

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman:

As Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific, one of my responsibilities is to assist Canada's Minister for International Trade in his efforts to increase business between Canada and the Asia-Pacific region. Accordingly, I am pleased to be in the dynamic city of Lahore and to have the opportunity to address you. As key representatives of the Pakistani business community, you will share with me an awareness of the importance of trade to the well-being of our respective countries.

Trade is the breath of life to the Canadian economy. Every \$1 billion in exports sustains about 12 000 jobs. More than one quarter of our gross domestic product is dependent on trade. While Canada ranks 31st in the world in population, we also have the eighth-largest economy and the ninth-highest per capita gross national product. How did so few of us do so much? Certainly not by selling to each other.

As an Asia-Pacific nation, Canada is fully aware of the dynamic changes taking place in the region. In recognition of these developments, we are committed to developing stronger bilateral and commercial relationships throughout Asia. Significant economic reforms, in particular, are creating greater confidence both in Canada and internationally of the opportunities for doing business in the region.

Before going any further, let me say that Canada values highly the relationship we have enjoyed with Pakistan over the last 45 years. Pakistan has played a useful and constructive role in international issues of direct interest to us such as the environment and the Law of the Sea. As Commonwealth nations, we share a commitment to democracy and the rule of law. We are also founding members of the new World Trade Organization, which recognizes our mutual commitment to a rules-based international trading system.

Through our development assistance programming, Canada has worked with Pakistan to develop its energy, power, agriculture and irrigation capabilities. We have co-operated in areas of medical and business education, rural social development and vocational training, among many others. A large number of these projects have been successfully completed and already benefit Pakistan and its citizens.

More importantly, Canada is home to a large and dynamic community of Pakistani-Canadians who contribute to the richness and diversity of Canadian life. Many have maintained and nurtured strong ties with Pakistan and have helped foster a strong interest in both countries in developing our commercial relations. In fact, several of the companies accompanying me on this visit are headed by Pakistani-Canadians. In Canada, we consider this our "hidden advantage." It is a strength for both Canada and Pakistan, one which provides depth to our relations.