

Ladies and Gentleman and Honoured Guests:

It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to the delegates to the Fourth World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention and to welcome you to my home city of Vancouver. I know that your visit to Vancouver will be an enjoyable and fruitful one.

Vancouver and British Columbia are Canada's, and indeed, North America's gateway to the Pacific and Asia. The dynamism and energy of Canada and of this city and province as we look to Asia Pacific have been well reflected in the enthusiasm of the gymnastic performance we have just seen. In this Year of Asia Pacific, when Canada is hosting the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit here in Vancouver in November, we are placing a major focus on our relations with Asia.

As many of you will know, Prime Minister Chretien declared 1997 as Canada's Year of Asia Pacific. The purpose was to enhance Canadians' awareness of the importance of our relations with this dynamic region. This Fourth World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention and the presence of you as delegates will certainly contribute to that awareness.

However, while Asia Pacific is clearly of major importance to us, Canada has strong interests in other regions of the world. Ours is an international trading nation with global interests.

Canada is a strong supporter of an open and unhindered international trading system. Thus, the meeting here in Vancouver of the Fourth World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention with your global representation is a most appropriate reminder of our common recognition of the importance of a liberalized global trading environment.

The delegates to this Convention represent a considerable number of countries. You confirm the usefulness and effectiveness of international relationships. You have proven that international networking maximizes the opportunities for economic development and wealth creation.

I am glad to see that there are a number of Chinese Canadian delegates among you who are part of this international networking system. The contacts you have with delegates from other countries to this Convention will be of benefit to Canada as we build bridges with Chinese business people around the world and as we seek to globalize our commercial interests further.

Canada acknowledges the importance and dynamism of the Chinese Canadian business community as an important component of the fabric of Canadian society. In particular, the community has made a valuable contribution to Canada's industry and technology sector. It has recognized the importance of investment in advanced technology and, through this investment, has contributed value added to the Canadian industry and technology base.

The plurinational nature of the World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention also serves the cause of more transparent business practices and of a greater awareness of human rights around the world. Thus, it can set an influential example for many nations and play a positive role across a range of issues of growing importance as we seek to strengthen the international trade environment.

I extend a sincere welcome to Canada and wish you a most productive Convention.