Thank you very much for your warm welcome and for giving us the opportunity to learn more about the contributions that the Romani culture has made to Europe and to humanity itself. We are delighted to be here to work with you on bringing peoples together.

One of my objectives as governor general of Canada is to give a voice to those who, at home and abroad, tend not to speak up or are rarely heard above the constant noise of our daily lives, in which the voices of some can become lost.

That is why I chose “breaking down solitudes” as my motto.

I am very interested in the work that the European Commission is doing with regard to the situation of the Roma in Europe; the President, José Manuel Barroso, said that the problem was “one of great urgency . . . not just in political terms, but above all in human terms.”

The unprecedented opening of borders that we have seen since the end of the last century is not enough to create a world that is free, once and for all, of every insidious form of individual and institutional discrimination.

There is no doubt that exclusion remains one of the most glaring issues that our societies are facing as we enter the third millennium.

As stated by the President of the European Union, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at the Canada-European Union summit held in the City of Québec last month: “Mainstream societies need to offer the Roma a real, practical chance to improve their perspectives.”

His words ring true, I believe, not just for the Roma, but for all men, women and children hurt by exclusion.

I was born in the poorest country in the Americas, Haiti, and my childhood was marked by the bloody regime of a merciless dictator, so I know that dignity begins with respect, hope with dialogue, and solidarity with opening oneself to others.
We know that, throughout your migration from the Indian subcontinent across the Atlantic, you, the Roma, have been one of the most persecuted ethnic minorities in history, as evidenced by the brutal eradication campaigns that the Nazis led against you in the last century.

Although you still carry this painful memory, which has still not found its rightful place in the history books, you have given us pause to reflect on a better future.

We have come together today to dream of a better future. Let us be daring together.

Because I believe that building a world from which exclusion is forever banished and in which we embrace our differences like so many precious facets of the human experience, starts with this dream.

We have come here, in a spirit of mutual enrichment, to celebrate your culture and to open a dialogue between all full-fledged citizens of the world.

Thank you for guiding us today in this quest, in this discussion, which we hope will be productive.