

I would like to thank Denis Shiflett, your Vice-Chairman, and the rest of the Canadian Business Club for the invitation to speak here today. I am nearing the end of what has been a most interesting and productive visit to Korea.

I understand that this is the first trade minister's visit between Canada and Korea in over two years. There has, therefore, been a sizable amount of business to take care of.

First, I have resumed the pattern of annual trade consultations by meeting with Trade Minister Kim Chulsu; second, I have raised several long-standing issues of market access, particularly in the agricultural sector; third, I have held meetings with Korean business leaders to encourage further two-way arrangements; fourth, I visited the CANDU reactor site at Wolsung—the largest project anywhere in the world featuring Canadian technology; and fifth, I endeavoured to support the efforts of accompanying businessmen to reinvigorate the bilateral Business Council.

However, the main objective of my mission was to advance the concept of a "special partnership" with Korea. This concept had been agreed upon by President Kim Young Sam and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien in Seattle last November. It was followed up in talks with Foreign Minister Han Sun-Joo in Ottawa in February.

Last Friday, I reached an agreement with Minister Kim to establish a Working Group to investigate options for the elaboration of this special partnership. The group's interim report is to be ready in July; the final report will be submitted to ministers in November when we meet at the APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum] meeting in Indonesia.

The mandate of this group is at once simple and ambitious. It is "to explore various bilateral and multilateral options to promote a more dynamic economic and trading relationship." You may ask: "Why a special relationship with Korea?" Indeed, some Canadians have already asked that question, as have some Koreans.

There are many reasons, in my view. They are based on the good sense it makes for Canada to make a major strategic investment in this relationship. Let's examine the matter in greater detail—why indeed a special partnership with Korea?

First, Korea has enormous potential and promise. There is the undeniable drive and character of its people. There is the growing international presence of its companies. There is the position of Korea as a future entry point into the continental tri-border area (China, Russia, Korea). There is the inevitability of eventual reunification, and the creation of a major middle power as a result.

Second, the perspective Canada and Korea share in their global outlook. We are both medium-sized economies. Each of us lives alongside major powers. We find ourselves highly dependent on trade for our prosperity, and on the integrity of the