

Mr. President, Excellencies, foreign ministers of the hemisphere, Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. Assistant Secretary-General, ladies and gentlemen, and friends:

As many of you know, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, Secretary of State for External Affairs, who was to have led the Delegation of Canada to this General Assembly, had to leave last evening to attend an urgent meeting in Europe on the Bosnian crisis, where Canada has more than 2500 peacekeepers under United Nations (UN) command. She asked me to thank you, Mr. President, for your warm hospitality and that of the Government of Nicaragua, and also to express her sincerest regrets to you and her colleagues, their Excellencies, the foreign ministers of the hemisphere, that she could not participate personally in this important assembly. She has asked me to read her speech as her personal speech, which very much represents her vision of this organization, for which she has the highest respect.

Her words are:

I very much regret that I cannot deliver my message in person, for reasons that have just been explained to you. This is a bittersweet occasion for me; it marks my third General Assembly, but also my last, for I have made the decision to leave Canadian political life and pursue other goals. I can assure you, however, that I will take with me a great deal of personal satisfaction from my participation with all of you in the activities of this, the world's oldest regional organization.

I would like, on behalf of the Canadian delegation, to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election and to assure you of the full support of the Canadian delegation during what promises to be a very active week of deliberations.

I would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Government of Nicaragua for the warm hospitality it has extended to all the delegations. I must also take this opportunity to applaud the process of national reconciliation that is under way in this country, and underscore Canada's support for this process. The government and people of Nicaragua are to be commended for their efforts to build a better and more secure future for themselves and their children.

I hope you will allow me, Mr. President, to reminisce a little bit. Canada joined the Organization of American States (OAS) three and a half years ago. As many of you know, it was not a decision we made lightly. But we were encouraged by the signs of progress and renewal, not only in the hemisphere, but within the organization itself, and we felt the time had come to abandon our role as passive observer. We owed it to ourselves, and to our neighbours, to take a seat at the table, to become full and active participants in the hemisphere.