

When this government came into office back in September, it was with two fundamental commitments to the Canadian people: to get the economy moving again, and to rebuild the bridges of dialogue and consultation between Ottawa and the rest of Canada. This meeting is one of the products of both of those commitments, and I thank you for helping us make it possible.

Those of you who are out in the markets of the world are well aware of how tough it is out there. Under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (the organization known as the GATT) the world's trading nations have been trying to get their act together for years. But international trade is still far from free.

The forces for protectionism are alive in every country, including Canada, and the pressures are unrelenting. Just as an example, more than 100 protectionist bills were introduced in the U.S. Congress last year alone. Not many of them got very far, but the volume is certainly indicative of the pressures. And the volume is growing.

On top of that, we face new and growing competition from nations that have been building their industries. We must cope with the high technology revolution, and with the fact that new materials (such as plastics) are crowding out the market for some of our traditional exports (such as copper and nickel.)

We, as a nation, have been slow to adapt to these changes. In 1968, Canada ranked fourth among the world's trading nations, just ahead of Japan. Today, Japan's share of world trade is double ours, and we have dropped to eighth place.

The fact that we have a healthy trade balance at the moment should not lull us to sleep. If we are going to maintain our standard of living, let alone improve it, we're going to have to do better as a trading nation. We're going to have to sharpen our competitive edge.

Since we have come to office, this government has been moving rapidly to improve Canada's trade performance.

We have undertaken two major export promotion campaigns, including last month's Marketplace '85, which took place throughout the month of March and brought Trade Commissioners back home from their posts abroad to meet with potential exporters.