

Mr. Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with great pleasure that Maureen and I welcome you, Mr. Minister, on your first visit to Canada. Two years ago, almost to the day, we had the privilege of visiting Poland, ending a period in our relations which had been made particularly difficult by the imposition of martial law. We are honoured to have you here today, fresh from the success of the historic round table discussions in Poland.

Your visit is brief, but you had an opportunity to spend some time during the weekend in Toronto and Niagara Falls. That is an introduction to our vast country, and I hope that another visit we will be able to show you more of Canada, including of course the province of Alberta.

In your part of the world, Mr. Olechowski, events are moving rapidly. I was pleased to discuss with you directly today the Round Table process in Poland and the results you hope it will bring. It is important that Canadians, and others, in the international community, know about the changes in Poland and the challenges you face.

Poland's history and culture are remarkable - your music, your art, your culture and science, the tremendous spirit of the Polish people to persevere in the face of historic adversity, time and time again. Everyone who visits Poland is impressed by the visual monuments to dedication and sacrifice; from beautiful cities featuring centuries of splendid architecture to the historical quarter of Warsaw reconstructed so painstakingly after the devastation of World War II.

In this country, Canadians of Polish origin have thrived and greatly contributed to our own society and culture. Poland has long been a major source of immigrants to Canada, with over 400,000 Canadians of Polish ancestry living here. Free travel between our two countries and family reunification have been important, sensitive issues. I am very pleased that family reunification has virtually disappeared as a problem since Poland opened its borders and provided its citizens with regular access to passports for travel abroad. Last year alone nearly 30,000 Polish citizens visited Canada. We look forward to even more in years to come.

Poland's progress in political liberation, human rights and humanitarian cooperation in general has been welcome. Our two countries have established an especially fruitful relationship in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). I can only hope that other countries that still lag behind in these areas will follow Poland's example.