As Canada’s governor general and commander-in-chief, it is an honour and a pleasure for me to join you this morning for a dialogue on diversity in an era of globalization.

I sincerely hope that at the end of this day, we will have all gained a greater appreciation for the special connection that has linked Canada and Mexico for so long.

Because this year is a special year.

It is the year we celebrate sixty-five years of diplomatic relations between Canada and Mexico—relations that have crystallized into the strong bond of solidarity that makes of us strong partners and key allies.

But above and beyond all the bilateral meetings that have transpired between our two governments, that which has really helped to foment Canada’s obvious crush on Mexico, are the unique friendships and collaborations that have blossomed between the peoples of our two great nations.

Canadians’ support for Mexican agricultural cooperatives.

Canadians’ outreach efforts with various indigenous and women’s rights organizations in your country.

Joint projects between Canadian and Mexican artists, museums and other cultural institutions.

Rich exchanges between Canadian and Mexican universities.

The incomparable love of Canadian tourists for your country.

These all remind us that after all is said and done, it is dialogue between civilizations, cultures and peoples—or what I like to call “diplomacy on a human scale”—that is the key to dismantling the walls of incomprehension, of indifference and of antagonism that still divide so many parts of the world.

Dear friends, we are living in an era in which unprecedented global challenges require unprecedented levels of international cooperation.

Now is the time to develop new and more humane ways of living together.
I am persuaded that the experiences of countries like Canada and Mexico can help to illuminate the path towards our dream of global harmony.

Just look at the Canadian experience.

Like Mexico, pre-colonial Canada boasted hundreds of indigenous nations that created complex multicultural and multilingual societies.

They are our first diversity—our deepest roots.

As in Mexico, the first peoples’ civilizations, as we call them in Canada, were disrupted by the arrival of European adventurers, seeking new opportunities for trade with Eastern and Southern Asia.

As in the North as in the South of the Americas, the slave trade was practiced in Canada, forcibly bringing countless Africans to our land.

With the expansion of the Canadian territory west to the Pacific coast and north to the Arctic, we also began welcoming immigrants from all over the world.

As in the rest of the Americas, Canada was from its inception a land of métissage and diversity, attributes which, today, are among our greatest strengths.

One major challenge we face, however, is defining and strengthening social cohesion between the different components of our society.

As our public institutions became more democratic, successive governments introduced specific measures to eradicate the structures of inequality.

In seeking to promote the values of inclusion and social justice, we also wanted to turn the page on some of the darkest chapters of our history.

For we could no longer ignore those periods in Canadian history when many cultural and linguistic groups, including the indigenous peoples, were subjected to some of the harshest forms of discrimination.

One of the saddest moments occurred when thousands of indigenous children were torn away from their parents and placed in, what were called, Indian Residential Schools.

These were secluded boarding schools designed to strip aboriginal children of their culture, divest them of their ancestral languages and ancient knowledge, and break the vital bond between the generations.

Not only did this affect the indigenous peoples, but it also dispossessed non-indigenous people, as Canadian society as a whole also suffered.
Dear friends, we were dispossessed of a cornerstone of our common heritage, which we are scrambling to preserve today.

Last year, the Government of Canada officially apologized for all the wrongs committed at the Indian Residential Schools.

In the centre of Parliament, the Prime Minister of Canada, and parliamentarians from all the political parties joined First Nations, Inuit and Métis leaders to bear witness to this historic occasion, in front of the entire nation.

The words of apology opened the door for a formal national reconciliation process now being led by our newly created Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This renewed focus on national reconciliation is challenging us to confront the darkest episodes of our history together.

It is inviting us to look beyond our differences and to embrace a new pact of solidarity.

I must say that it brings me great joy to see that young people are already taking the lead in this regard.

For wherever I have gone, exercising the duties of head of State—across Canada, Africa, Europe, Latin America and Afghanistan—I have been struck by the way in which youth are leading their communities forward on the road to greater solidarity.

These youth are not caught up in the divisions and animosities of the past.

They are forward looking, and their astonishing accomplishments speak to their audacious approach to bringing about social change.

To give you an example: two years ago, I held an *Urban Arts Forum* in Canada at Winnipeg’s Graffiti Gallery, in the predominantly indigenous neighbourhood of North Point Douglas.

These forums have assembled disenfranchised youth, government ministers, business leaders, public security officials, under the same roof to address issues facing low-income neighbourhoods and communities.

So in the midst of powerful testimonies by Winnipeg youth, two young girls made a passionate plea to the audience.

These ten and eleven year-olds explained how criminal gangs had taken their neighbourhood hostage, and they pleaded for their community to rally against crime.
Their courage and eloquence inspired the entire neighbourhood to take back North Point Douglas from the gangs.

And just six months later, the community began reaping the fruit of their labour.

According to the community, crime dropped by 70%.

I find their story to be such a vivid illustration of the power of citizens, particularly youth, to work together for the greater good.

And similar community-based initiatives for social change are proliferating across the Americas.

I have only to point to the Ignite the Americas initiative which, last year, saw dozens of young urban artists from all member States of the Organization of American States and from Cuba, converge on Toronto, Canada.

They designed an impressive strategy to place grassroots youth arts initiatives at the heart of the wider hemispheric imperative for greater prosperity, peace and democracy.

These young artists affirm, as I do, that the arts and culture are indispensable to our North American and pan-American efforts to increase security, economic growth, good governance throughout our region.

And they believe, like I do, that the youth of the Americas, those of all social and cultural backgrounds, have a key role to play.

And it is in that spirit that I would like to hear from you today.

I would like to learn about the ways you are addressing the challenges you confront in Mexico City and across your country.

I am accompanied by a delegation of Canadians representing civil society who will bring our northern perspective to today’s conversation.

As we share our ideas and our points of view, promises for the future will begin to emerge, for us and for all of humanity.

I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Let us make our moment together very special.

Thank you.