

Mr. President,

It is fitting that we have returned to the Caribbean to conclude our work where 9 years ago the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea began its deliberations. The Caribbean is a region where the sea is a part of the national heritage. It is a region where the sea and its bounty offer the best prospects for the future. The waters of the Caribbean are rich in fish and its seabed holds a wealth of oil and other mineral resources. This tropical sea also provides invaluable amenities for recreation which Canadians in particular at this time of year truly appreciate. But such advantages must never be taken for granted. There is always the danger of marine pollution, of over-fishing and of conflict over fisheries and maritime boundaries. Only a widely accepted Law of the Sea Convention can ensure benefits from the oceans while at the same time minimizing the problems brought about by conflicting uses of ocean resources. Advancing the cause of world peace and security over nearly three-quarters of the surface of the globe is and must be the greatest accomplishment of this Conference and this Convention.

It is fitting, too, that we have gathered here in Jamaica, the site of the International Seabed Authority, to sign the Law of the Sea Convention. Ambassador Rattray of Jamaica is one of the select group of men, the Collegium of the Conference, who have provided the leadership, the dedication and the drive to bring the Conference to its conclusion. Conference President Koh of Singapore, Ambassador Engo of Cameroon, Ambassador Aguilar of Venezuela, Professor Yankov of Bulgaria, and Ambassador Beesley of Canada are also among those who deserve special mention. I wish to pay tribute as well to the memory of the late Conference President, Shirley Amerasinghe of Sri Lanka, who provided such inspiration for many years. And finally, what could we have accomplished without the support and unstinting cooperation of the Conference Secretariat under Bernardo Zuleta of Colombia?

When addressing the International Law Association a few months ago in Montreal, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Perez de Cuellar, called the Law of the Sea Convention "possibly the most significant legal instrument of this century". I believe Canada can be proud of the role it has played in helping to shape this treaty. I think all delegations can be proud of a Convention that recognizes the interest and role of all states -- whether coastal or landlocked -- in the law of the sea. I am especially pleased that the Convention provides for an equitable distribution of the ocean's wealth between developed and developing nations, thereby providing a substantial response to some of the imperatives of the North/South dialogue.