

It was through NATO in 1972 that we and our Allies set down our objectives for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Through that process, we have secured from the Soviet Union and its East European Allies real commitments in human rights, economic cooperation and military security. Today, in the East, there is greater respect for the rights of individuals, greater freedom to travel to visit friends or relatives, and greater freedom to worship. That progress would not have been made without the tenacity with which the Allies pressed the East to extend to their publics the privileges and rights we take for granted.

We are at an historic juncture now. The two superpowers have agreed to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons. Significant progress has been made on a treaty to reduce by approximately 50 per cent the size of their strategic nuclear arsenals. A new sense of purpose has been injected into efforts to control and ultimately ban chemical weapons. And perhaps most important of all, new negotiations to reduce conventional forces in Europe are underway in Vienna. With imagination and goodwill on both sides we have every reason for optimism.

President Gorbachev is claiming credit for much of this success and certainly he deserves a good deal of credit. After all, he is redefining the Soviet Union. But it is important to remember that President Gorbachev has been responding to ideas and proposals originally made by the West. He has been responding to the unity and fidelity to western values, which are at the heart of the success of the North Atlantic Alliance.

Every Canadian of goodwill celebrates the changes that are appearing in the Soviet Union and in parts of Eastern Europe. They represent the kind of genuine progress toward the social, economic and political achievement Mr. Pearson described. The challenge for NATO is to continue to bring down the tensions between East and West and continue to build up confidence and co-operation. That will require the same unity and determination which have allowed the NATO Alliance to contribute so strongly to the progress so far.

Some have suggested that Canada should step aside from the responsibilities of membership in this Western Alliance. Had we stepped aside before, NATO would not have been able to contribute as constructively to the progress the world sees now. Canada has many means to influence peace in the world. One of those, which has worked for forty years, and is essential to continued progress in East-West relations, is the NATO Alliance whose anniversary we mark today.

NATO has been good for Europe, good for North America and good for Canada. This government is committed to ensuring Canada continues to play a full and leading role in NATO, in helping to shape a new era in East-West relations.