

ployees, and technology transfers are other assets of that kind of program.

It is precisely this sharing of ideas and experiences in the Canadian industrial context that will help to ensure Canada's continued competitiveness and prosperity as we move into the next century.

Through the annual Canada Awards for Business Excellence and the Strategies for Success initiative ISTC honours the companies and the individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to business excellence in Canada.

It is part of ISTC's mandate to provide Canadian businesses with information and services that will help them to hone their competitive edge. The department has set up 16 business service centres across the country. At these centres businesses can consult the Business Opportunities Sourcing System, a computerized data bank that offers profiles of over 26,000 Canadian companies.

Entrepreneurs can access thousands of licensing offers from around the world, or obtain information about government programs and about science and technology improvements, both domestic and foreign. Eleven of these business service centres are run jointly with External Affairs and International Trade Canada as international trade centres. Accessing the resources of over 100 Canadian missions overseas these centres are able to help provide firms with vital information to improve their export sales.

I mentioned earlier that one of the five key areas for our continued prosperity was our ability to export. I would like to speak for a moment or two about the importance of international trade. The fact is that Canada is a trading nation. This country was carved out of the wilderness by traders. Trade has kept food on our table and clothes on our backs for over three centuries. Trade has helped to build the high standard of living and the enviable social safety net that we enjoy in Canada today.

ISTC is committed to helping Canadian industries and businesses be competitive in the international marketplace. It is our objective to help develop and secure access to world markets for Canadian products and services. Working with industry we are assessing Canadian strengths and weaknesses in relation to world

markets. We are developing strategies to position Canadian firms to compete more effectively.

There is no turning back from the reality of global competition. In today's world it is by stimulating initiative and the will to succeed that modern nations can achieve higher standards of living, greater security and continued prosperity for their people.

The department has launched a series of sector competitive initiatives in areas ranging from commercial education to micro-electronics, from forest products to the fashion industry, from advanced manufacturing technologies to the emerging environmental business. Working closely with industry, labour and other government departments, we are identifying issues, challenges and opportunities specific to each related sector and we are developing action plans to address them.

ISTC and International Trade Canada are working together to promote new market opportunities created by the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement in areas such as consumer goods, food, textiles, clothing, footwear, consulting services, education and training services, and so on.

Confronted with the enormous challenges of our times we sometimes forget to acknowledge our achievements and concentrate only on the problems that remain to be solved. Therefore it is useful to take a good look from time to time at the solid hard work and accomplishments of a department in our Canadian government such as Industry, Science and Technology Canada. ISTC is in the business of promoting international competitiveness and excellence in Canadian industry.

Through programs and services such as those I have briefly mentioned tonight the department strives to co-operate with and promote the interests of the Canadian scientific, research and industry sectors.

The men and women of ISTC deserve commendation for their dedication, initiative and creativity in seeking and applying uniquely Canadian answers to the challenges of international competition.

Canada is a fortunate and wealthy country. It is no accident that the United Nations recently rated it as the best country in the world in which to live. We have problems and challenges ahead of us, but we also have the tools at hand to solve them.