

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here today, in the heart of Montreal, this great and vibrant metropolis of French life in North America.

Montreal is Canada's second-largest city and is the hub of the Quebec economy. It is also a leading cultural and financial centre. Just six months ago, here in Montreal, I met with my U.S. and Mexican counterparts in the midst of negotiations on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This Agreement, which I am going to talk about today, was signed in its legal version just last week in San Antonio, Texas.

The NAFTA is another pillar in the edifice being raised by the government to give Canadian exporters better access to international markets. It is precisely this -- the search for new outlets for our products and services -- that has brought us here for ExportVision '92.

This afternoon, you will be able to continue this morning's sectoral and geographical discussions, and the one-on-one meetings with our trade delegates from various parts of the world. The whole program has been designed with you exporters in mind.

Why is exporting so important to us? The answer is quite simple: our survival depends on international trade. One out of three jobs depends on exporting. Our standard of living, envied worldwide, also depends on it.

Largely through its success as a trading nation, Canada boasts a gross domestic product (GDP) of over \$22,000 per capita. In real terms, this is twice as much as in the mid-1960s.

True, the competition is fierce. But we can and we must continue to look for new foreign markets. After all, it is the exporting sector that will bring us out of this recession.

Already, signs of emergence are becoming evident. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States is paving the way. During the first three years of the FTA, our merchandise trade increased by more than 10 per cent, from \$292 billion between 1986 and 1988, to \$323 billion between 1989 and 1991. During the first quarter of this year, exports to the United States reached an all-time high.

This is why I wish personally to take part in the ExportVision initiative. I believe that by working together, we can maintain our export effort.

This joint effort is going ahead under full steam. For the most part, the exporters of Quebec, and of Montreal in particular, are