

We are here to open a Centre. And in so doing, we are here to celebrate a cause and confirm a commitment. That commitment is to the defence and pursuit of human rights and democracy around the world. That cause is the development of a world where justice knows no borders and human rights no caveat. That cause and that commitment are central elements of Canada's foreign policy. And they have firm roots in our Canadian experience and Canadian values.

As we enter a new decade and approach a new century, never have there been such grounds for optimism that the observance of human rights around the world will become more the rule and less the exception. And never have so many societies embraced democracy, some for the first time and some once again.

But this is not a time for complacency or congratulation. For the process is just beginning. In some countries, old walls have been torn down. But new structures remain to be built. In those countries, the fabric is fragile and the future remains uncertain. And in many parts of the world, walls remain. Walls of the mind and walls of power. Walls that which deprive people of their rights and their prosperity. Walls that deny development and consign whole sectors of society to lives that are partial and poor. That some battles have been won tells us that there are many battles yet to be fought.

Those victories will be won through action, based on an attitude that does not see human rights as a luxury but as what that term says: rights which come with being human. An attitude that does not pose false choices -- development versus democracy, security versus human rights, stability versus justice. An attitude that does not see those as choices but as complements.

The past year has seen that new attitude in evidence in Europe, where in a matter of months, what we once feared was permanent came tumbling down, a triumph of the human spirit which took our breath away. That triumph represented the end of one system and the beginning of another. But that new system has yet to take form and tearing down is easier than building up. Democracy and human rights have been given an opportunity in Eastern Europe. It is up to the people of these countries -- and to us to ensure that opportunity becomes success.

The peoples of Eastern Europe did not reject communism because they thought it was illogical or immoral. They rejected communism because it did not work, it did not deliver. It denied people food for the body and food for the spirit. The collapse of communism is a victory not for ideology, but for common sense.