

Transcript of a Speech by the Honourable Pierre S. Pettigrew Canadian Minister for International Trade

Thank you very much. I will want to be very short because we are indeed here to listen and hear what you have to say.

I think you already have a pretty good idea of what I have to say. I've often had the opportunity to address these very important themes.

First of all, I'd like to draw your attention, as I feel it is important, to our many colleagues, ministers of trade and ministers of foreign affairs, who have joined us today and who represent their countries, their governments, and who are also here to hear what civil society and our government have to say.

So I thank them for having agreed to participate in this meeting, and I think that we are in what I would call the spirit of Buenos Aires. I would also like to note the presence of the representatives, the leaders, to tell the truth, of the major organizations of our hemisphere. We have the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, who are represented here by Mr. Wolfensohn, Mr. Gaviria and Mr. Iglesias, and I thank them as well for participating in this meeting. So I think you see the importance we place on this roundtable.

We had a historic breakthrough in Buenos Aires, and I believe that, more than ever, we will be conducting international trade negotiations in the same way.

We decided unanimously, as international trade ministers, to release the draft of the agreement currently being negotiated, that is, three and a half years before the conclusion of the negotiations. That is a historic breakthrough.

I believe we will need, in a very responsible way, to establish a dialogue among ourselves on the basis of those texts, and I have to say that I consider that the unanimous support that was given to that recommendation is, in my opinion, very, very much a sign of progress in terms of the things we have often discussed together.

There is another point that I was extremely pleased about in Buenos Aires, and that is that trade ministers have agreed to really build and institutionalize a dialogue with civil society on the hemispheric level.

As you know, there were questions that some countries thought maybe we should do it country by country, governments should deal with their own civil societies, and I thought it was an extraordinary breakthrough as well that the Free Trade Area of the Americas will now institutionalize this dialogue with hemispheric civil society.

So I can tell that there has been substantial improvement in, I would say, opening the windows and opening the doors to these negotiations.