

Mr. President,

Once again the nations of the world meet in full assembly to discuss the state of our world, to report on our actions of the past year and to express the focus for our intentions in the coming years.

Many of us had hoped that this might have been a time for celebration, a time for rejoicing, as the deep freeze of a lengthy Cold War gave way to the soothing warmth of a new era of enlightenment, understanding, caring and purpose. But we have little joy -- and our celebration was far too brief. Whatever insights we may have gained from the cruel and terrible events of the past half century are sorely needed now in a world that breeds new forms of tyranny, hatred and brutality almost on a daily basis.

Many people in this chamber have seen the evidence up close, the bullets, the bodies, and the fear in ordinary men and women. But there is no need to lose hope -- we have the capacity, and we must continue to build for the future. What we need is the collective will.

I believe that it is this institution, this United Nations (UN), this global forum where we must dedicate ourselves to securing the peace and stability that have evaded many generations before us. We must build a new world, individual by individual, nation by nation, but we must remove the double standards that are everywhere.

What good are words in this Chamber, if people at home are unable to speak freely? Why exercise the art of diplomacy here, if it is not supported at home by the science of justice and the skilful application of the rule of law? Can we hope to manage together an always more challenging world when many of our own houses are in disorder?

In true democracies, people constantly strive for improvement.

We, in Canada, at this very moment, are engaged in our own process of rebuilding, rededication and renewal. In four weeks, millions of Canadians will exercise the ultimate democratic right by deciding through their votes whether to accept or reject a proposal for fundamental reform of our constitution.

If accepted, and I have no doubt that it will be, this reform will build on the values and rights that are already a proud part of the Canadian reality. It will strengthen existing guarantees and protection for the rights of minorities, improve the functioning of our already highly regarded democratic institutions, bring greater social and economic justice to our native peoples, and reallocate fundamental roles and responsibilities between levels of governments.