

Mr. Chairman,

I wish at the outset to express our gratitude to the Government of France for hosting this important event, and our appreciation of the efficient work of the executive secretary, M. Dessaux, and his staff in organizing this conference in a very short time.

This conference opens a new chapter in European political dialogue and in the ongoing struggle for established and recognized human rights on this continent.

Little more than four months ago, we met in Vienna to finalize the Concluding Document of the CSCE. Since then a new negotiation has been launched seeking to reduce the level of conventional forces in Europe, the most heavily armed area of the world.

Today we inaugurate the CSCE Conference on the Human Dimension, a concept without precedent in the history of Europe and the world.

In the coming weeks here we will take stock of the progress made of the many commitments in human rights, human contacts, and humanitarian cooperation we collectively agreed to in the Vienna Concluding Document. It is an opportunity not only to assess what has been done but, just as importantly, to determine how we continue on from here to ensure further progress.

France will soon celebrate the bicentennial of the French Revolution, an event of cardinal significance in our common heritage. As we reflect on the history of Europe during the two centuries since the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, it is evident that the quest for human rights and human dignity has been a potent and incessant impulse. Europe is more than a geographical expression, it also represents a set of values and ideas which have contributed to our common heritage. Human rights take a central place among them.

Canada is fortunate to have been profoundly influenced by several important strands of this European tradition. We inherited British parliamentary democracy evolved over the centuries from Magna Carta. We are heirs to the rich cultural and political legacy of France. Our legal system has roots in both French and British justice. We have welcomed, and continue to welcome, people from every corner of this planet, many fleeing human rights violations or political upheaval elsewhere. These new Canadians speak many languages, profess different religions, and practice varied cultures. They have enriched our heritage and embraced our freedom.