

Good evening. I am delighted to be in Cuba and to be a part of this conference. I would like to congratulate *The Economist* and Sherritt for taking the initiative to bring us all together and for providing such excellent arrangements. That such a gathering is taking place here is recognition of the reality that this is a significant time for Cuba, and for Cuba's relations with the international community. This meeting can make an important contribution to the discourse between Cuba and other countries on economic issues, and can enhance prospects for substantial commercial relationships.

It is now also an interesting time for Cuban-Canadian relations. I, therefore, am grateful that Ian Delaney, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sherritt extended an invitation to the Canadian government that has enabled me to address this conference. My focus will be on the Canada-Cuba relationship, a relationship that is deeply influenced by what is happening in Cuba and elsewhere in the Hemisphere.

Since taking up my responsibilities as Secretary of State for Latin America and Africa, I have travelled widely in the hemisphere and met with many political leaders. Earlier this month I represented Canada at the 24th OAS [Organization of American States] General Assembly in Belém, Brazil. Naturally, I have been struck by the political and economic transformation of the hemisphere — by the willingness to address difficult economic issues such as trade liberalization and poverty alleviation, the desire to make multilateralism work through the OAS and other institutions, and by the determination to strengthen democratic institutions to make democracy work. Canadian business people, of course, are especially interested in the progress in reforming domestic legal and regulatory frameworks to make the rules of the game more transparent and predictable. My appointment following the election, last year, of the Liberal government demonstrated the Prime Minister's desire to see Canada more actively engaged in these significant developments. As underlined in the foreign policy review we have initiated, and in the speeches made in Parliament by myself and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, André Ouellet, our priorities in the Hemisphere focus on sustainable development, democratic development and good governance, trade and economic integration and security issues. We are pursuing these objectives multilaterally, especially through the OAS, and bilaterally in our relations with individual hemispheric partners.

Because we regard Cuba as very much a part of the hemisphere and the broader international community, we will work to bring these objectives to bear in our relationship with Cuba.

Cuba is entering an important period. It is a time of economic change, a time to adjust to a new international economic environment, and yet to ensure that the Cuban population retains the benefits of important social programs in such areas as education and health. Adjustment is a difficult process that