

PC.DEL/832/04
13 September 2004

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

**Speaking notes
for
Barbara Gibson
Ambassador to the Organization for Security and
Cooperation in Europe
on behalf of
The Honourable Raymond Chan
Minister of State (Multiculturalism)
on the occasion of the
OSCE Conference on
*Tolerance and the Fight Against Racism,
Xenophobia and Discrimination***

**Brussels, Belgium
September 13, 2004**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Bonjour mesdames et messieurs.

I am pleased to be here on behalf of the Honourable Raymond Chan, Canada's Minister of State for Multiculturalism.

I thank our Belgian hosts and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for taking the initiative to organize this important conference on racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

Diversity has been a hallmark of Canada since its very beginnings.

Our population now claims more than 200 ethnic origins. More than one in ten people living in Canada are visible minorities. And with immigration at its highest level in 70 years, this ratio is expected to rise to one in five by 2016.

Moreover, our concept of what constitutes diversity has expanded as well, moving beyond language, ethnicity, race and religion to include characteristics such as gender and sexual orientation.

Les Canadiens et Canadiennes ne font pas seulement preuve d'ouverture envers les différences. En fait, ils ont réussi à faire de la diversité l'une de leurs plus grandes forces sur les plans économique, social et culturel.

However, differences at times lead to tensions.

We all share the belief that racism, or any form of discrimination against any group or individual, undermines the very fabric and values of our societies. Canada is working diligently to foster understanding and ease these tensions as they arise.

The principles and values of multiculturalism - as expressed by Canada's Multiculturalism Act and supported by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms - inform all aspects of our policy making. We have learned that constitutional measures and legislation alone are not enough to combat

racism and discrimination, therefore the Government of Canada takes a multi-faceted approach toward eliminating racism and all forms of discrimination.

Canada's approach involves working closely with the United Nations and other international organizations in efforts to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding.

Operating within a strong legislative framework, the Canadian approach includes :

- outreach, public education and capacity-building programs,
- initiatives aimed at institutional change, and
- on-going research into the existence of racism and people's perceptions of themselves and their fellow citizens.

In September 2003, the Government of Canada released the results of the groundbreaking Ethnic Diversity Survey. With 42, 500 respondents, this was the largest survey of its kind. There are real people behind the numbers, with real stories to tell. We are using the data to conduct research that will enhance our understanding about how people's ethnic and racial backgrounds affect their participation in society.

We want all Canadians to feel comfortable in their neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces.

It is also important that every individual has the opportunity to play an active role in Canada's social, cultural, economic and political life.

Alongside our domestic efforts, the Government of Canada will continue to participate in the challenging work of the OSCE for combatting racism with a view to building comprehensive and inclusive international approaches.

The Government of Canada takes very seriously the role that civil society plays alongside governments, in the promotion of equality and respect for diversity in our societies.

Building understanding and respect for ethno-cultural and ethno-racial diversity and combatting all forms of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance remain key elements of Canada's international

activities.

Over the last few decades, Canada has made a great deal of progress in building a society that values multiculturalism, and we believe that Canada's model for multiculturalism is successful.

Bien entendu, nous sommes conscients qu'il reste encore des défis à relever. D'ailleurs, nous continuons à apprendre de nos erreurs et à travailler d'arrache-pied pour réaliser d'autres progrès.

As Canadians adapt and learn to relate to each other despite differences in ethnic background, race or religion, we are becoming ever more aware of the fact that the differences between us do not have to divide us and, in fact, are a great source of strength for our country.

Through sustained dialogue and resolve among participating states and communities in this forum, we can forge together a better world, rooted firmly in our common search for mutual respect and equality.

Thank you.

Merci.