

Mr. Chairman:

Canada is very pleased that you have been elected and is certain that you will tactfully and effectively assume responsibility for supervising our work. Mr. Chairman, you can count on our full co-operation.

Canada has always had a special place for the United Nations in its foreign policy. As I speak to you here for the first time as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I am reminded of something one of my illustrious predecessors, Lester B. Pearson, said about the United Nations. He said: "We must cultivate international ideals, develop international policies, strengthen international institutions, above all the United Nations, so that peace and progress can be made secure."

The government that I represent shares his broad and noble vision of the role and place of the UN. In order to face the challenges that await it at the dawn of the 21st century, more than ever, the international community needs a strong, credible multilateral institution equipped with the tools for fulfilling our expectations.

These challenges are peacekeeping and international security, as well as development, justice, democracy, human rights and the fight against inequalities. At a time when we are preparing to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the UN, there is no more urgent task than intensifying our efforts for reform in order to give our organization the second wind it needs. Let us draw inspiration from the vision and enthusiasm of the people who wrote the Charter of the United Nations 50 years ago.

Mr. Chairman, the extensive upheavals that have shaken our planet since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War can be symbolized in a few images.

I am thinking of the moving image of President Nelson Mandela taking the oath of office as democratically elected president of South Africa and the historic handshake between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] Leader Yasser Arafat.

For these people and those in Cambodia, El Salvador and perhaps Mozambique and Angola who have found the road to peace with the help of the United Nations, the future is filled with hope.

There is also hope in Haiti, where a courageous people has been subject for too long to oppression and misery. We will share their joy in finally welcoming to his native land President Aristide, a living symbol of nascent democracy.

But there are also unbearable images of the victims in the market in Sarajevo and the sea of humanity fleeing the killings in Rwanda.