

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

On behalf of my government and the people of Canada, I would like to welcome you to Canada. It is indeed an honour that such a distinguished array of delegates from the countries of Europe and North America have gathered here in Ottawa to discuss questions concerning respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the participating states of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. It is an honour not only because this human rights experts meeting is the first meeting of the CSCE held outside of Europe, but also because it is the first such meeting dedicated solely to consideration of the protection of human rights.

It has long been the view of my government that efforts in the CSCE to improve co-operation and confidence in the security area should be balanced with a corresponding degree of effort and serious resolve to bring about a more effective implementation of the Helsinki and Madrid commitments to respect human rights and to cooperate on humanitarian matters. This meeting therefore marks a significant step forward in the CSCE process itself, a process to which Canadian men and women attach great importance.

Our interest in holding such a meeting also derives from the high priority which human rights have in Canada, and the important place which we believe human rights considerations should play in our foreign policy in general.

Domestically, one only has to follow the Canadian media for a few days to realize how aware Canadians are of their rights and how active they are in pursuing them. This may reflect the character and complexity of Canadian society, which embraces indigenous populations, two main language groups, a multiplicity of ethnic groups who have come here from every corner of the globe, and a great diversity of backgrounds and beliefs. Such diversity is not exclusive to Canada, but we believe that it can bring particular strengths to any society or country, and there is much that governments can do--or refrain from doing--that will preserve it.