

My colleague Wong Kan Seng,

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am honoured that you would join us today to celebrate the opening of the Canada-ASEAN Centre.

I have had the privilege of attending five Post-Ministerial Conferences of ASEAN and her dialogue partners. Often we talked of the need to build a tangible bridge between Canada and ASEAN. We both felt we needed a permanent institution in the region to encourage and enlarge ASEAN's growing connections with Canada. Today, thanks to your unanimous and positive encouragement, these wishes have become a reality. At last, the Canada-ASEAN centre is born.

It is far more than an office and a set of rooms. It is a symbol of a relationship founded on cooperation and mutual trust.

Mr. Wong and I have just come from the Post-Ministerial Conference held in Bandar Seri Begawan. We covered a lot of ground in Brunei: Cambodia, the security situation in Asia-Pacific, refugees, international economics and trade, the environment and a meeting of Ministers later this year in Australia to discuss Pacific Economic Cooperation. Naturally we also discussed our growing trade and development cooperation programs.

That was all done openly, frankly, directly. That is the natural style of relations between Canada and ASEAN. Like individuals, nations confide and freely discuss with their closest friends. It is indeed an honour that ASEAN chooses to discuss with us these matters of regional importance to you.

Canada has had a long and valued association with ASEAN, beginning with the contacts initiated by Canada some fifteen years ago. Since then we have made substantial progress in identifying common interests and objectives. We have promoted greater trade and commercial links between our countries - and, through our development cooperation program, we have assisted in the tremendous economic growth of the ASEAN region. We continue to work closely together in seeking an end to regional disputes which threaten the prosperity and stability of the entire South-east Asia region.