

My remarks today are made in the context of our government's commitment to a foreign policy review.

The foreign policy review commences with this opportunity in the House of Commons for elected members of Parliament to speak to issues that, although they may not seem as urgent to their constituents' well-being, are in fact just as relevant to the well-being of Canadians as health, welfare and the social safety net. Many factors outside of Canada threaten the security of our daily lives and that of our children and grandchildren, just as surely as unemployment, the deterioration of health and education programs, and difficulties resulting from our debt and deficits at home.

If world population growth rates continue and poverty worldwide is allowed to continue to ravage our global environment; if consumption levels continue without consideration of whether that consumption is sustainable; if women worldwide are not recognized as the critical determiners of health and education standards and economic well-being, nor supported adequately in these roles; then our very survival is threatened, not just our economic or social well-being.

Members of Parliament are elected to represent more than the immediate interests of their constituents, important as these interests are. Members of Parliament are obliged to balance the interests of their constituents with the broad and often conflicting interests of the regions of Canada and of our country as a whole. But federally elected members of Parliament must broaden the balance of all of these interests to include a global perspective -- the best interests of humanity as a whole, our global family. Our vision cannot be blinkered by narrow interests; we must not be blind to critical issues in a rapidly changing world. As I am sure all members have noticed since the commencement of the 35th Parliament, determining the future directions of our nation is a complex and often difficult balancing act.

Canada has a long-standing reputation for leadership in addressing international problems, and we intend to further strengthen this reputation over the years, but no government has all the answers. In the post-Cold War era we are continuously presented with rapidly changing situations, new challenges and many opportunities. That is the reason that this government is launching today a broad consultative process with the Canadian people.

Ultimately the Government must make policy decisions, but we recognize that Canadians, for reasons of culture, language, education, travel and business experience, have much more to contribute to policy formulation than ever before. These rich qualities of culture, language, education and international experience are not exceeded in any other country.