biodiversity convention to protect the flora and fauna of the earth.

• (1615)

In this regard the process of setting up a round table was a most important aspect of what we were wanting to do in terms of having organizations and people from all different walks of life come together and have this round table as a meeting of the minds.

I might say in response to my colleague who just spoke concerning Canada's green plan, the United Nations Environment Program chairman, Mr. Tolba, stated at the Brazil conference that Canada's green plan was an example for all nations. It was hailed as the example of what Canadians could do together and as a nation come forth with a green plan. In fact nations that participated in that conference were anxious to find out what the green plan was. They wanted us to tell them about the plan, to give them copies of it.

The \$3 billion in funds attached to the commitments of the green plan is a very, very substantial commitment on behalf of all Canadians. This year alone there is a 30 per cent increase in the amount of funds attached to the environment programs, initiatives that take place out of that green plan. As we are pressed in terms of our financial resources, our commitment to the environment has been steadfast in the increase of that amount of money.

At a time in history when all of us need some encouragement about our ability to respond to rapid change, we have an opportunity to build on our tradition of forward-looking institutional adaptation in the interests of improving our environmental and economic quality of life.