

Mr. Chairman, first of all I want to register my appreciation for the invitation to appear before your committee. I look forward to an informative exchange of views with you today and to establishing a close, ongoing relationship. I propose to take some time now to outline for you my preliminary thoughts on where Canadian trade policy and trade initiatives should head as we move into the second half of the 1990s. Subsequently, I would welcome questions from the committee.

I understand that tomorrow you will be briefed on the Department's budget, the main estimates, by Garrett Lambert, who is with me today. Mr. Lambert is the Assistant Deputy Minister for Corporate Management Issues in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. I would suggest that the Committee may, in the first instance, wish to direct questions on budgetary matters, including any related to trade development, to Mr. Lambert tomorrow.

I am, of course, ready to discuss all trade and trade-related matters with you today, as members wish. Nonetheless, as this is my first meeting with the committee, I think it might be particularly useful for me to provide you with a sense of the direction I want to give to the international trade portfolio.

In this regard, I want to emphasize that I will be working closely with the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the foreign policy consultative process now under way. Trade issues are foreign policy issues; I make no distinction. I am confident that the views of the special joint parliamentary committee, established to consult with Canadians on foreign policy issues, will make an essential contribution to the development of a balanced and forward-looking agenda for Canada's international trade relations.

Mr. Chairman, trade is central to sustaining Canadian prosperity. Exports of goods and services account for over one-quarter of Canada's gross domestic product [GDP]. Directly and indirectly, exports sustain over two million jobs in Canada. The export sector has been the most dynamic element in stimulating economic growth in Canada. The importance of trade for job creation will continue to increase into the foreseeable future.

Canada also relies on imports of goods and services -- again representing about one-quarter of our GDP. For a small economy such as Canada, imported inputs have been and are critical to sustaining competitive domestic production as varied as up-scale men's clothing, motor vehicles, and computers and computer accessories.

I believe that the conduct of Canada's trade relations should rest on the quest for greater international security for Canadian exporters through agreed rule-making and enforcement, and on the creation of competitively sustained jobs for Canadians, whatever the product, wherever the market.