

It is a distinct pleasure for me to begin by first visit to the South American continent in the city that witnessed the birth of Simon Bolivar over two hundred years ago. The Beacon of Liberty, freedom and justice that was kindled by "The Liberator" still burns brightly to inspire those who are struggling to achieve the ideals that were so important to him. The democratic example set by successive Venezuelan governments in the last three decades has provided substance to these ideals and now they are reinforced again by the growing number of governments in your sister republics who have chosen the democratic path. Bolivar would be proud.

As part of the family of this hemisphere, we share that pride in the growth of democracy and believe that stronger economies and stronger democracies go hand in hand. Canadian's in business, in government, in the arts, and in other fields want to work more closely in this large family of the Americas. Personally I look forward to the good advice and active cooperation of your government. The prominent role of Venezuela in Opec, Contadora, and the Cartagena Group to name a few, gives your government unique perspectives and insights on issues that affect us all. I also hope to renew this momentum in Canada-Venezuela relations and to improve our trade prospects in several areas. To pursue that goal several Canadian businessmen and investors have accompanied me. Canada is perhaps best known for our resources and our geography, and we have a lot of both. In territory, we are the largest country in this hemisphere, the second largest in the world. We have abundant natural resources, including coal, oil, grain, aluminium and other commodities where the price could be better. In fact, we are proud of both our resource base, and our success in building a modern nation across a vast and sometimes hostile territory. But there is much more to Canada than mines and miles. We are an increasingly competitive modern economy, and an increasingly distinctive North-American society, tolerant, diverse, confident.

Respect for individual differences is natural in a country like Canada, with two official languages, and a population drawn from every corner and every colour of the world. Respect for national differences is natural. Natural in a country like ours, whose only experience with colonialism has been as a colony. We are active in the World - in trade, in aid, and in the vigorous support of multilateral institutions. Our economy is one of the strongest in the OECD. Our productivity is high and increasing. With a challenging geography, and a powerful neighbour, we have to be innovative, and are among the world's leaders in transportation and communications and other modern technologies.