

I am grateful to the International Trade Advisory Committee, and in particular to the chairman, Marshall Cohen, for this plaque, recognizing 100 years of service from the Trade Commissioner Service. I accept it on behalf of the hundreds of women and men, Canada-based and locally engaged, officers and support staff, who throughout the world, have given a true meaning to "public service" by devoting their energies and talent to the service of Canadian business people. Such an honour is all the more meaningful coming from those they serve.

Welcome all to this conference celebrating the centenary of the Trade Commissioner Service, a service that has been recognized by Canadians and by our competitors alike as one of the best official trade representation services in the world. The Service has been a critical component of the federal government's overall international business development strategy.

I am sure that my predecessors in this portfolio, and particularly those who are here today, would agree with me that the Trade Commissioner Service should not be considered as just another government program, but rather as a sound investment in Canada's prosperity.

Early next year, I plan to visit Australia where, in 1894, John Larke was appointed as Canada's first trade commissioner. While his world was so completely different from ours, John Larke did work that was remarkably similar to what trade commissioners do today. He collected commercial information, he promoted Canadian companies interested in trade with Australia. He provided advice on transportation and customs matters, and he stimulated trade in a wide range of Canadian goods, including textiles, carriage wheels and cereals.

Today, the 600 Canadians and 350 locally engaged trade officers working in 140 offices in Canada and around the world are still offering that kind of advice. Now, however, they promote exports of a much wider range of products and services. These include microchips, telecommunications equipment, financial and legal services, and information technology, to name just a few of the high-tech, value-added industries in which Canadian companies are world leaders.

Today's trade commissioners must also contend with a new range of issues that Larke could not even imagine. Quotas, subsidies, instant global communications, bilateral and international trade agreements, and falling tariff barriers coupled with expanding non-tariff barriers, are just some of the words that characterize the contemporary international trade landscape.