

Thank you, Mr. Van Zeist, for your introduction and for the warm welcome you and the Business Council have extended.

I would like to begin today by outlining my responsibilities as Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific. My role is to advise Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister, André Ouellet, on Asia-Pacific matters, and my responsibilities therefore cover both geographic and sectoral issues, such as political and social developments, as well as economic matters and development assistance. I also assist International Trade Minister Roy MacLaren in his efforts to increase trade between Canada and the Asia-Pacific region.

The potential for Canada in Asia is enormous, and Canadians must prepare themselves to capitalize on the opportunities that are presented. To do this, we need good public and private sector co-operation in promoting our interests. We also need to capitalize on one of our somewhat underutilized natural resources: Canada's large and vibrant community of Asian-Canadians. It is clear that this community enriches Canada culturally. Also, working with Canadians who understand the Asia-Pacific market presents an advantage in developing trade and other ties to the region.

In addition to our obvious business interests, we also see the Asia-Pacific region playing an increasingly active role in international politics and security issues as its economic power grows. It is in Canada's best long-term interest to develop and diversify our economic and social ties with the countries of the region. Our political relations with the Asia-Pacific region are complex and challenging. Since the end of the Cold War, the region has evolved into an area of greater stability, productivity and justice and many countries have made significant progress towards more representative governmental systems.

Perhaps the most encouraging development in recent years in the Asia-Pacific region is the growing willingness to address security issues and potential problems multilaterally, using mechanisms such as the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] Post-Ministerial Conference, in which Canada is a Dialogue Partner. The process of multilateral consultation among regional governments on political and security issues was advanced significantly last month with the first meeting at the ministerial level of the ASEAN Regional Forum. This contributes an important element to our relationship. I am pleased to report that for the next three years Malaysia will be Canada's ASEAN Dialogue Partner.

One of the most interesting aspects of my work is that I have a unique opportunity to see first hand the vast diversity that makes this region so exciting, and to observe the many ways in which Canadian interests are engaged here. My first trip as Secretary of State was to the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation [APEC] summit in November 1993 in Seattle, when I accompanied Prime Minister Chrétien and Minister MacLaren. APEC member