

Your Royal Highness, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome tonight our distinguished guest, His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al Faisal Al Saud, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, together with our friends representing both the public and the private sectors of Saudi Arabia. Having met His Royal Highness on several occasions and recalling with great pleasure my visit last year to Riyadh, I am pleased at this opportunity to meet once again, this time on Canadian soil. I understand that His Royal Highness enjoys the sport of skiing and I only wish that the season was right for introducing him to the world-class ski slopes we have prepared for the upcoming winter Olympic Games. I trust, however, that his memories of his time in Ottawa will be as pleasant as those I retain of the Kingdom.

From the Canadian side, we look forward to the next few days both as an opportunity for exchanging views on pressing issues of common concern, and as an occasion for developing stronger and mutually beneficial economic ties through the Joint Economic Committee.

During my brief visit to Saudi Arabia I found a country stark in its environment, yet blessed with the dramatic vistas of its great deserts, with the proud and independent spirit of its people, and with the presence within its borders of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Many Canadians of the Muslim faith participate in the pilgrimage to Mecca each year where they enjoy the hospitality of their hosts, the Government and people of Saudi Arabia. But Saudi Arabia is blessed as well in its statesmen of vision, courage and dedication, who will lead their country into the 21st century. At the same time these statesmen will ensure that Saudi Arabia remains true to its heritage, retaining the customs, laws and traditions of its people so as to enrich future generations.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also blessed with a range of natural resources, most notably of course, the greatest petroleum reserves in the world. These non-renewable resources have been husbanded, developed with an eye to the future of Saudi Arabia but also with due regard to their international importance, such as the needs of less fortunate nations, thus according to the Kingdom's rulers a respected place in international circles.

Yet Saudi Arabia faces external problems. For over seven years, the Gulf war between Iran and Iraq has caused incalculable suffering only a short distance from the frontiers of the Kingdom. In recent months this conflict has affected