

Madam Speaker,

I rise at a moment when we are witnessing great and historic changes in South Africa, a moment that Canada has precipitated through many of its actions over the past decades.

What was once a great tragedy of our lifetimes has now become a story of renewed hope for all South Africans, black and white. It is a story in which we, as Canadians, have played an important role, one that bears repeating in this House.

Canada has been a leader in the fight against apartheid for many decades. It was John Diefenbaker who led in the Commonwealth -- when South Africa left the Commonwealth -- saying that there would always be a light in the window for South Africa.

Our Prime Minister today is the Prime Minister who led the policy of the Commonwealth regarding sanctions; the former Secretary of State for External Affairs and now the Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs was among world leaders in the policy against apartheid in South Africa.

Now that this system is beginning to crumble, the world's attention, and particularly the attention of Canadians, is focused on the initial steps toward establishing a non-racial democracy, a moment that we can all celebrate.

A dramatic milestone in the progress toward that goal came on March 17, when President de Klerk's call for a mandate to continue negotiations was overwhelmingly endorsed by the white electorate. In the wake of that outcome, the Prime Minister asked me to visit South Africa to express in person Canada's strong support for the process of constitutional negotiations currently under way through the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA).

During my four-day visit, I met many of the political leaders actively involved in the negotiations, including Nelson Mandela and President de Klerk, as well as many others -- church and community leaders, academics and businesspeople -- who are working to bring about a peaceful transformation in their country. The experience was a moving one, not only because of the insights that I gained at the formal political level, but also because of the many brave and dedicated people I met who have devoted their lives to combatting the evils of the system that surrounds them.

But the fight for peace, justice, and equality is not over. The road ahead is fraught with difficulty and danger. While in South Africa, I strongly condemned to all whom I met the violence that continues to claim lives on a daily basis. It threatens not only to undermine the current discussions, but to jeopardize the future of democratic development in South Africa. If that country is to have lasting change and assume its rightful place