

Mr. President, Excellency, Mr. Minister, Members of the Canadian Institute for International Affairs (CIIA), Ladies and Gentlemen:

Allow me first to thank Richard French and the members of the Montreal CIIA for organizing this excellent event. I am sure that it will be useful as well as enjoyable.

I am very pleased to welcome in our midst a colleague and friend, the Secretary of Trade and Industry for Mexico, His Excellency Dr. Jaime Serra Puche.

Secretary Serra has held the reins of Mexico's international trade for four years now. We had the pleasure of welcoming him and his colleagues to Ottawa yesterday for the ninth annual meeting of the Canada-Mexico Joint Ministerial Committee.

This meeting strengthened relations between our two countries by giving Canadian and Mexican ministers an opportunity to discuss policy, economics, trade and other areas of mutual interest.

To complement these productive consultations, Secretary Serra has come to Montreal to see some concrete examples of highly successful partnerships between Canadian and Mexican business people.

It is important to note that Canadian companies did not wait for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to come into effect before starting to take advantage of the increasingly attractive outlets available in Mexico, and its increasingly open markets.

Right here in Quebec, and especially in greater Montreal, companies have already begun to take advantage of these opportunities. As Mexico continues to reduce and eventually does away with its tariff and other non-tariff barriers completely, Canadian companies will find even more outlets there.

Our visit with Secretary Serra this morning to two major companies in the Montreal region underscored the importance of the Mexican market for Canada.

Canadair and SR Telecom, along with Atelier Montréal Facilities, which we will visit this afternoon, are already doing business with Mexico. I am talking about business in the tens of millions of dollars, with a potential for hundreds of millions.

Sitting at my table is David Cherem, an investor in Mexico and the President of Artopex Plus, a company that employs 300 people in Laval, Quebec. In addition to his investment in Artopex Plus, Mr. Cherem will be responsible for distributing the company's products in Mexico. What better example could there be of the possibilities of partnership between Canada and Mexico?