

Ladies and Gentlemen - Welcome to Atlantic Canada.

It gives me great pleasure to join you again at your Annual Convention.

When we met at your Annual Dinner last year in Ottawa, your Convention theme was "The 1990's - Meeting the Challenge".

This year's Convention theme stresses the importance of export competitiveness. It is not always easy to agree on exactly what is required to maximize our export competitiveness.

However, one thing I think we can all agree on is that government and business must work together to maximize Canada's export potential.

Government and business must work together, because neither one of us can do it alone. We each have an important role to play.

Your role is to create and market goods and services in an increasingly competitive global market place.

Our role is to create a policy framework and environment that will enable you to compete on an equal footing in open markets around the world. To fulfill our role, the Government of Canada must be active on several fronts.

Tonight I would like to focus my remarks on two policy fronts that are of critical importance to Canadian exporters - trade policy negotiations, and our domestic economic policies.

I will not dwell on our trade development programs this evening, because I understand you discussed them in considerable detail this afternoon. You are therefore already familiar with our Going Global strategy, and our numerous trade development programs targeted to the United States, Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

Trade policy is important to Canada because our prosperity depends on secure access to markets beyond our borders. We all know that one-third of the Canadian Gross National Product depends on exports.

Since 1947, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade has been the cornerstone of Canadian trade policy. As we approach the 21st century, the GATT remains a top priority, but we must recognize that it has reached a turning point.

During the next few months, the GATT will pass through one of the most critical phases of its existence. We should therefore pause for a moment and carefully consider what is at stake.