

**Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean
Speech on the Occasion of a Luncheon hosted by the
Canada-Mexico Chamber of Commerce
Mexico City, Tuesday, December 8, 2009**



It is here, in the “land of the feathered serpent,” the birthplace of pre-Columbian civilizations, that I began this journey taking me from the north to the centre of the Americas.

This is not my first trip to Mexico, and it will not be my last.

I travelled the country from north to south before starting university, and that trip was a defining moment of my youth.

I also travelled here as a Canadian public television journalist, and 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.

And I am just as captivated today by this land of amazing contrasts, one of whose many—and certainly not its least—riches is the warmth of its people.

The journey across Mexico, Guatemala and Costa Rica that I am embarking on is an opportunity for me to continue thinking about this continent we share.

It is a reflection fed by my own story.

I was born in Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas.

Haiti, the land of my childhood, the land of my ancestors, Aboriginal and African.

Haiti, a country I knew when it was torn apart, which my family was forced to flee because of persecution, like so many others, at the hands of a regime of terror.

And they chose a country where anything is possible, Canada, where my roots are taking hold more firmly every day, and spreading from their origins in the south ever northward.

A country that, just like Mexico, and all of the Americas really, was created by the meeting of peoples with time-honoured traditions and European explorers, followed closely by people from all over the world.

A country created by an ideal based on civic-mindedness that is rooted in democracy.

An ideal that established a peaceful and prosperous society, where the notion of equality is our philosophy.

Needless to say, our origins and our destinies in this land that is America blend together and are much more closely related than we might think.

Recently, successive waves of continental migration have redefined the nature of our bonds, enriching them with new perspectives. North America, Central America, the Caribbean and South America—all these worlds are becoming more and more intertwined, creating a more blended and convergent society.

In Canada, for example, a dynamic Mexican community is contributing to our prosperity and originality.

It is estimated that Mexico receives the highest number of Canadian tourists in Latin America, not counting those who decide to live here.

A large number of Mexicans make the trip to Canada, including thousands of temporary workers under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, which is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year.

A broad-based flow of people, ideas, cultures, goods and capital has developed between Canada and Mexico since we first established diplomatic relations sixty-five years ago.

We are cooperating more and more and at all levels, in the areas of human rights, governance, the electoral system, parliamentary affairs, arts and culture, academia and the environment, not to mention security and the urgent need to establish joint strategies to counter the threat of sophisticated, organized crime networks that have spread across the entire continent and ravage our communities.

Another case in point is the Canadian International Development Agency, which is working relentlessly to enhance the exchange of knowledge, models and experiences between Mexican and Canadian partners.

Through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, NGOs are active in the field, implementing a large number of projects to promote the value of democracy and social engagement. I will be going to witness first-hand the work they are accomplishing, in a spirit of solidarity.

Mexico's economy ranks among the world's fifteen largest, and the country is Canada's largest trading partner in Latin America.

It is the fifth largest destination for Canadian exports, and Canada is the second largest destination for Mexican exports.

It is estimated that there are 2,200 Canadian businesses in Mexico.

But I know it is not you, as members of the Canada-Mexico Chamber of Commerce, who need to be told of the vitality of relations between our two countries.

A vitality that has grown since the Canada-Mexico Partnership came into effect in 2004.

On the trade front alone, bilateral trade between Canada and Mexico rose to over US\$26 billion in 2008, a nearly nine percent increase over the previous year.

However, we cannot discuss Canada-Mexico relations without mentioning the United States, a powerful partner with which we share a border, a history, a hemisphere and, since the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1994, a vast market in which our economies are integrated.

Since NAFTA came into force, Canadian and Mexican imports and exports have increased exponentially.

And our trilateral relations have continued to intensify.

Consider the trilateral Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, the North American Security Council and the joint positions that our countries develop on major issues through multilateral forums such as the Organization of American States, the Summit of the Americas, the G20, and the United Nations, to name just a few.

It is these underlying bonds that serve as the basis for effective collaboration among our leaders, who last met this past summer in Guadalajara. Next year, it will be Canada's turn to host the next North American Leaders' Summit, and we are thrilled at the prospect.

At a time when there are so many large economic blocks, and more particularly, in the wake of the financial crisis that is currently rocking the entire world, Mexico and Canada, with the support of the United States, must be committed to increasing not only trade, but the number of opportunities for their citizens to improve their living conditions and open themselves to the world, and to further diversifying and energizing our partnerships.

And in this regard, we must be bold, show some imagination, and exploit the full potential of our relationship. I am convinced we can do better, that we can do more.

And we must do it in a reciprocal manner.

Not having openness, progress and possibilities would only bring isolation, inequalities and exclusion, as much in your backyard as in ours.

I firmly believe that co-operation and business must increase our prosperity and

stimulate sustainable development that is respectful of people, their history and their culture.

I believe that cooperation and business must also respect the ecological integrity of the places from which we draw our resources.

To exploit resources irresponsibly is to jeopardize the future of generations to come.

What is at stake each time is much more than a short-term gain.

And I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the signing last month, here, in Mexico City, of a memorandum of understanding between Canada, Mexico and the United States, on wilderness protection.

The more our respective interests reach beyond our borders and encompass the interests of the wider world, the more fulfilled we will be and the stronger we will make our joint commitment to the human family.

The decisions and practices Canadian businesses adopt when they expand abroad have an impact on the lives of so many women, men and children that they must be guided by values other than the lure of profit, performance indices or short-term success.

The same values as those we defend within our own borders.

When we make decisions that could lead to exclusion, inequality, injustice or poverty, we create a social problem with devastating consequences that comes at a very high price.

That is why we need the courage to reflect on the consequences of our decisions and to rethink how we do things, while focussing on the greater good.

That is what I call responsible development.

With the advent of globalization, people are being brought together and new coalitions of interest are forming, full of promise. Now more than ever, the time has come to redefine the ties that bind us across the entire hemisphere.

We are beginning a new era of solidarity and friendship in the Americas, and Canada would like to play a key role in this move towards an openness to the world.

We need to pool our strengths, while respecting our differences and for the good of all.

That is what Canada and Mexico, along with all the nations in the Americas, should now be focussing on, strong in the friendship that binds us from north to south, and from south to north.

Thank you very much. To the solidarity, cooperation and friendship that Canada and Mexico share!