

Professor Ricklefs, ladies and gentleman:

It is certainly an honour for me to meet with you this afternoon during my first visit to Australia.

I came to Australia as head of the Canadian delegation to the South Pacific Forum. This provided an opportunity to meet with ministers from the region and to talk with Prime Minister Keating. I was also able to outline Canada's perspectives on some of the issues of mutual concern and those faced particularly by the small and often fragile economies of the South Pacific Island States.

Here today, you provide me with another, and very welcome, opportunity to outline Canada's interests and involvement in the Asia-Pacific region.

Since my appointment as Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific) last October, I have had a number of opportunities to travel within the region, and I have been pleased by how well Canada was received among those I have met.

Despite the very positive attitude towards Canada, it would, however, appear that Canadian interests and engagements in Asia-Pacific are not exactly well-known. I am not entirely sure why this is the case — perhaps it is a combination of Canadian modesty and the preoccupation with the role of the United States. Maybe it is simply that we do not toot our own horn often and loudly enough.

Having myself been an immigrant to Canada from Asia, I have taken great interest in the movement of peoples and the impact this has on a country. Throughout Canadian history there has been an inexorable push west across our large country towards the Pacific. Legendary companies such as the Canadian Pacific Railway (which is still one of the largest transportation companies in the world) evoke this preoccupation with the Pacific. Thousands of labourers from China were involved in the construction of this ribbon of steel over 100 years ago and, as a result, Canada became well known in the villages of southern China.

Today the term "Asia-Pacific" is not just a distant geographic concept for Canadians but is very much part of the psyche of modern Canada. Fifty per cent of the immigrants to Canada now come from the Asia-Pacific region and five per cent of Canadians trace their ancestry to the Asia-Pacific region.

Canada's own involvement in the Asia-Pacific sphere goes back well over a century to when Canadian missionaries were active in China. I mention this because several of the sons of these missionary families were instrumental in shaping the nascent Canadian Department of External Affairs and left an indelible