

Good evening, friends Bonsoir, mes amis Buenas tardes, amigos ...

Three cultures are joined here.

We have much to learn from one another in the exciting years ahead. We will get to know and understand one another better. We will make new and lasting friendships.

In the end, I suspect all this will mean more than the increased trade and investment that will flow from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

For 25 years now, ministers from Canada and Mexico have exchanged views at these meetings on a wide range of issues. And I am confident the Joint Ministerial Committee will play an important role in shaping our vital partnership in the years ahead.

We are indebted to our Mexican colleagues for the many sectors represented in their delegation at this Ninth Joint Ministerial Committee meeting. They have come well prepared for a dialogue on matters of mutual interest and concern in the fields of energy, agriculture, forestry, labour, communications and culture.

Earlier today, Minister Serra and I discussed measures still needed to ensure a smooth start-up for the NAFTA on January 1, 1994. We will be introducing legislation to Parliament very soon and I want to take this opportunity to assure you that I am confident the NAFTA will be implemented on schedule.

Mrs. McDougall and I are looking forward to travelling with our counterparts beginning tomorrow to visit industrial sites and to take part in other activities in all parts of Canada. It's an opportunity to explore jointly ways in which we can begin to make the NAFTA work to the greater benefit of the partnership we are building for the future.

At lunch today, Prime Minister Mulroney commented on Canada's commitment to closer relations with Mexico and Latin America. The toasts just proposed by my colleague, External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall, and Foreign Secretary Solana, touched on many aspects of our new partnership.

I want to leave you with the thought that each of us is privileged to play some small part in shaping this new and vital relationship.

I am honoured to propose a toast to all of you -- the participants in this Ninth Joint Ministerial Committee -- and to the partnership we are building between Canada and Mexico.

¡Salud!