

Mr. Mayor,
Mr. Premier
Mr. Director General of the FAO,
Mr. Pearson,
Madame Lapointe,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen:

I am both pleased and honoured to be here today to participate in the inauguration of Place FAO [UN Food and Agriculture Organization] in Quebec City, and in the unveiling of a plaque in honour of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, one of Canada's greatest diplomats and prime ministers.

Mr. Mayor, I believe we can take this opportunity to highlight the important role played by Quebec City in the contemporary history of Canada and the world.

Quebec City is not only the birthplace of the FAO; among other things, it also hosted the allied leaders on two occasions during the Second World War, enabling them to co-ordinate their efforts to liberate Europe and to recognize Canada's importance in the Alliance.

On October 16, 1945, 42 countries met in this city under the chairmanship of Lester B. Pearson, then Canadian Ambassador to the United States, to sign the Constitution and take part in the first Conference of the new Food and Agriculture Organization. In view of the important role that our country would play in building the UN system, it was fitting that Quebec City's name should be linked with the creation of a specialized UN agency.

But Canada's involvement in creating the FAO dates back earlier than the Quebec City Conference of 1945. Two years earlier, in 1943, Mr. Pearson accepted President Franklin Roosevelt's invitation to chair the commission responsible for setting up the FAO.

In 1945 the world had just experienced the worst conflict in the history of humanity. The world's nations were confronted with famine, mass destruction of food reserves, inflation, shortages, the destruction of arable land - in short, the ravages of a terrible war.

Today, with 171 members, the FAO is an international forum without equal. Operating not only in the field of technical assistance, it is also involved in various activities aimed at agricultural development and improving the nutritional value and security of the world's food supplies.

Since its creation on October 16, 1945, remarkable progress has been achieved in this respect. However, we realize that much remains to be done, and many challenges must be faced. Current events remind us that hunger and malnutrition are still with us.