

It gives me great pleasure to join you here in my home of Vancouver near the midpoint of Trade Month in Canada.

For the fourth year the government and the private sector have used "Trade Month" to highlight trade's importance to our national life, and to recognize those Canadians who have met with commercial success beyond our borders. It is an important endeavour, because as you know better than anyone, our ability to meet our domestic wants will depend on our success in meeting international demand. "Trade Month" is an effective way to focus all Canadians' attention on the importance of export trade to our country.

Last week, in my first formal address to the House of Commons as Minister for International Trade, I set forth the government's priorities in this critical area of national policy. Tonight I want to revisit some of the themes set out in that address and deliver a basic, but critical, message to you, and on this important occasion, to the people of Canada.

Let me begin by explaining the government's approach to trade policy. A realistic approach must appreciate the profound global changes wrought by advanced technologies, the changing players in the global economy, and the present unsatisfactory state of international trade rules.

Our policy attempts to do precisely that. There can be no question that trade, investment, and technology have created an interdependent world. Nations rely on each other as never before - as lenders and borrowers, as buyers and sellers. But nations and businesses situated within them also compete as never before. Global competition is unquestionably increasing.

For a country like Canada, which has a small domestic market, trade policy must be responsive to the changing global economy to protect our interests. One of the best ways for government to obtain accurate information about changing trends in international trade is to seek the views of those who are actually engaged in it.

It was for that reason that the federal government decided to establish the International Trade Advisory Committee (ITAC) and the fifteen Sectoral Advisory Groups on International Trade (SAGIT). The ITAC has already met three times and has set up nine task forces. I will be meeting the ITAC members next week in Toronto and my officials will be in close contact with the SAGIT as well.

I take this private sector participation in trade policy-making very seriously. It is an important contribution to a responsive national trade policy. I expect my Department and our negotiators to take the considered views of our advisors fully into account.