

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Canadian Government recently conducted a thorough review of Canada's international relations, the first for 16 years. This time we were determined to open up the debate on foreign policy to all Canadians. From Saint John's in the East to Victoria in the West to Yellowknife in the North Canadians came forward with their views and concerns. They touched on every aspect of our foreign policy. They told us in no uncertain terms that Canadians remain as internationalist, as global in their world view as ever. Maybe more so.

One of the areas stressed in that review was the North. In hearings before the Parliamentary Committee an Inuit leader, Mark Gordon, argued forcefully that one of the problems with the North is that too often Northern policies are developed in isolation by southerners in capital cities in temperate zones. It is striking for me, and I expect for most of the Canadians in the room, that we are meeting here in Tromsø - that Tromsø is near the 70th parallel, well north of the Arctic Circle, indeed north of mainland Canada.

It is true that in Canada the majority of our population lives close to our border with the United States. But that fact does not diminish Canadians' sense of the North. Although the high Arctic may be more real to those who live there than to others, the North and the Arctic are a singular influence in the self-image of all Canadians. In the evocative words of a famous Canadian folk-song:

"Mon pays, ce n'est pas un pays, c'est l'hiver".

It is fitting that Norwegians and Canadians are meeting here this week. As we were reminded so memorably last night, 500 years before Columbus was even born Norsemen were exploring and settling in Canada-to-be.

Other countries came to settle the Americas. Through accidents of history Canadians came to speak English and French and not Norwegian! But Nordic peoples continued to fish and explore in Canada's North. They came more frequently in the late nineteenth century as the search for a northwest passage intensified. A Norwegian, Amundsen, finally found it. Larsen, the first Canadian to navigate that passage, was Norwegian born. Many islands and waterways are named after Norwegian explorers such as Nansen and Sverdrup. In fact we are probably lucky that today Norway lays no claim to the Northern half of Canada!