

Mr. Speaker, today, March 9, is Commonwealth Day, which has particular significance this year for Canada. In October, in your own city of Vancouver, we will host the next meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government.

In that same internationalist tradition, Canada will welcome the second Francophone Summit to Québec City in September. These are both family meetings for Canada, taking us back to the roots and traditions which shaped our unique country, but also, as strong and vital families do, helping us reach out to new influence and opportunities in a changing world.

It was once the style to be nostalgic about the Commonwealth. Today it is one of the most relevant and effective associations to which Canada belongs. Under its auspices, we are involved in ocean development in the Caribbean and the South Pacific; technical cooperation in Asia and Africa; scholarships and research on all six continents; cooperation at Geneva on international trade; and continuing dialogue among countries whose conditions range from the poorest to the most advanced. In Chittagong, in Bangladesh, last month, I met a Canadian who had been involved in the first Canadian project under the Colombo Plan. That was the beginning of our program of external aid, and the beginning also of Canada's reputation in the developing world as a trusted modern power.

In the last two years, the Commonwealth has also been the principal forum in which Canada has been able to help build effective pressure against the evil of apartheid in South Africa. I want to take the occasion of Commonwealth Day to report to Parliament upon the Prime Minister's most recent conversations in Africa, as well as my own meetings with Commonwealth partners in Britain and in Asia, and consultations between the Minister for External Relations and the Minister of State for Immigration, with representatives of several governments of Southern Africa.

Canada was particularly active in launching the work of the Eminent Persons Group, and then in fashioning the first Commonwealth package of sanctions against South Africa. We have implemented all of the sanctions and measures agreed by the Commonwealth at Nassau and at London. Among the Heads of Government, the Prime Minister, personally, and as chairman of the Vancouver meeting, is playing a leading role.