

Thank you for inviting me to meet with you today. It is wonderful to be back in the friendly and dynamic city of Calgary. This is a city whose business leaders, I know, have been among the most active in Canada in pursuing opportunities in the booming markets of Asia-Pacific.

As Prime Minister Chrétien has demonstrated so clearly, trade – exports, investment and technology transfer – is central to sustaining Canadian prosperity. The export of Canadian goods and services accounts for over one quarter of Canada's gross domestic product. Directly and indirectly, exports sustain over two million jobs in Canada. Most importantly, the export sector has been the most dynamic element in stimulating economic growth in Canada. For all these reasons, international business development holds a high priority on our government's economic agenda.

Considerable progress has been made in recent months in bringing down trade barriers – at both the interprovincial and the international level. We have had a successful conclusion, after almost seven years of negotiation, to the Uruguay Round of the GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade]. We have committed ourselves to the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]. And we have worked hard to build bridges to Asia-Pacific markets through such vehicles as APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum], ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations], and ARF [ASEAN Regional Forum].

Our government is putting into place the building blocks that confirm our identity as a Pacific nation. Roy MacLaren, André Ouellet and I have criss-crossed the region, working hard to promote Canadian interests.

In March I led a 50-member trade delegation to India and Pakistan to pursue opportunities in those countries. Several engineering firms joined me on the visit, and I can tell you they were extremely excited about the myriad of opportunities in South Asia. At the end of July I will be going to Indonesia to explore the markets in that country.

I am convinced that our government's focus on Asia-Pacific – and our explanations to Canadians for that focus – is perhaps the best example to Canadians of our government's Red Book philosophy. In short, exports create jobs, and jobs create wealth for Canadians, thus helping to reduce the deficit and to maintain many of those programs, such as health care, that have made our country the envy of the world.

Yet, as you know, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade must be concerned not only with international trade issues, but also with political, social and economic matters. As our trade grows, we frequently encounter political conditions that are different from those we enjoy in Canada. We respect time-honoured traditions and cultures, but as Canadians we cannot turn aside from violations of universally accepted fundamental freedoms.