

In Canada, we are committed to fostering social inclusion and respect for ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, because they make our societies strong, our economies more flexible and promote exchange of ideas and knowledge. We celebrate the diversity of our nations. We encourage cultural diversity. Globalization, which is indeed about more contacts and more exchanges, should not lead to uniformity, but to the enrichment of people and the opening of cultures.

Canadians have learned that having two international languages is a comparative advantage and a source of continuing creativity and innovation. Through our immigration program, Canada accepts more newcomers per capita from more places than any other country in the world.

Canada's international voice draws on its distinct advantage as a multi-cultural society where people have roots in virtually every country in the world.

Canada is a country built on diversity. It is no coincidence that common principles are found in our *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. We then took it one step further by passing the *Multiculturalism Act* in 1989, the first of its kind in the world.

The issue of Safe communities is another important social policy issue.

I believe that a high quality of life requires safe communities where people wish to live and raise their families, where they can live without fear of crime or violence. Crime rates in Canada have been falling steadily since the 1990s. In 1997, Canada's police-reported crime rate decreased for the sixth year in a row, falling 5%. Canada is working to maintain this decline in crime rates, to ensure that its communities continue to be safe and that Canadians do not live in fear of crime.

In order to ensure safe communities, strong law enforcement and effective corrections is required but we must also focus our efforts on preventing crime before it happens.

Canada has been called a "public enterprise" society because of its traditions of social responsibility. We take pride in our reputation for mutual tolerance, mutual respect, and mutual responsibility. Our strong civic base is reflected in relatively low and decreasing rates of crime and violence, high rates of voluntarism and charitable giving, and a strong and active voluntary sector.

Another important development is the growth of the Voluntary Sector in many societies.

We cannot over emphasize the value of the voluntary sector in reaching out to those that government programs may too often miss.

In Canada, our Prime Minister has characterized the volunteer sector as one of the "strongest fibres in our social fabric". I could not agree more. By investing in our relationship with the voluntary sector we are investing in our communities and neighborhoods.

Ten years ago, the bulk of Canada's voluntary hours came from younger Canadians between the ages of 25 and 44. Today, those over 45 carry most of the load. Although more youth in Canada are volunteering, the number of hours they contribute is relatively small. The voluntary sector is vulnerable because it relies on a small core of supporters.