

I came to Canada at the age of 16. I chose this country for its promise of a future, social stability and a tradition of welcoming new citizens. And I must say that I was not disappointed.

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Yes, Canada's doors are open. Yes, Canada is full of opportunities. Yes, Canada is a land of justice and sharing. Yes, it is the best country in the world!

And even if the Canadian Heritage critic for the Official Opposition does not agree, I would like to tell him that there are millions and millions of human beings in the world who would give everything they have to be admitted into Canada and to live here with us. Despite our difficulties, our differences, our economic and financial problems, this country is still the best in the world. And in Quebec, it is a minority that wants to separate Quebec from the rest of Canada and destroy this country.

Let us not be misled, this country is still the best in the world. This fact has been recognized twice by the United Nations and most importantly it is acknowledged by all of us who, day after day, live in peace and prosperity on this vast North American territory.

I am a Canadian proud and aware of the considerable benefits that this country provides. I am also a full-fledged Quebecer who realizes how beneficial it is for us to be part of the Canadian entity.

There are few places in the world where two great cultures can blossom out in such harmony and with such autonomy as in Canada. And this is where the role of the Department of Heritage becomes so important. Our government recognizes that culture is not an abstraction detached from reality but a vital link that binds us all together.

As a matter of fact, in our red book, we say that "culture is the very essence of national identity, the bedrock of national sovereignty and national pride".

Several of our major cultural institutions, namely the CBC, the Canada Council, the National Film Board and Telefilm Canada contribute year after year to bring to the fore artistic talents from Quebec.

Heritage Canada supports, finances, develops markets for francophone cultural products that are essential to our artists in Quebec. The Canadian Museum of Civilizations in Hull, as well as the Quebec Citadel, trace the history of the first inhabitants and the first settlers that came here. Our parks and historic sites give the millions of tourists who visit our country an idea of the richness of our natural heritage.

The works of Michel Tremblay, Alice Parizeau, Antonine Maillet and many others have reached far beyond the boundaries of Quebec and of Canada. Those works are translated in several languages and have become the delight of readers all around the world.

Government Orders

The Cirque du soleil, a unique cultural product, conceived and realized by Quebecers, fills with wonder the young and not so young on several continents.

Quebec films, songs and plays have extensions on all continents. In television, the TV5 channel opens a window on the French-speaking world. This international cooperation allows also the francophonie to learn what goes on in our country. Programs produced in this country are broadcasted in Rome, Warsaw or Cairo.

The Canadian government plays a leading role in the expression and promotion of French culture in Canada and in the world.

We support creation. We support production. We encourage young artists. We negotiate agreements regarding export of our cultural products.

In the day-to-day life of French-speaking creators, the federal contribution is irreplaceable. Without the contribution of the Canadian government, many of our famous writers, our established actors and actresses, our renowned movie producers would have never taken off. We know it and this is why, despite our limited resources, we give particular attention to cultural development. This is part of our mandate, part of our responsibilities.

We should not underestimate the economic value of our cultural sector. Today, cultural enterprises rank ninth among our national industries. They generate direct revenues amounting to \$22 billion a year.

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About 600,000 Canadians work in this field. This clearly demonstrates that our cultural industries are closely linked to the economic development of our country and actively contribute to our prosperity. In addition to preserving and promoting native, French and English cultures, Canada officially recognizes its multiculturalism.

Moreover, the building of this country has largely been influenced by several waves of immigrants who made their homes here. Thousands of immigrants have developed Canada's natural resources. They have settled vast territories. They have helped build our cities.

Most regions of Canada have developed their own characteristics inherited from different cultural groups. This diversity is the hallmark of the Canadian identity and culture. Canadian multiculturalism is two-pronged. It encourages all Canadians to take an active part in society, in either official language. It also urges society to get rid of all obstacles impeding full and equal participation.

Cultural harmony is being promoted through initiatives such as teaching heritage languages, assisting ethnic artists and encouraging cross-cultural activities. While recognizing that