

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates and Visitors,

It is my pleasant task today to welcome to Ottawa those who will take part in the CSCE Meeting of Experts on Human Rights. A number of you will have been to North America and to Canada before. For those making your first visit to this continent and to this country, I believe it is particularly appropriate that you are here in springtime. After the long and difficult winters we so often have to face in the northern part of this continent, spring comes -- not a moment too soon -- as a time of renewal, of expanded horizons, and of a sense of new opportunities. I hope that this seasonal phenomenon can somehow be a metaphor for our meeting, and that by the time it ends in June, you, as delegates, and the many citizens of our countries who are watching intently, will share the view that we have managed to renew our commitment to respect human rights and to expand our co-operation in this field.

As my colleague, Madame Vézina, the Minister for External Relations, noted when she welcomed delegates to the Preparatory Meeting on April 23, this experts meeting has two claims to historical importance. It is the first CSCE meeting held on the North American continent, and also the first dedicated exclusively to human rights.

Canada has placed great importance on the CSCE process since its inception because it offers the possibility of continuing dialogue and progress in areas of interest to our countries, and allows its participants, large and small, to each make our own distinctive contribution on the basis of equality.

Canada, furthermore, can never turn its back on developments in Europe. North Americans though we are, there are too many historical and cultural attachments, too many political and economic links, and too many individual human ties for this country ever to ignore European affairs. Deeply conscious of these associations and their durability, Canada has in the past played an active and I believe, constructive role in all aspects of the CSCE process. Under this Government, Canada remains firmly convinced that a safe,