

**Her Excellency the Right honourable Michaëlle Jean
Speech on the Occasion of the Welcoming Ceremony
Mexico City, Monday, December 7, 2009**



One of your great poets, Octavio Paz, said that the only thing that the world does not tolerate is “lack of meaning.”

For me, what most strongly characterizes Mexico, and what led me to travel its length from north to south before I began my university education, is in fact an abundance of meaning.

An abundance of meaning conveyed at once by both the richness and the diversity of the traits of civilizations that literally jump out at you, from the moment you cross the northern border until you reach Chiapas.

That journey across Mexico made a deep impression on my youth; it allowed me—a daughter of Haiti—to rediscover that Latin heritage we all share; it had a profound impact on the path that I would follow in life.

As I marvelled at such a diverse and ancient culture, one so deeply rooted in the Americas and open to the blending of cultures, from the vestiges of its glorious antiquity to its mural tradition, which brings to life chapters from more recent history on the walls of public buildings, I came to realize that I was following in the footsteps of one of humanity’s most prolific and extraordinary heritages.

It was upon returning from that trip to Mexico, Excellency, that the young girl I once was, who saw herself in that Latin culture—the culture of my Caribbean origins—, decided to enrol in the Université de Montréal’s department of Hispanic studies and further explore some of the striking impressions I had acquired along the way.

My professors even told me that I had a slight Mexican accent when I spoke Spanish. I leave it to you to decide whether they were right in detecting a hint of those months spent learning in Mexico, where fate has since brought me back time and again.

As a journalist on Canadian public television, I had the opportunity to reflect on several aspects of the trade relations between our two countries and to consider the social realities that prevailed in the 1990s.

The experience gave me a deeper understanding of the major challenges Mexico was facing while the North American Free Trade Agreement was being negotiated.

Each time I return fuels my fascination and passion for the extraordinary diversity of Mexican society and culture.

I cannot begin to tell you how happy I am to be here today as governor general and commander-in-chief of Canada.

I wanted to begin by telling you about my personal discovery of Mexico and the resulting connection that I have to your people and your culture because this is a sentiment shared by many of my fellow Canadians.

Indeed, out of all of Latin America and the Caribbean, it is Mexico that welcomes the highest number of Canadian tourists each year.

I am delighted to bring special emphasis to that point in particular as we celebrate 65 years of diplomatic relations between Canada and Mexico this year.

We are both friends and continental partners who believe wholeheartedly in the democratic values of justice and fairness, in the rule of law and respect for personal freedoms, working together to preserve the security, prosperity and competitiveness of North America in the current global context.

And it is precisely from a desire to highlight the close ties that bind us that my husband, Jean-Daniel Lafond, our delegation and I will be going out to meet with the people and organizations that form the backbone of Mexican society, here in the centre of the country and in Chiapas, in Tuxtla Gutiérrez and San Cristóbal de las Casas.

We believe it is important to continue an already vigorous dialogue with the women, youth and men working to improve the lives of those around them and their communities, and we will most certainly be inspired by their perspectives on issues that, rooted though they may be here, concern us all as citizens of this hemisphere and the world.

As we begin this State visit to Mexico, our dearest wish is to remind Mexicans how much we cherish their friendship and want to explore together new ways of making it even stronger and more productive.

I thank you with all my heart for this warm welcome and say long live the friendship between Canada and Mexico!