

Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates,

It gives me much pleasure to bring to this Assembly the greetings and good wishes of the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada, who has given me the honour of leading the Canadian delegation to this Assembly. This is the first General Assembly of the Organization of American States which Canada has attended since being accredited as a Permanent Observer to the OAS on February 2.

The Permanent Observer Mission of Canada to the OAS opened here in Washington one month ago. In the near future an Ambassador will be appointed as our Permanent Observer.

For us, then, this is a notable occasion, for Canada wants a closer association -- a closer association with Latin American countries and a closer association with inter-American institutions and organizations.

I would like to express to the Assembly, to the Permanent Council and to the Secretary General Canada's appreciation of their collaboration with us in our endeavours.

Perhaps we have appeared to be a reluctant bridegroom to the OAS. Possibly we should have long ago taken to heart the saying that marriage is, after all, an extended form of friendship. But also, there have always been Canadians who recall the proverb voiced by Samuel Butler: "A man's friendships are, like his will, invalidated by marriage...".

Distinguished delegates, these considerations, pro and con, have never been far from Canadians' minds. So it is no surprise to us that the significance of our Permanent Observer status has been questioned in Canada as it is questioned among some members of this Assembly.

We are asked whether this is a first step toward full membership in the OAS. Or does it reflect a decision to dwell permanently in the twilight zone on the edge of the OAS? Shall Canada always observe, but never become part of the action?

We are also asked why, after a generation of observing the activities of this Organization, we still have not made up our minds whether or not to join in full membership.

Today, I would like to address myself fairly to some of these justifiable questions.

Our association with the OAS as a Permanent Observer need not be interpreted as a first step toward full membership