

Mr. Chairman and Colleagues:

I am very pleased to be with you again for the annual Post-Ministerial Conference.

I should like first to thank our host, Foreign Minister Dhanabalan, for the warm welcome we have received and for the excellent arrangements he and his Ministry have made for this conference.

I wish also to express my appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for the extremely constructive role it has played over the past two years as co-ordinator for Canada's dialogue relationship with ASEAN. These two years have been very productive and, in large measure, this has been possible because of the cooperation and support we have received from Foreign Minister Siddhi and his able officials.

Canada takes ASEAN very seriously, both the concept and your direction. We see ASEAN as a continuing force for the security, stability and economic progress of Southeast Asia. We are encouraged by the renewed emphasis that is being placed on more economic integration within ASEAN. We wish you well with your efforts to reduce the barriers among ASEAN states, as we strive together toward freer trade among all the world's nations. We understand the importance of the ASEAN Heads of Government Meeting in Manila later this year, and will submit our views well before that meeting as to improvements we both might contemplate in the relations between ASEAN and Canada.

Over the past decade, that relationship has matured and developed. Our views are similar on a range of international and regional economic and political issues. A prime example is our co-operation on the new round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, in capitals, in Geneva and in the Cairns Groups of agricultural free traders. This past week, a Canadian MTN delegation has completed another visit to ASEAN capitals and we look forward to continuing this close collaboration.