

My first engagement after arriving in Singapore this morning, just before joining you, was to witness the signature of an Agreement on Co-operation between the Canadian Environment Industries Association (CEIA) and the Singapore Association for Environmental Companies, SAFECO. I mention this for two reasons: my interest is in promoting private sector linkages in sectors critical to Canadian prosperity and in areas where Canada has much to offer; and doing so in ways which permit Canada and Singapore to exploit their comparative advantages together for mutual benefit.

The CEIA-SAFECO link yields potentially significant benefits for both parties. The Agreement provides a framework for the exchange of information on technology, research and development, policies to protect the environment, practices best suited to local conditions, and legislative frameworks. In the longer term, it provides Canadian companies with a valuable entry point into the Singapore and the larger ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] market. This is precisely the kind of tie-up that the Canadian government wishes to promote.

We have given clear recognition to the dynamic growth in this region and its increasing importance in terms of the share of global trade. My appointment as Canada's first Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific underscores this. My role is to advise the Minister of Foreign Affairs on Asia-Pacific matters. My responsibilities, therefore, cover both geographical and sectoral issues such as political and economic matters, the social context in which we must situate our policies, and development co-operation.

The Asia-Pacific is a region of contrasts and complexities, with many untapped opportunities. The Canadian government's current foreign policy review is intended to ensure that we understand these contrasts, complexities and opportunities and position ourselves to take advantage of them.

Most Canadians no longer think of this part of the world as "the Far East." That is an outmoded term which I am glad is disappearing as a concept. Our government wants to ensure that all Canadians embrace the view that Singapore and its Asian neighbours are but the western rim of a Pacific community in which Canada is a full member.

After the United States, the Asia-Pacific region has become Canada's most important trading partner. It is the second fastest growing market for Canadian exports. Canada's transpacific trade has long surpassed transatlantic trade. All Canadians and particularly our business communities must be awake to these trends if we are to get our fair share of business. We all must stop being timid about setting-up shop at great distances or, indeed, worrying unduly about the costs in time, effort, and resources of investing in an "on-the-ground" presence.