

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure this evening to extend to you a warm welcome on behalf of the Government of Canada. This 100th Session of the International Wheat Council indeed represents a landmark in the history of international co-operation in grain matters and we are honoured to host the anniversary session in our capital city, together with the Centennial Forum which begins tomorrow.

I understand that among the member countries of the Council represented here are those key countries which began over 50 years ago to develop the concepts of co-operation which led to the formation of successive wheat agreements and to the Council itself. We are pleased that eight non-member countries have joined Council members in marking this occasion, including several whose role in the international grain trade is of increasing importance. I also wish to extend a special welcome to the representatives of the many international organizations concerned with the production, distribution and trade in grain who have joined us.

Canada's interest in grain trading dates back to the original settlement of the country, and with the opening of the Canadian West, Canada entered the international grains arena. You are probably aware of the continuing importance of grain to our production and trade. Over half the grain and oilseeds we produce is exported and the annual export volume is approaching 30 million tonnes.

I have been personally involved with many issues affecting international trade in agricultural produce including grains. One of my first international meetings as Secretary of State for External Affairs in 1975 was the Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Food Production and Rural Development. Later that same year I led the Canadian delegation to the World Food Conference in Rome. More recently I chaired the 1982 Gatt Ministerial Conference where the issue of trade in agriculture was a highly divisive issue. I shall thus be following your deliberations with great interest.

The importance of food and its production and distribution throughout the world goes well beyond the economics of the activity itself. Wheat and other food grains are as essential to the well being and security of the world today as they have been throughout history. With the world's population exceeding six billion by the turn of the century, production and