

Ministers,  
Ambassadors,  
Mr. Chairman of the Permanent Committee of la Francophonie,  
Mr. Secretary-General of the ACCT,  
Distinguished guests,  
Dear friends:

Welcome to Canada. I see some familiar faces in the room, colleagues that I had the honour of meeting in Ouagadougou in December and at other meetings here or elsewhere. I am also meeting some of you for the first time. I hope that your stay will allow us to get to know one another well. I know that we will all benefit from the atmosphere of honesty and friendship that characterizes meetings of la Francophonie and that the result will be productive discussions.

Unlike other regional and international organizations, la Francophonie has not yet had to play a leading role in conflict prevention and resolution. As I said at the last Ministerial Conference in Ouagadougou, however, the recent events that have shaken some Francophone countries concern and directly affect us all. I said then that la Francophonie was summoned to take action as far as its means would allow. I still believe this to be the case. This observation prompted Canada to propose that a meeting be held in Ottawa to consider establishing a conflict prevention process within la Francophonie. I am happy to see that la Francophonie has answered the call.

We are joined by representatives of the United Nations [UN] and the Organization of African Unity [OAU], as well as ambassadors of Commonwealth countries. Their presence underscores the critical nature of our discussions and clearly highlights the importance of conflict prevention in Africa.

Our meeting is innovative and seeks to achieve ambitious objectives. On the one hand, it is the first Francophone meeting of this nature and thus confirms the desire of Francophone countries to move in this direction. On the other hand, we regard the conference as part of the preparatory process that will lead us to the Cotonou Summit, where I feel that security issues will have an important place.

Allow me to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts on the very timely topic that you have started to discuss this morning.

For 45 years, the security of nations was threatened by the other side, the enemy, whose very existence challenged our territorial integrity, our way of life, our political system and our national values. Divided into two ideological camps and obsessed with the danger of atomic war, many nations ignored their own deep, internal social, political and economic divisions and their consequences for too long. Since 1945, more than a hundred conflicts have resulted in the deaths of 20 million people. The fear of nuclear holocaust meant peace for only a few.