In 1990, countries of Europe and North America agreed in the Charter of Paris "to build ... and strengthen democracy, as the only system of government of our nations," and they held that respect for human rights "is an essential safeguard against an over-mighty state."

So human rights, democracy and good government have become inextricably linked, and rightly, since without one component of the trinity, the others will collapse.

Moreover, they cannot thrive without a framework of co-operative security and sustainable prosperity, two of the other major objectives of Canadian foreign policy. In fact, it was our Canadian, John Humphrey, practical as ever, who wrote, "Human rights without social and economic rights have little meaning for most people, particularly on empty bellies."

Indeed, this is the rationale behind our efforts to aid Russia, the other ex-Soviet states, and the states of Eastern Europe today. These states and their peoples are currently free, but freedom may seem less of a priority for these people if there are no jobs, no food and little security.

Our objective is straightforward -- prevent conflict while building progress. At Stanford University, the Prime Minister cautioned that this is a task that might not be completed for many years, but that we should nonetheless have the vision and courage "to take the first defining step."

Good Governance -- a Definition

This first defining step is a challenge that Canada and other countries are trying to address through the promotion and pursuit of what we have come to call "good governance" in international relations, a concept that is centred on the affirmation of human rights and the effective use of scarce resources.

I want to elaborate on:

● what we mean by good governance;

● how we support it; and

● why we believe what we are doing is important.

Let me start with a short definition and a brief outline of the context.

● Good governance means government based on universal human values, open and democratic institutions, and sound and practical systems for priority setting, decision making and program management.