

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you today to the inauguration of the Canadian Foreign Service Institute. My colleagues, the Honourable Michael Wilson and the Honourable Monique Landry, have asked me to add their good wishes to my own on this occasion.

I am also pleased to welcome Peter Harder, Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Immigration Canada, here today representing my colleague the Honourable Bernard Valcourt, along with so many employees of the Department and of Employment and Immigration Canada. The Canadian Foreign Service Institute is very much your institute as well, here to respond to your needs.

The Canadian Foreign Service Institute will most certainly be a timely and important new resource for this Department and for Canada.

The international environment is evolving at tremendous speed and global interdependence is sharply on the rise. New international mechanisms for co-operation are being created, while many existing institutions are being forced to reorder their priorities. New nations are being born -- and in some cases reborn -- while many established nations are finding unique ways to co-operate on many levels.

It is a fundamental challenge for Canada to keep abreast of these evolving institutions, relationships and international mechanisms to ensure that our voice is heard and that the interests of Canadians are protected.

The challenges to our foreign service are therefore increasingly diverse and complex. Traditional tasks have become more complicated as new countries, new blocs and new relationships emerge.

Mass movements of populations, including political and economic refugees, have changed forever the way our immigration officers work. Environmental concerns have spawned a new range of political and trade issues, and the continuing struggle to ensure respect for human rights requires continued vigilance as old walls come down, and new ones spring up. In areas of instability, consular resources will continue to be tested to the limit to protect the welfare of Canadians abroad.

Our missions abroad, whether in other capitals or accredited to multilateral bodies, are an essential network for dialogue between Canada and other countries. But they can only be as effective as the people who serve in them and the network of people who support them. We must ensure that our staff in the field, as well as those here in Canada are up-to-date, well-trained and motivated. The work they do is crucial to the well-being and long-term security of all Canadians.