

I am particularly pleased to join you here this evening on behalf of the Government of Canada to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Association des restaurants chinois du Québec. There are a number of reasons why I am so pleased to join you here. First and foremost, what person in their right mind would turn down a meal with 500 restaurateurs? Secondly, I feel a genuine kinship with you as I have owned and operated two Chinese restaurants in my home province of British Columbia. I know how difficult it is to run a successful restaurant and opportunities like this evening to sit back and celebrate your successes are few and far between. It is not often that we restaurateurs can sit back and have someone else do the cooking and the serving.

I also feel a particular sense of pride looking around the room tonight as I see many Canadians who, like myself, came to this country from Asia looking for, and finding, a better life for themselves and their families. Several of you are sixth and seventh generation Canadians and I thank you and your families for blazing a trail to Canada, making it so much easier for the rest of us because you demonstrated to other Canadians why this country should continue to open its arms to hard-working and industrious people.

I would like to take a few moments to briefly describe my role as Canada's Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific). The prime function of my position is to advise the Minister of Foreign Affairs, André Ouellet - who represents the Montreal riding of Papineau-Saint-Michel - on Asia-Pacific matters. My responsibilities therefore cover both geographic and sectoral issues, such as political economic matters and social development assistance. At the same time, I work closely with the Minister for International Trade, Roy MacLaren, to help him in his capacity of promoting trade for Canada.

A key part of my job is to build on the links that many of us have with Asia to enhance Canadian export opportunities. As our government has clearly demonstrated during the two years we have been in office, trade - exports, investment and technology transfer - is central to sustaining Canadian prosperity. The export of Canadian goods and services accounts for over one quarter of Canada's gross domestic product. Directly and indirectly, exports sustain over two million jobs in Canada. Most importantly, the export sector has been the most dynamic element in stimulating economic growth in Canada. For all these reasons, international business development holds a high priority on our government's economic agenda.

The two years since Prime Minister Chrétien appointed me to his cabinet have certainly been eventful for those of us dealing with the Asia-Pacific: it included visits to Canada by a number of Asian heads of state, and ministers from virtually every Asian country. Going the other way, André Ouellet, Roy MacLaren and I have crisscrossed the region working hard to promote Canadian interests.

Last year was the kick-off of "Team Canada." Led by Prime Minister Chrétien, Team Canada was a sort of awakening to the sheer scale of opportunities and to Canada's capacity to compete when the effort is