

It commits us to UNCED as a priority for action.

It does so because we recognize that we are in a world of interdependence. Our environmental fate is tied to that of the world.

Perhaps this understanding comes from the strong sense of environment which underlies Canadians' sense of nationhood.

Think about it for a moment. When Canada came into being 125 years ago, less than a quarter of Canadians lived in cities, while the rest lived in rural and frontier areas as our Aboriginal people had for many centuries. Now, the reverse is true and with a much larger population. But, while Canadians may have moved to the cities and new immigrants have tended to settle there, our sense of place is not really urban.

Our mental image of Canada may include the CN Tower, but in our hearts it is one of mountains, oceans and the Arctic. It is the North and the prairies. It is fundamentally shaped by the environment that welcomed us and that nurtures us still.

Our artistic heritage, whether back to painters like Paul Peel or later among the Group of Seven, A. J. Casson and Emily Carr, is linked to the vastness and grandeur of the Canadian environment.

Our economic life began with furs, fish and forests. To this day, many jobs are still tied to them.

All these factors suggest why, maybe more than most people, Canadians see themselves through the prism of their environment. And threats to that environment or how we co-exist with it have been a part of Canadian thinking for a long time. In the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, there is a display of how a lumber camp in the Ottawa Valley would have looked in the 19th century.

That's interesting enough, but what is more interesting in some ways can be found on a wall nearby. There you will find a long quote from Sir John A. Macdonald. As Prime Minister for many years, his office overlooked the Ottawa River. From his window he could see hundreds of thousands of logs floating on their way to the mills in Ottawa, Hull and elsewhere.

The quote describes his concern about the long-term viability of that kind of forest use. He wondered just how long such cutting could last before there were no more trees. He wondered where it would lead. Although Sir John A. did not know the term, he was wondering about sustainable development. And now we are coming to grips with the questions he posed over a hundred years ago.