

Mr. Pearson, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to be here today to participate in this ceremony which honours both the person, Lester B. Pearson, and an idea, peace. Both the person and the idea are very much part of our everyday lives here in this building that bears his name.

I am particularly grateful to Geoffrey Pearson and the Pearson family for entrusting the Nobel medal to this Department and to this building, so that it can continue to inspire all of us to follow the principles and the practices of a man whose ideas are still very much at the forefront of international diplomacy.

After a distinguished career in the Department of External Affairs, "Mike" Pearson entered politics in 1948, eventually becoming Prime Minister of Canada in 1963.

But the politics of peace were always Lester B. Pearson's greatest passion, and his commitment to this noble calling has been emulated by subsequent Prime Ministers and Ministers of External Affairs.

In 1956, Lester Pearson created the idea for the United Nations' first successful peacekeeping operation and worked closely with Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold to make the plan functional.

The objective of the exercise was simple: to ensure that nothing would endanger the ceasefire reached in Suez in the fall of 1956, so that eventually a political settlement could be reached.

In addressing Parliament on November 27, 1956, Lester Pearson said: "May this force succeed in its task. If it does, we may have started something of immense value for the future. We may have taken a step to put force behind the collective will of the international community under the law."

His words have echoed true until this very day.

We, the international community, did in fact start something of immense value for the future. The idea did take hold and the world has seen some 40 UN peacekeeping operations since then.

Canada has played a part in virtually all of them. From the jungles of Indo-China, to the mountains of the Himalayas, to the deserts of the Middle East, to the towns and cities of Europe -- Canada has played a part, far beyond our size and our apparent influence on the international scene in other matters.

When it comes to peace, Canada is seen as the master. "Canada" and "peace" are synonymous in international circles.

Not all peacekeeping missions have been successful but taken in their aggregate, they have significantly lowered the level of