

I wish to thank the participants and the organizers of this conference. I understand that a number of different groups are represented here today. As you know, the Government has initiated a major review of its foreign policy. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government, academics, Aboriginal groups, experts and lay persons alike all have an essential contribution to make toward this review. Let me say that I am delighted to see such a conference take place; it will be an important contribution to our review process.

I want to share with all of you today some thoughts as to the new Liberal government's views on circumpolar Arctic affairs, and possible directions in Canada's Arctic foreign policy. I understand that my colleague Ron Irwin, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, has touched on some points already.

Let me begin by saying that in any discussion of this subject, I have four questions in mind.

- Is there a fundamental purpose that should guide us in our Arctic international relations?
- How can an Arctic focus in our foreign policy contribute to Canadian unity?
- How can we construct a northern foreign policy that has the largest possible impact at the least cost, given our financial limitations?
- What must we do to ensure that a policy framework is in place that provides for consultation, co-operation and co-ordination, both among Canadians and with our Arctic neighbours?

The North has been overlooked somewhat in Canada's international activities in recent years. Part of the foreign policy plank of our electoral platform was our firm desire to assume a more active role in circumpolar affairs. Upon its election, the Liberal government made a commitment to enhance the northern focus of Canada's foreign affairs.

The North must be part and parcel of Canada's foreign policy, because the stakes and interests that Canada has in the North are vital to its sovereignty and security.

If you will, let us now examine these stakes and interests, and also look at what we can do together to address them.

Stakes and Interests

Canada occupies 30 percent of the Arctic land mass. Eight-five thousand Canadians inhabit this immense area. But of course, the Arctic is far more than a vast, glacial expanse. This desolate