

Mr. Mayor,
Mr. Pearson,
Mr. Premier,
Mrs. Lapointe,
Mr. Director-General of the FAO.

Allow me to congratulate the authors of this initiative and to pay tribute to the artist and his assistants who have produced an exceptional work that is a credit to Place FAO (UN Food and Agriculture Organization). I am especially pleased to be taking part in this ceremony held, on the one hand, to inaugurate Place FAO in Quebec City, and on the other, to unveil a plaque in honour of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, one of Canada's great diplomats and prime ministers.

Mr. Mayor, I believe we can take this opportunity to celebrate the important role played by Quebec in the contemporary history of Canada and the world. Quebec is not only the birthplace of the FAO; it also hosted the allied leaders during the Second World War, enabling them to co-ordinate their efforts to liberate Europe and gaining recognition for Canada's importance in the Alliance.

Concerning the FAO, on October 16, 1945, 42 countries met in this city under the chairmanship of Lester B. Pearson to take part in the first conference of this new organization for food and agriculture.

In 1945, the world had just emerged from the worst war in its history. The world's nations were facing the spectre of famine, mass destruction of food reserves, inflation, shortages, the destruction of arable land - in short, the ravages of a world war. Today, with 171 members, the FAO is an international forum without equal. Operating not only in the field of technical assistance, it is also involved in various activities aimed at agricultural development, improving the nutrition of people around the world, and enhancing the security of the world's food supplies.

Since its creation, remarkable progress has been achieved. However, we realize that much remains to be done, and many challenges must be faced. Current events remind us that hunger and malnutrition are still with us. This is why this week and in the coming days, in addition to the FAO ministerial meeting, Quebec City will also host a symposium, which will bring together more than 1000 representatives from governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and academia. Among those present will be representatives from many well-known Canadian and Quebec institutions including Desjardins International Development, McGill, Laval and Montreal universities, and the Fédération des producteurs de bois du Québec. The expertise of these stakeholders in the sustainable development of natural and agricultural resources is recognized and sought after. We believe that hunger is a worldwide problem whose solution requires co-operation at all levels of society and the international community.