

of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, in the months and years to come the House of Commons will have the opportunity to debate the difficult issues of our times.

But we will also invite Canadians at large to play an active part in this country's foreign policy. On March 21 and 22, we will hold a National Forum on Canada's International Relations. The Forum will be sponsored by three ministers: the Minister for International Trade, the Minister of Defence, and myself. The Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, will preside at the opening of the Forum. More than 100 Canadian personalities from different walks of life will be invited to examine the major directions of our foreign policy in light of the overwhelming changes of recent years. Their comments will be extremely useful to us in assessing our foreign policy. We should be able to determine which policies continue to serve our interests and which should be redesigned.

After the Forum, the Government will ask a joint parliamentary committee to undertake its own review of Canada's foreign policy, including our assistance programs. I will of course inform the committee of the results of the National Forum to assist my parliamentary colleagues in their deliberations. I hope the committee will have the opportunity to hear the views and opinions of all Canadians across the country.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, the Government will continue to consult Canadians on a wide range of subjects. The recent annual human rights consultations with non-governmental organizations [NGOs] were very productive for us in preparing for this year's meeting of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The recent International Development Week was more than a mere listening exercise for me; it enabled me to pursue and develop co-operative ties with our partners.

I would like to emphasize the importance that I attach to the consultation process. The Forum and the work of the joint committee will certainly not be the last step in this consultative process. I intend to pursue my own meetings with representatives of the diverse groups involved in this country's international relations.

The National Forum, the efforts of Parliament, and bilateral consultations form the basis of our foreign policy review. But, Mr. Speaker, this is only a first step. I would like to emphasize that all this marks the beginning of an ongoing process. In fact, the Government intends to make the National Forum an annual event. In the coming years, we may very well ask the National Forum to review specific aspects of Canada's foreign policy. The Government seeks to maintain an ongoing review of its foreign policy that will involve Canadians and their elected representatives. In this world where rapid change and upheaval