

Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Mr. Assistant Secretary-General,  
Your Excellencies, Foreign Ministers of Member  
Countries, Distinguished Permanent Representatives and Permanent  
Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today is an historic and happy occasion for me and for my country. For today, Canada joins the oldest regional organization in the world and the centrepiece of the Inter-American system. Today, at long last, we take our seat at the table of the Organization of American States.

I am touched by your warm words of welcome and your unanimous support for our application of membership. We shall proceed quickly to ratify our signature of the Charter and to undertake fully the responsibilities of our membership.

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Jorge Luis Borges, the great Argentinian author, is reported to have said, and I quote, "Canada is so far away that it almost does not exist."

There has been a psychological distance between Canada and the southern part of this hemisphere.

We intend to change that state of mind, to make Canada "exist" more significantly for Latin America and to make Latin America "exist" more substantially for Canadians.

Mr. President, Canada's joining of the OAS represents not so much a decision to become a member of an organization as it does a decision to become a partner in this hemisphere. For too long, Canadians have seen this hemisphere as our house; it is now time to make it our home.

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We are living in a period of potent challenge and immense opportunity. Developments in Latin America mirror the profound changes sweeping the globe, particularly the freedom of people to govern themselves.

In the past ten years, no fewer than ten Latin American countries have made the historic and courageous transition from dictatorship to democracy. It is our hope that democracy will soon become the accepted form of government in all countries of the hemisphere.