

I am deeply moved to be here with you in Kiev this evening to celebrate the close ties of family and friendship that bind the peoples of Canada and the Ukraine.

The Ukraine has given Canada something precious and enduring: almost one million Canadians of Ukrainian descent who have made an immeasurable contribution to the building of the Canadian nation.

I think, for instance, of the painter William Kurelek, who has captured so evocatively the joys of childhood in Canada's prairie provinces; of delegations of influential Canadian businessmen of Ukrainian origin who visit the Ukraine, exploring opportunities for trade with you; or of Canada's next Governor-General and Head of State, The Honorable Ramon Hnatyshyn. He will bring honor to his new responsibilities and joy to the hearts of all Canadians.

The first Ukrainian settlers arrived in Canada in the late 19th century. In their new land, particularly in our prairie provinces where many of them settled, they found echoes of the country they had left behind. They found those echoes in the harsh winters they endured; in the fertile wheat fields they farmed; and in the endless spaces they sought to settle. They worked and sacrificed and prayed and they found opportunity, prosperity and freedom in a new land, on a new continent.

Today in Canada, almost a century later, the Ukrainian language is still spoken and Ukrainian heritage is still strong and impressive. This is a heritage which is justly and wisely cherished by all Canadians, who rejoice in the diversity of their different origins.

I am sometimes asked what it means to be Canadian. How do we define ourselves? And how is a sense of belonging fostered among people who have come from the four corners of the globe to become citizens of Canada?

I believe the answer lies in tolerance; tolerance of differences in race, language, religion and colour and expressed openly in a free and democratic society. We have recognized that diversity is infinitely more a source of strength and dynamism than a cause of friction.