My husband Jean-Daniel Lafond, the members of the Canadian delegation accompanying us and I would like to thank you for such a warm welcome and for hosting this splendid banquet in our honour.

I have already had the pleasure of meeting Their Royal Highnesses the Crown Prince and the Crown Princess at the International AIDS Conference in Toronto in 2006, where many of us called for a globalization of our efforts to fight the threat of AIDS.

We are especially pleased to be here today for this State visit to Norway because Canadian and Norwegian women and men, in addition to denouncing every injustice with passion, are sisters and brothers of the North.

Our dearest wish over the next few days is to witness the ties that bind our two countries, ties that are made stronger by our shared northerly location on the world map.

The Far North, as we say in Canada, and the Arctic make up nearly half of Canada’s land mass, and this geographic characteristic defines many of our Aboriginal and Inuit populations and goes to the very heart of our collective identity.

It is the most eloquent reason why the “human dimension” of the Arctic is a “key objective” for Canada, in the words of Canadian foreign affairs minister, the Honourable Lawrence Cannon.

For I believe that it is essential to promote sustainable social and economic development in these unparalleled regions and to give the populations that have inhabited them for thousands of years—or those that have chosen to call these regions home and to adopt their values—to give them the means to be fully involved in the nation’s prosperity.

Just as it is important to us that we work closely with our partners within the Arctic Council, including Norway, to find a fair balance between developing resources and protecting the ecosystems that are so vital to the survival of our too often mistreated planet.

Moreover, this year marks the 10th anniversary of the creation of Nunavut, a new Canadian territory filled with Inuit names, that represents two million square kilometres and 20 percent of Canada’s land mass.
This great adventure toward self-government, begun 10 years ago and pursued to this day with hope and determination, was born of the desire to give the populations of these ancestral lands the means to manage their own resources and to preserve their cultures, languages and knowledge.

I believe that this anniversary is an important date in the recent history of our country.

Because, as the great playwright Ibsen stated unequivocally, “[translation] the worst thing that a man can do to himself is to commit an injustice against another.”

It is also in a spirit of solidarity that we are preparing to host, in Vancouver, in February and March 2010, the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

Canada and Norway share that unforgettable experience—remember Oslo in 1952, Calgary in 1988 and Lillehammer in 1994—and we are counting on you, our Norwegian friends, to make this extraordinary encounter a celebration of winter, of sport excellence and of fellowship.

The roots of the relationship between Canada and Norway have always weathered the cold season and over the years have given rise to a number of productive partnerships in such varied fields as climate change research, new energies, new technologies, the oceans, and oil and gas production.

We are also founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and have worked tirelessly since then to ensure greater global security.

Canadian and Norwegian women and men support a global and concerted approach to finding solutions to the major issues of the day, particularly the widening gap between the North and the South, respect for human rights, the need for civic engagement, and environmental protection.

As you yourself said, Your Majesty, at the Millennium Summit, to the United Nations General Assembly, “[t]he elimination of poverty is not only a bridge to peace and development, not only a bridge to human rights and individual dignity, but also a bridge to the preservation of the environment for future generations.”

We share that hope, Your Majesty, and it is with that same conviction as our guide that we will be meeting with your fellow citizens.

We are eager to pursue the dialogue with the driving forces of Norwegian society, be it decision-making authorities, the cultural and business communities, or the NGOs in your civil society.
Women, men and youth with whom we hope to exchange points of view on the challenges we are all facing, from the multiethnic growth of our societies, to access to culture in remote regions, to the unique contribution that the Sami people are making to the rich heritage of Norway and to the Arctic culture of the entire world.

We will also have the great privilege of travelling to Tromsø, the largest city north of the Arctic Circle, to add to our reflection on the incredible diversity of the peoples of the North.

I am most impressed with the dynamism that the Polar Institute and the University of Tromsø has brought to the North of your country. Surely a model to follow.

My husband Jean-Daniel Lafond and I believe that the dialogues that we establish during State visits are what these visits are all about and are part of what we like to call cultural and human diplomacy.

We are living in an age when the spaces for dialogue, reflection and creation are often sacrificed in favour of speed, haste, or entertainment. However, there can be no doubt that these spaces are essential to civilization.

It is our hope that the opportunity that we have been given to forge ties outside of ideological constraints and based on common interests will revitalize our determination to pool our strengths, rather than fracture our efforts.

And so it is in a spirit of sharing that we are embarking upon this journey of friendship, confident that we are indeed here among friends.

It is with great joy that I raise my glass to the unbreakable friendship between Canada and Norway!