

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Canadians:

I am particularly pleased to be with you this evening. While I will speak only briefly I very much look forward to meeting many of you here tonight.

In my worldwide travels I am constantly struck by the fact that so many people in this world view Canada as a land of opportunity and Canadians as a people who attach paramount importance to freedom and democracy. We are seen as a nation which understands world problems and is determined to contribute to international peace and stability.

More importantly, we are increasingly seen as a country whose strength and vitality have their roots in Canada's multicultural reality. Canada is a place of refuge, and a home, to people, cultures and traditions from around the world.

This country has been enriched beyond measure by the contributions of our immigrants to the political, social and economic fabric of Canada. We have been particularly blessed by the thousands of Armenians who have settled on our shores. Their deep commitment and unquestionable loyalty enrich the fabric and the quality of Canadian life.

The contribution of the Armenian Community to Canadian society is vividly reflected in the construction of churches, schools and cultural centres across the country. It is mirrored in your significant contributions to the arts, to architecture, literature, photography, commerce, industry, law, and administration and education.

Many Canadians of Armenian origin came to this country to escape from injustices suffered elsewhere. They arrived in pursuit of the dignity and enjoyment of basic rights which were denied them elsewhere. Their plight was shared by others who came to our shores seeking escape from international conflict, civil war, pestilence, and religious, racial, political or ethnic persecution. Many Canadians who share this sad legacy are proud of Canada's prominence in defence of international human rights and our example to the world of how different cultures can work together.

Our Government is pledged to the pursuit of justice and a respect for human rights throughout the world. We cannot redress the injustices suffered in other countries, in other times. We must ensure that future generations are spared such indignities, such injustices, such atrocities, and the consequent need to flee persecution.