

I would like to begin by extending my best wishes to Les Scheininger, Moshe Ronen, and all the other members of the outgoing executive of Canadian Jewish Congress, many of whom I have had the pleasure of working with since they came into office in 1989.

I would also like to extend my congratulations to Irving Abella and the rest of the incoming executive of Canadian Jewish Congress. You can be assured that my door will be open to you and to your concerns, and may you have much success in your continuing endeavours on behalf of the Jewish people of Canada and your brothers and sisters around the world.

I had the pleasure of being in Montreal in 1989 when the outgoing executive members began their term of office, and in many ways I feel a very close bond with them, because many of the issues they were attempting to address were important issues on my own agenda as well, first as Minister of Employment and Immigration, and more recently as Secretary of State for External Affairs.

In 1989, high on the agenda were the plight of Soviet Jewry and the continuing efforts to liberate Syrian and Ethiopian Jews. I met many times with Congress and its representatives on these issues. I am sure that I would not be alone in this room if I were to admit that the events that have taken place in these areas in such a short period of time are almost beyond belief.

Of course, the Jewish people are no strangers to miracles -- in fact, as someone said, "Not only do the Jewish people expect miracles, they rely on them."

This is something we Progressive Conservatives understand; indeed, relying on miracles is part of our election campaign strategy, and it sure confuses the pollsters!

There is much to be joyful about today. The hundreds of thousands of Jews who have emigrated from what was once the Soviet Union are like hundreds of thousands of seedlings. Their lives have been transplanted from a barren and repressive soil to one that is rich and fertile in the land of Israel. Their hardy strain cannot help but flourish in the warmth and nurturing of their new homeland.

So, too, the Jews of Ethiopia rejoin their long lost families in Israel to continue and expand the traditions that they have held to with unbelievable faith and steadfastness over generations of isolation, persecution and assimilation.

The most recent developments in Syria, highlighted by the release of the Swed brothers from prison last Passover, augur well for the 3,800 Jews who remain in that country from the more than 30,000 that lived there before 1948. As with most situations in the Middle East, each change is often fragile and ephemeral, and