

My vision of Quebec has always been, long before I was in politics, that it is a distinct society, both historically and culturally."

In February, the Prime Minister spoke in Toronto and Quebec City about Canada's future.

He began from the premise of a strong and united Canada. He outlined our government's intention of working with Canadians to restructure Canada, not dismantle it. He emphasized the need to restore mutual understanding and respect among the partners in Confederation.

He recognized that we must deal with the sense of powerlessness in the West and disparity in Atlantic Canada. We must listen to the concerns of the North and of our aboriginal peoples. We must seek to understand the growing feeling of frustration of many Ontarians whose contribution to Canada is rarely recognized. And we must find a way to ensure that Quebecers become willing and enthusiastic partners in Canada.

The Prime Minister outlined that in looking at new arrangements, seven basic principles must be respected.

First, any change should lead to a more prosperous Canada. If it can be demonstrated that a transfer of some federal powers to the provinces will enhance the prosperity of Canadians, the federal government will not hesitate to agree to it.

But the process of re-Confederation is a two-way street. There may be some things now in provincial jurisdiction that could be handled better by the federal government, as Canada is called upon to confront the challenges of globalization in the 21st century.

Second, the federal government will promote constitutional changes that lead to a more efficient federation and a more competitive nation.

Third, we must be guided by fairness, we want a Canada that respects not only the diversity of its citizens, but also their equality.

Fourth, let's not be tied down by stale dogma or tired ideology. Let's ask what's practical. Let's look at common features of the various agendas, and let's look where differences can be reconciled, for the good of all.

Fifth, we need to maintain certain national standards in the interests of all Canadians. This means, for example, that pensions must be portable, and that health care must be accessible for all Canadians. It also means that, in shared