

Mr. President,  
Ministers and heads of delegations,  
Madam President of the Permanent Council,  
Mr. Secretary-General of the ACCT [Cultural and Technological  
Co-operation Agency],  
Dear Friends:

The representatives of La Francophonie once again find themselves meeting on African soil.

That is to say, our meeting takes place in the midst not only of those who most desired it — I am thinking here of the Senghors, the Dioris, the Bourguibas — but also of those who, in many ways, have best illustrated steadfast devotion to the ideal of solidarity that La Francophonie embodies.

We are also among those whose continuing allegiance is an important guarantor of La Francophonie's permanence, its richness and the diversity of its values. In the series of Summits, Ouagadougou represents another landmark after Bujumbura, Dakar, Mauritius and Bamako. Meanwhile, Cotonou awaits us. . . .

I am therefore very happy that the first time I have the pleasure of taking part in a ministerial conference of La Francophonie, it is here in Burkina Faso.

A sincere "thank you" to you, Minister Ouedraogo, and to the authorities and people of your country, for the warm welcome extended to us. Our Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien, and I have fond memories of your recent visit to Canada.

In the name of the Prime Minister, I would like to reiterate Canada's unwavering commitment to La Francophonie. I can assure you as well of my own commitment to this fraternal alliance, which is as noble as it is necessary.

History has made Canada a country whose unity, specific nature and very existence as a unique entity have always depended and will continue to depend on the dynamism of its linguistic and cultural heritage. Hence our natural affinity toward countries that share the French language in common with us. Hence also the importance we attach to promoting La Francophonie and seeing it developed and strengthened as a community that is itself multilateral and respectful of diversity.

Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the fathers of La Francophonie, described it as "integral humanism weaving itself around the world." Canada is well-placed to realize that La Francophonie is not a question of territory. The greatest lesson we have learned is that La Francophonie is not defined by borders; it is universal. Our Canadian Francophonie — in Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba and elsewhere — needs the support of a strong, vigorous, credible and worldwide Francophone community.