

The summits have been the target of much criticism, however. Some see them as media extravaganzas, others as occasions for the leaders to approve texts that will never be acted on. Let me say that Prime Minister Chrétien has listened carefully to the criticism and has tried to make this summit a real working session for the leaders. Without diminishing the importance of the preparatory work done by the different sherpas, there is still much to be done by the leaders themselves.

Activity at the official level can never take the place of political will on the part of the various G-7 members. If a failure occurs, and if criticism of previous summits is warranted, it is at the political level. As for the Government of Canada, I can tell you that the Halifax Summit is an important part of its foreign policy agenda.

As host of the summit, we have the unique opportunity to set the agenda and the tone of the discussions.

Allow me, if you will, to touch on some of Canada's political objectives on the eve of the Halifax Summit. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien will take the opportunity when here tomorrow to talk about the economic aspect of the summit.

The issue of United Nations [UN] reform exemplifies the need for political will. This summit will allow us not only to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the UN but also to reaffirm our commitment to multilateral co-operation in the political and security areas. I intend to continue the dialogue that I began last year in New York when, on behalf of the Government, I presented Canada's proposals for reform of the United Nations - in particular its rapid reaction capability. Canada has conducted a study on the matter, and has undertaken to present the results at the next meeting of the General Assembly this autumn in New York.

Many voices have been heard of late challenging the validity of the UN's peacekeeping operations and its ability to fulfil its mandate. I would be the first to admit that the UN system has its weaknesses and shortcomings. However, despite its failures, I would not question its usefulness. On the contrary, I believe that we must draw some important lessons from the difficulties encountered by the UN recently in Somalia and right now in Bosnia. Canada intends to seize the opportunity given by Halifax to again affirm the necessity of working together toward the reforms that will give the UN a second wind. Herein lies one of the main merits of this kind of summit: it is a unique opportunity to pursue discussions on matters requiring the political will of states.

The UN has been asked to respond more rapidly and more effectively to counter threats to international peace and security. With its G-7 colleagues, Canada intends to examine ways of reinforcing the UN system's capacity for preventive diplomacy.