

I want to welcome all of you and thank you for agreeing to join me for discussions tonight and tomorrow on Canada's agenda for peace and security.

These discussions could not be more timely.

Every day, the "New World Order" seems to fall further into disarray. Somalia and the Balkans are stark visual images that have already scarred our future memories of this decade. The return of murderous quarrels in Angola, India and Pakistan; the excuse of religious dogma for widespread, vicious attacks against other ethnic groups and women; and strife in parts of the former Soviet Union provide us with almost universal evidence of the incapacity of human beings to live up to the ideals of peace and harmony that they themselves have helped to establish.

The international community and its institutions were seemingly caught off guard by the rapid and widespread descent into instability that followed the end of the Cold War. No doubt, as the Berlin Wall was enthusiastically knocked to the ground, there were entrails to be read, portents of disintegration to come.

Was the international community not paying attention? Did it ignore warning signals that could have led us toward policies and actions of a different kind? Possibly, but I, for one, regard those brief few months of relaxed international tensions as a different kind of portent -- a brief vision of what our world can be like if we truly accomplish what we thought we had achieved then -- a new level of stability, harmony and hope.

The question the international community is wrestling with now in this period of volatility is, where do we go from here? And the situation Canada happily finds itself in is that our expressed perspective, our skills, and our steadfastness to our own ideals may be what the world needs in the face of these dauntingly complex challenges.

As we begin our discussions here today and tomorrow, one thing should be clear: Canada's commitments to the United Nations, to multilateralism and to peacekeeping are not at issue. We will continue to be activists when it comes to peace and security, especially through the UN.

The real focus of this seminar must be a hard look at how we can best support the UN and other organizations in achieving and maintaining peace and security in the world.

We cannot ignore the rapid and profound changes that are taking place in the world, nor can we pretend that these changes do not have significant implications for Canada and the international community.