

It is a pleasure to be back in Vietnam after so many years. I was a Canadian diplomat posted to the International Control Commission in Saigon 36 years ago. The people of this city are as energetic and full of life today as they were then.

Canada and Vietnam share historic ties. As a member of the International Control Commission from 1954 to 1973, and as a non-belligerent observer, Canada strove to end a long and painful war.

I was a witness at the beginning of that terrible conflict, which is vivid in the world's memory. I wish you well two decades after the curtain closed on those historical events.

Canada has been a friend of Vietnam in good times and in bad.

Today Canada and Vietnam can move forward together in an era of peace and economic development. We now share an increasingly dynamic, exciting and multifaceted relationship.

1994 will remain a milestone in the history of our relations. Not only are we inaugurating a new Chancery in Hanoi and a Trade Office in Ho Chi Minh City, but we have appointed Her Excellency Christine Desloges as Canada's first Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In June, your Deputy Prime Minister, Phan Van Khai, visited Canada and met with Canadian leaders and tomorrow, our Prime Minister, Mr. Jean Chrétien, will be making the first visit by a Canadian Prime Minister to this country.

The significance of these developments cannot be understated. I am here today to express Canada's support to our Vietnamese friends. We want to play a useful and constructive role as Vietnam strives to open its doors, liberalize its economy and reintegrate into the world community. A good example of this was Canada's contribution to clearing Vietnam's International Monetary Fund arrears.

We are together in "la francophonie" and Canada, as a G-7 country, would like to see Vietnam join the new World Trade Organization; we would welcome its membership in APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum] and we look forward to its future membership in ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations].

We also want to participate in the rejuvenation of a modern Vietnamese economy. Our countries may be a thousand miles apart, on opposite sides of the world's largest ocean, but we share much in common. Vietnam and Canada are both endowed with plentiful natural resources, and skilled and motivated workers.

Our two nations have similar infrastructure requirements to deal with our respective river systems, coastlines, mountains and rural communities. Most significantly, we both benefit from foreign investment and global trade for our economic well-being.