

In the last four years, it has been my privilege, on behalf of Canada, to meet Anatoly Scharansky in Jerusalem, and receive his thanks for the unrelenting support of the Canadians who sought his freedom; to host in Ottawa some of the mothers of "the disappeared" of Argentina, who had come to discuss human rights institutions with us, because they trust Canada more than other countries; to visit remote Asian villages where Canadians are overcoming tradition and despair so children can live and countries develop. There is a lot to say about Canada's role in the world - and a lot to learn about our own country by understanding how we are seen abroad.

Today, I want to turn that mirror around, and draw from our foreign policy some of the Canadian characteristics that make us effective and respected in the world. I do that deliberately in the week the free trade bill was adopted by the House of Commons, because the free trade debate has revived concern, among some Canadians, about Canada's ability to pursue an independent and distinct foreign policy. I don't share that concern - quite the contrary - but I treat it seriously, and want to address it precisely because I think it is wrong.

In a sense, a country is what its people think it is. If we are confident about ourselves, that shows. In fact, I believe there is a close connection between the self-confidence we are developing at home, in this diverse distinct country, and the growing expectations and respect we generate in the world. I regard the trade negotiations as one more assertion of Canadian maturity. It is an act of confidence in ourselves, and will lead to other confident actions, including in foreign policy, reflecting truly a country that is unlike any other in the world, and is prepared to act that way.

On Wednesday, in Parliament, the Prime Minister said: "Canada is surer of its identity than it ever was before. Canada's international personality in the global community is more mature and we express ourselves more independently than ever in the past. Our commitment and our capacity to project our economic, political and territorial sovereignty have never been stronger."

I emphasize, in particular, two of his words: "commitment" and "capacity". You need both to be effective.