

Fellow Ministers, our meeting today represents a watershed in Canada-Mexico relations.

The last time the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) met in Ottawa, in January 1990, it took important steps to revitalize our partnership, especially in the economic field.

What we have since achieved is remarkable.

Most importantly, in the course of 14 months, from June 1991 to August 1992, we succeeded in negotiating with the United States the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which will create the world's largest free trade area.

The entry into force of the Agreement on January 1, 1994 will be an important event for all three countries.

The creation, over 10 years, of a North American market, free of all tariffs and many non-tariff barriers, and with liberalized investment and service flows, will provide a stimulus to all three economies.

It will aid us in providing the base for our economic prosperity, which is the foundation for the well-being of our citizens.

I can assure our Mexican friends here today that the Canadian Government is committed to the North American Free Trade Agreement. In fact, we plan to introduce our implementing legislation to Parliament in a few weeks. We are confident of successful passage of the bill through both chambers of Parliament to permit entry into force of the NAFTA on January 1, 1994, as called for in the Agreement.

Canada is also committed to greater trilateral co-operation on the labour and environment front. As we negotiated the NAFTA, Canada, Mexico and the United States engaged in important discussions on co-operation in the areas of the environment and labour.

These talks enhanced the co-operation that JMC Meetings had already established between Canada and Mexico. We are pleased with the progress that is being made through bilateral co-operation, but we see an opportunity to make further advances in these areas on a trilateral basis.

We welcome the priority that the Clinton administration is placing on the environment and labour, and we are prepared to work closely with the United States and Mexico in making parallel initiatives in these areas a reality.