My husband Jean-Daniel Lafond, the members of the Canadian delegation accompanying us, and I all consider it a great privilege to be here in Tromsø, the largest city north of the Arctic Circle.

And we thank you for hosting this luncheon in honour of our State visit to Norway.

And if we needed another sign of our excellent relationship, we need only look to the maple leaves that decorate the ceiling of this splendid room, making us Canadians feel “at home,” and certainly among friends.

Joining us today are provincial and territorial premiers, and ministers who took part in yesterday’s meeting of foreign affairs ministers of the Arctic Council, which was created in 1996, in Ottawa, to promote circumpolar co-operation.

Canada and Norway work together closely on the Council, which is an exceptional discussion forum for Arctic neighbour-countries and Aboriginal organizations representing people who have lived in this region for thousands of years.

The objective is to ensure a fair balance between developing resources and protecting the environment, and the development of northern peoples.

It is essential that people in the North have access to all of the tools they need to manage their own resources effectively and to preserve their cultures, languages and knowledge, which are an irreplaceable treasure for all of humanity.

In Canada, the territory of Nunavut—which covers two million square kilometres and represents twenty percent of our surface area—is this year celebrating the 10th anniversary of its creation and its exciting progress toward self-government.

It is a decisive date in Canada’s recent history, and it gives me great pleasure to mark it here, in Norway, in an Arctic community, and near the Sami people.

It goes without saying that the remarkable experience of the Sami people is of great interest to us, and later this afternoon, we will have an opportunity to start what we hope will be a productive dialogue with Sami representatives.
For us, this openness to dialogue bodes well for the future and is the very foundation of all mutual enrichment through the sharing of points of view and knowledge, in a spirit of reciprocity.

In fact, sharing knowledge is one of the keys to the success of the partnerships between Canada and Norway, and, more specifically, between Tromsø and Canada.

A number of Canadian researchers maintain rich and prolific collaborations with two exceptional institutions here, working in areas of common interest that are related to our northern geographic location.

I am referring, of course, to the Norwegian Polar Institute, the first of its kind in the world, renowned for its research on climate change and its Arctic cartography work.

The co-operation between the Institute and several Canadian universities is especially noteworthy, including the joint study on changes in glaciers in the context of global warming.

I am also referring to the University of Tromsø, which is the northernmost university in the world and part of the large University of the Arctic network, which also includes 28 Canadian universities.

Exploring every dimension of the development of Arctic regions—from their cultural development to their economic prosperity—created a real community spirit among Canadian and Norwegian researchers.

A number of exchange programs and research projects have been established between the Centre for Sami Studies and several Canadian institutions, which demonstrates promising vitality.

Later today, I will be highlighting the extraordinary collaboration between Canada and these two leading Norwegian Arctic institutions.

The Arctic used to be considered inaccessible and hostile, a place with ice as severe as the fires of Dante’s Inferno.

But we, Norwegians and Canadians, sisters and brothers of the North, have long known that nothing could be further from the truth and we know how warm the Arctic peoples truly are.

Just as we know that the current infatuation brought on by the immense resource potential of these ancestral lands give us a responsibility in light of the future.
A responsibility to not greedily exhaust this still virgin expanse of its natural riches and to protect for future generations the cultures that have taken root here, cultures that must be allowed to perpetuate in a respectful and dignified manner.

I am certain it is a responsibility that neither Canada nor Norway takes lightly.

We are responsible for the spirit of these lands, lands like no other in the world.

The spirit of a land whose majesty is sometimes written in the sky, to borrow the beautiful image of Innu poet Rita Mestokosho, like the aurora borealis, which dances across the sky as if by magic.

Thank you very much for welcoming us and for listening.

Long live the friendship between Canada and Norway!