

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the second Space Conference of the Americas. Credit is due to the Chilean government for organizing this important event as a follow-up to the 1990 San José conference. This conference gives renewed impetus to regional co-operation, development and integration in the Americas, in the field of space activities and their applications.

The space age started about 35 years ago with the launching of Sputnik, the first artificial satellite, in 1957. Five years later, Canada became the third country in the world to build its own satellite -- Alouette I -- and in 1972 became the first country in the world to operate a commercial, domestic, geostationary satellite communications system. Three Canadian astronauts have now had the opportunity to participate in U.S. space shuttle missions.

Canada can rightfully claim to be one of the pioneer nations in the peaceful use of outer space. Why? The answer lies in our immense geography, our varied climate and resources, and our unevenly spread population. Early on, these naturally pushed us to develop space-based communication systems and to investigate the opportunities resulting from the use of remote-sensing data gathered from space.

Space technology unites Canadians through cross-country weather reports, television, telephone, fax, electronic mail, tele-education and tele-medicine. At the same time, it connects Canadians to the world.

Since those early years, the benefits of space activity have become increasingly apparent in many fields of endeavour. Our irrepressible curiosity about the universe has allowed us to leave the earth and has given us a new perspective on our own planet. The challenges presented by space activity have also produced advantages on earth, through the use of new technologies developed in space and a better understanding of human physiology.

Current international circumstances encourage greater international co-operation in space. The two major space powers are themselves engaging in closer co-operation. Moreover, the large costs of major projects -- as well as present budgetary constraints in most countries -- compel us to look for international partnerships to share expertise, risk and resources.

The Canadian Space Program has a tradition of international co-operation, in order to make the most of our investment and to benefit from the know-how and experience of others. This tradition has been successful, and Canada will continue to undertake most major initiatives in partnership with other countries.