

70E

CANADIAN DECLARATION
AT THE
SECOND MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE
UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
CONVENTION ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
IN A TRANSBOUNDARY CONTEXT

To be delivered by
Robert G. Connelly
Head of the Canadian Delegation

at

Sofia, Bulgaria

February 26, 2001

Madame Chair, Ministers, fellow delegates:

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank our hosts for their very warm hospitality and reception in Bulgaria. Although Canada's Minister of the Environment, the Honourable David Anderson was unable to attend personally, he sends his greetings to Minister Maneva and to his other colleagues represented here, and he wishes the Parties to the Convention very productive discussions during its second meeting. It is particularly a great pleasure for Canada to make this statement on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Convention.

Significant political, economic and social change has occurred in Europe and North America over the past decade. Environmental issues are once again growing in importance, and Canada believes the Espoo Convention will serve countries well as a planning tool for sustainable development as we move into the 21st century.

The Espoo Convention is founded on the principle elaborated in Section 21 of the Stockholm Declaration, that states have a responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other states or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. We are pleased that, 33 countries, including Canada, have embraced this principle by formally ratifying the Convention and accepting its obligations as being legally binding. The Espoo Convention has been, and will continue to be, an innovative and useful instrument for international co-operation and dialogue on environmental assessment matters of mutual interest.

Governments that have ratified the Convention are paying greater attention to the potential transboundary effects of developments originating within their borders. As well, the Convention's principles have been embraced by countries outside the region of the Economic Commission for Europe. Most notably, the Convention has influenced the development of environmental impact assessment regimes in countries both within and outside of the region represented by the Economic Commission for Europe.

Canada is pleased to note that the Espoo Convention has fostered the development of bilateral and multilateral agreements among our respective countries. These agreements are strengthening the application of the Convention, improving co-operation and resulting in positive discussions about reducing the impact of certain planned activities.

The Convention has also served as a model for other agreements, including the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy and the environmental impact assessment agreement being developed by Canada, the United States and Mexico under the North American Free Trade Agreement. The Convention also led Canada to include transboundary provisions in its own environmental assessment legislation, enacted in 1995.

Looking to the future, Canada believes the need for the Espoo Convention has never been greater. Continued growth in the world's population and the freer flow of goods and services will boost the demand for energy, raw materials and development projects of many kinds. All nations must accept that environmental effects that may arise from such developments do not always respect national boundaries. Greater vigilance is needed to ensure that activities in one country do not have far-reaching implications for ecosystems or people in other jurisdictions.

Canada is confident the Convention will continue to serve its purpose of engaging governments in an objective, meaningful dialogue on reducing the impacts of new projects and activities. At the same time, Canada wholeheartedly endorses the proposal to conduct a review of the Convention in 2001 or 2002, with a view to updating and strengthening its provisions. Canada also supports the need for continued research and exchanges of information among the Parties to advance the concept of environmental impact assessment.

The Espoo Convention is a unique and effective mechanism for dealing with emerging transboundary environmental issues in a co-operative manner. Canada recognizes the value of such co-operation, and looks forward to continue to work with other Parties to enhance the application of the Convention and to ensure that its provisions are rigorously applied.

Thank you for your attention