

Excellency, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to welcome you here this evening on the occasion of the opening of this Canada-Malaysia Conference. The list of participants is remarkable, in that it brings together a host of distinguished representatives of government, business and the academic community from both countries. We are especially honoured, Excellency, that you have found it possible to come to Canada at this time. I know that you have had to make significant adjustments to your own schedule, both official and personal, in order to accommodate the visit, and I deeply appreciate your thoughtfulness. In our earlier discussion, you recalled that you had, in your previous portfolio, visited Canada last year to attend the International Congress on Alcoholism and Drugs in Calgary. You are therefore no stranger to Canada and to our views on at least one important issue. I hope you will also find your first visit to Canada as Foreign Minister to be both useful and enjoyable. I can think of no more appropriate occasion for your return, from our point of view, than this unique conference.

Over the two years since this government came into office and I assumed my duties as Secretary of State for External Affairs, we have increasingly recognized the importance to Canada of the Asian Pacific area. I have travelled to Asia four times in that period, including attendance at two meetings of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers. The first of these, of course, was in Kuala Lumpur, where I enjoyed a warm welcome from your predecessor and a superb programme which included a most refreshing trip to Fraser's Hill. I was grateful for the excellent hospitality extended to me by your government.

Ten years ago, Canada's trans-Pacific immigration surpassed our trans-Atlantic immigration, for the first time in history. As a Canadian from the western region of Canada, I have always been aware of the immense importance and the immense potential of our neighbours across the Pacific. That understanding, which is second nature in western Canada, has now spread across our country.

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