

For many reasons it is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today. The first is surely the experience of being in this great historic city which over the centuries has been the seat of events and developments which have so profoundly influenced western civilization. A second reason is the sense of kinship which so many Canadians feel with the Italian people, a kinship derived from the long association Canadians have had with so many of your citizens who came to Canada from Italy and now have taken their place as community leaders in so many fields. A few of them are here with me today -- Members of the Parliament of Canada or prominent citizens in my country. A third reason arises from the many parallel aspects of the history of both our countries which have forged strong and lasting links between us. Today, I want briefly to tell you of some of those common and complementary traits shared by Canada and Italy.

Some are a matter of historical record. Both modern Italy and Canada were born in the 1860s -- both products of the liberal political philosophy of the nineteenth century. In the longer term, of course, our history and geography are vastly different. It is sometimes said that Canada has too much geography and Europe too much history -- of which Italy, as heir to Roman civilization and the renaissance, has the most. But in many ways those differences have yielded complementary benefits. We in Canada have benefited from the wisdom of the ancient civilizations which evolved here; and our geographic vastness and natural resources have made possible a better life for so many of your former countrymen.

Over the years, both our countries have been enriched through the multiplicity of contacts made possible through migration, international commerce, tourism, and cultural relations. Those contacts have given Canadians a deep appreciation of the quantity and quality of Italy's contribution to our people and nation. That appreciation is perhaps best reflected in the welcome Canadians have accorded to so many immigrants of Italian origin, and in our eagerness to bring them into the mainstream of Canada. More recently, the spontaneous contribution of Canadians towards relief for natural disasters such as the Italian earthquake is more tangible evidence of the feelings between our countries.

We have other similarities. Although for very different geographical, historical and cultural reasons, regionalism in both our countries has been a strong factor in our political and economic development. In both our countries this factor has also instilled in our people and governments a sense of coexistence, tolerance and compromise -- characteristics which have marked them for a special role and presence in international affairs.