

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you, and to join in your consideration of the rights of minorities. I come to Laval in two capacities. As Secretary of State for External Affairs, I want to welcome a truly distinguished group of authorities, who have come from many countries, to help explore this absorbing and sensitive issue.

And as a citizen of Canada, who has acquired an affection for this Province, I am honoured to find myself again in the company of Le Devoir, Laval University, and, of course, Senator Arthur Tremblay.

I am a Western Canadian who has become involved in Québec - a product of one Canadian minority working to establish the rights of another, and much of what I know of Québec was shaped by this small newspaper, this great university, and my extraordinary friend, the Senator.

Laval University, of course, has other distinctions. It can boast of almost as many distinguished graduates as the University of St. Francis Xavier.

At other times in our recent past, I have spoken of minority rights in Canada. I remember vividly one particular occasion at this University, with the support of Le Devoir, when I proposed some changes that could have allowed Québec to join with honour in the constitutional accord. That experience serves to emphasize that for Canadians, questions of minority rights are not academic matters. They are issues as old as our country, and as fresh as last week. Just eight days ago, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs introduced a Bill to end finally discrimination against certain women under our Indian Act. That very Bill is being criticized by some spokesmen of the Indian community, who claim the action by Parliament infringes their collective rights as aboriginal people. Such are the complexities of questions of rights, and for Canadians they are domestic complexities as well as international.