

Norwegians joined in the massive flood of immigration to Canada between the 1880s and 1930. They have adapted to Canadian society with ease, while retaining elements of their distinctive culture and their language.

Norwegians contributed so much to Canadian society because our societies and our values are strikingly similar. I think our common Northern environment is a key factor: we each developed the difficult parts of our respective continents.

Canadians and Norwegians have common attitudes towards the individual and towards the individual's relationships with family, nature, God and one's fellow man. That is not simply a coincidence. It is a product of our common geography. Harsh climate and the challenge of survival breed an attitude of sharing, of cooperation, of responsibility.

We are both democratic societies, but more importantly, we believe in the same type of democracy. We believe passionately in freedom and in justice. We believe that collectively society has a duty to ensure the rights of minorities, to protect the weak and to maintain high standards of health, welfare, education and safety. In Northern climates government must provide services, strengthen the economy and protect the environment.

As Northern societies, we are both geographically remote: most of Canada from the heartland of North America, Norway from the European heartland. Politically and militarily we are neither the largest nor the smallest of states. We are both especially dependent on the international economic and political order. These realities have made both of us strong defenders of collective and international institutions such as NATO, the OECD and the UN system. In a world of superpowers and giant economic blocs, nations like Canada and Norway understand and can support each other.

This symposium has had sessions on resource development, historical trends, defence, legal issues and indigenous peoples. I want to address some Northern issues of particular concern to Canada and my government. These are issues where we seek Norwegian understanding, experience and wisdom - issues on which we can cooperate in the broader international community.

A northern dimension to our foreign policy is not new for Canada. In 1882 Canada was a participant in the first International Polar Year. Since then international cooperation in northern regions has been a special Canadian concern.