

A World in Change

Next Tuesday will be the first anniversary of my appointment as Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs. To say that this has been a busy year is to diminish the breadth and magnitude of the changes that have occurred in the world and will permanently alter the course of human history.

I have just returned from South Africa, where I had the opportunity to speak with President de Klerk, Nelson Mandela and the many other leaders who will manage the transition of that society. On Monday, I was in Washington to speak with my Organization of American States (OAS) colleagues about the urgent situation in Peru. Next month, Canada will be hosting one of the multilateral meetings that are part of the United States-Russia-sponsored process to bring peace to the Middle East.

The world is changing at breakneck speed -- and Canada is a respected player at the meetings and in the institutions where that change is transformed from philosophy and political theory into food, medicine, education, jobs, peace, security and respect for basic human rights.

Because the opportunity for change -- positive change -- does not come often, our generation must recognize that, as we approach the new century, we have in our hands the power to bequeath to our children a more stable, prosperous and peaceful world.

The Challenge of the New Eastern Europe

But it is not an easy task, nor is it without new dangers -- and no part of the world exemplifies the enormity of this challenge more than the newly emerging Eastern Europe -- Russia, Ukraine and the other European countries that were part of the former Soviet Union.

The next generation in those countries will test the legitimacy and the viability of the Western values that are now in the ascendancy -- democracy, pluralism, free market economies and respect for human rights.

We in Canada have a direct interest in the region, in its stability and prosperity, not only through direct ties of family and friendship, but as potential new trading partners and allies.

I am pleased to report that Canada and Canadians are already very active in the new Eastern Europe -- but it is important first of all to understand the pressures and tensions that are currently at work in this region.

In throwing off the Soviet yoke, the people of Eastern Europe have driven home to us how precious freedom is. The dangers of global war or nuclear annihilation have been reduced dramatically -- but freedom has a price.