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HEADLINE: Paul Martin accepts UN **commission** post, sees no conflict with Liberal race

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BODY:

UNITED NATIONS (CP) _ Paul Martin will perform a warmup lap as a United Nations co-chairman while winding down the days to his all-but-certain appointment as prime minister, he announced Friday.

The Liberal leadership favourite was named co-chairman of a United Nations **commission** devoted to economic development in the Third World.

Friday's appointment might help offset Martin's one-dimensional popular image as a deficit-slaying numbers cruncher.

"I have always been interested in problems of Third World development," Martin noted in an interview from New York.

"I believe the alleviation of poverty is the single most important problem we face as a human society."

Martin often points out that when he was finance minister, he was instrumental in lobbying other countries to relieve Third World debt.

Also, his appointment to the **Commission** on the **Private Sector** and Development could help deflect criticism he's too cozy with the United States.

Martin has also said military action must sometimes be taken without the UN.

Meanwhile, he said he sees no conflict with heading up a UN **commission** while running to lead Canada.

The UN appointment is no more time-consuming than the job of cabinet minister, he said in reference to his lone remaining leadership opponent.

"The other candidate (Heritage Minister Sheila Copps) is a minister. She has responsibilities," Martin said.

The job won't require much travel because most work can be done by telephone, through the Internet, or by video conference. However, he said he will have to travel occasionally to New York.

Martin said the UN **commission** is exploring revolutionary ways of creating wealth.

He said foreign aid and trade will always play a crucial role in developing poor countries.

However, the **commission** is studying ways for countries to stimulate their own economies.

It will offer suggestions for local **private sectors** to create wealth and help develop a middle class where there is none.

"I think this is an opportunity for Canadians to take a leadership role in an area that really advances the yardsticks," Martin said during a conference call.

The Liberals will choose a successor to Jean Chretien at a November convention, although Martin is expected to have victory sewn up after delegate-selection meetings in September.

Chretien has said he won't step down until early next year, after the UN **commission** is expected to have completed its work.

Meanwhile, Martin said he has not spoken with Chretien _ his longtime political rival _ about the UN appointment.

He said he was not representing the federal government but was taking on the challenge as a personal initiative.

Former Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo will also sit as a co-chair on the **commission**.

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