

Good morning.

I am delighted to join you in launching the second annual Women's History Month. This is an excellent occasion to focus on the contributions of women in Canada and in the Department, and to recognize their achievements, whether as employees or spouses or dependents, as a vital part of our heritage.

In 1909, Agnes McCloskey became one of the first three women to join External Affairs. She joined as a lady "typewriter"! By itself, this was quite an accomplishment in a Department that, at the time, only allowed men to join as officers. This practice persisted until well into the 1940s.

Undaunted at being refused admission as officers, women, such as Margaret Meagher and Pamela McDougall, entered External Affairs as clerks, rose through the ranks, and went on to become ambassadors. Pamela, who went on to fill deputy's jobs elsewhere in the Public Service, rendered a final contribution here by chairing the Royal Commission on Conditions of Foreign Service, a seminal work whose recommendations are still being implemented today.

In 1943, Agnes McCloskey became the first woman to represent Canada abroad as Vice-Consul at the consulate general in New York. In 1947, six women became foreign service officers. Five were clerks in the Department who were promoted to FSO 2; they included Marjorie McKenzie and Margaret Meagher. The sixth was Marion MacPherson, who was the first woman to have been recruited as an officer from outside the Department.

In 1954, Elizabeth MacCallum was appointed chargé d'affaires in Beirut, Lebanon. She was the first woman to head a Canadian diplomatic mission. On her appointment to Tel Aviv in 1958, Margaret Meagher became Canada's first woman ambassador. More than 25 years later, there were only two women heads of post—Irene Johnson in Philadelphia and Elsa Amadio in Milan. Their numbers increased a little more rapidly after 1984, so that by 1989 there were 13 women in charge of missions abroad. These numbers have remained more or less constant since then.

Certainly progress has been made, but there's still a long way to go for women to occupy head of mission positions and for them to be placed in headquarters executive positions in numbers proportional to their representation in the Department. And, more important, in numbers proportional to the contribution women have made and are making to the work of the Department.

The Department has not done quite so well when it comes to filling headquarters positions with women at the assistant deputy minister level or above. Sylvia Ostry became the first woman Deputy Minister for International Trade in 1984.