

A week from today I will be in New York to make a major address to the United Nations General Assembly, a place where I am also now at home, representing all Canadians from coast to coast.

These are important sessions, where leaders from virtually every country of the world come to declare their positions on world issues, and essentially, provide a form of accountability of their actions and initiatives over the past year, as well as establishing their expectations for the future.

The reason that I am at home there is not just because of my many visits over the last year and a half, but because Canada has a home there. As a strong and respected member of the United Nations, Canada's views are given close and careful consideration, not simply because of our continuing support for United Nations-sponsored activities, but, more importantly, for the uniquely Canadian values and principles that are at the foundation of our international initiatives.

Canada holds a very special place among the nations of the world, one that is reinforced almost daily, whether in the battlefields of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the ravaged deserts of Somalia or in the diplomatic meeting places in Geneva or New York.

Our international reputation has been hard earned throughout our 125 years together as a nation. We should take pride in our past achievements, but we must also be diligent in protecting and strengthening our own domestic unity so that we can continue to be a positive force in the world for the future.

As Canadians, we have experienced the full set of highs and lows that are part and parcel of a true democracy -- the task forces and commissions and high-level meetings, the give and take and, ultimately, the compromises and consensus.

Now, the agreement reached in Charlottetown on August 28 will go to the people and, for the next 39 days, we can expect to see and hear more of the sights and sounds of democracy in action.

We have learned many important lessons in the process -- lessons that we want to share with the world.

It is one of the enormous ironies of our era that, while we continue to reduce the physical distances between individuals and nations, we are still unable to close many other fundamental distances -- between rich and poor, between developed and developing, between environmentally sensible and environmentally senseless and, most of all, between the warlike and the peaceful.

Many of us had very high hopes for this decade -- that, at long last, a century that had brought us to new levels of barbarism and inhumanity would provide us with a period of stability and tranquillity in which democracy could flourish.