

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, foreign ministers of the hemisphere, Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. Assistant Secretary-General, ladies and gentlemen, friends:

My first opportunity to participate in an OAS [Organization of American States] General Assembly came just a few short months ago in Washington. It is indeed a very great pleasure for me to be here at my second Assembly and to renew acquaintance with so many of my colleagues from around the region. I look forward to working closely with all of you over the coming months and years toward achievement of our common goals.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Canadian delegation, I would like to congratulate you on your election and to assure you of the full support and co-operation of my delegation over the coming week of deliberations.

I must also extend our sincere thanks to the Government of Brazil for its generosity in hosting this major event, for the cordial hospitality which they have extended to all of us, and for the superb organization of the week's events in this unique setting. I am sure that I am not alone in being impressed at being here in Belém, at the mouth of one of the world's greatest rivers.

Belém bears another distinction and that is being the birthplace of the outgoing Secretary General of the OAS, Mr. João Baena Soares. On behalf of the Canadian government, I must extend to you, Mr. Secretary-General, our sincere appreciation for the tremendous service which you have rendered to this Organization over the past 10 years.

Your mandate has coincided with a period of tremendous change in the hemisphere — both economic and political — and the OAS has, under your leadership, evolved with those changes. Not so many years ago, it was commonplace to hear doubts and concerns about the relevance and usefulness of the Organization. Those days are gone — the OAS has truly come into its own — and you, Mr. Secretary-General, have had a large part in that transformation. Please accept our very best wishes for much success, health and happiness in your future endeavours.

I would also like at this point to offer my congratulations to the Secretary-General-elect, President César Gaviria of Colombia, even though he could not be here with us today. Mr. Gaviria has a challenging job ahead of him — the Organization is still evolving and there remains much work to be done. However, Mr. Gaviria's previous incarnation has shown that he is not afraid of challenges and I am confident he will rise to the task.

This General Assembly comes during a time of change for Canada as well. As many of you may know, the party to which I belong, the Liberal Party, came to power in Canada in late 1993. My appointment as Secretary of State for Latin America provided immediate and tangible proof of our Prime Minister's desire to