

A few short days after assuming the Trade portfolio a year ago I had occasion to address your last annual meeting. At that time, I had scant knowledge of the importance of this organization, the vitality of its membership or the magnitude of your contribution to the welfare of the Canadian people.

I approach the task of tonight's address with greater awe and trepidation because of my enhanced comprehension of your ongoing contribution to Canada.

This is not to suggest that I am not happy to be here. That would be totally contrary from the truth.

I am delighted to have the occasion in the middle of export trade development month to pay tribute of the warmest and most sincere quality to this organization, its executive and to each of its members, all of whom enrich our country and support the standard of living of their fellow citizens by their efforts in the export markets of the world.

In the course of the past year, I have had the privilege of travelling in company of many of your members in trade missions to various parts of the world. I have had the occasion to observe their expertise in execution.

Beyond their individual efforts, I have been particularly impressed by the Canadian team approach whereby the members of a trade mission of disparate undertakings assist and advise each other providing a cross fertilization of expertise that enriches the overall sales effort and enhances the achievement of the mission.

In addition to those with whom I have travelled I have had the experience of being involved with many more exporters seeking solutions to problems or merely consultations on projects in my office.

I would like to believe that I have come a long road in my comprehension of your problems, needs, challenges and opportunities in the course of that year.

Tonight, on the occasion of the Export Awards, I salute you for every one of your members is worthy of recognition.

I have formulated some ideas of the directions government must follow to support you by trade promotion and to provide favourable conditions through the negotiations of trade policy.