

Your Excellency Senator Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle,

Your Excellency Mr. Mr. Patricio Walker Prieto,

Ambassador Ortega,

Honourable parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Senate of Canada, please let me tell you how grateful I am to receive this honour. Personally, I am delighted by the recognition of my work as a Senator over more than a decade and a half and my work as Speaker of the Senate over the past year.

Speaker Frei, I would like to express my gratitude to you in particular. During your visit here, we have come to know each other well, and we have gained a new appreciation for each other's country. I can say that the future of Canada-Chile relations has never looked better.

The value of exchanges such as this is immeasurable. Modern communications technology makes it easy to find information about each other's country. It is not so easy, however, to arrange face-to-face discussions, particularly when our countries are so far apart. Thanks to your taking the time to come and visit us, we have come to a new level of understanding.

During my time as Speaker, I have had the opportunity to meet with parliamentarians and world leaders from every inhabited continent, and from many diverse political systems, cultures, and faiths. By examining our differences and recognizing the things we have in common, we have helped dissolve the differences between us.

Speaker Frei, by presenting me with this medal, you have validated the importance of this work. I am convinced that if the peoples of the world can share their different points of view through constructive dialogue, we can help make the world a more peaceful place.

In closing, I humbly accept this medal, and I look forward to continuing to build on the work we have accomplished during your visit here. Please convey my gratitude to the Senate of Chile.

Your Excellency Senator Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle,
Your Excellency Mr. Antonio Leal Labrin,
Honourable parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Along with my colleague from the House of Commons, I would like to propose a toast to our guests from the National Congress of Chile.

Speaker Frei, as Speaker of the Canadian Senate it is a great pleasure to meet my Chilean counterpart. Not only are you the Speaker, but from 1994 to 2000 you were president of Chile. Prior to entering politics, you practiced as a civil engineer. It is an honour to learn about Chile from a man of your many and varied accomplishments.

Speaker Leal, I am also honoured to make the acquaintance of my counterpart from the Chamber of Deputies.

The visit here by both Speakers of the Congress of Chile speaks volumes about the warm relations between our two countries. As you know, Canada and Chile have maintained diplomatic relations since 1941. During the 1990s, our relations entered a new phase when we signed the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement.

The benefits of this new relationship are very real. Between 2001 and 2006, our bilateral trade went from just over one billion dollars annually to over two and a quarter billion dollars. Meanwhile, Canada has become a significant player in the Chilean economy through investment in areas such as mining and banking.

Of course, the friendship between our two countries is due in large measure to more than 34,000 people with Chilean origins who live in Canada. Through their passion and their creativity, they have helped build a more vibrant country. In addition, Canadians of all backgrounds enjoy your fine Chilean wines.

Although ties between our countries have been expanding, Canadians are not aware sufficiently of the strength of our relationship. The distances between Canada and Chile are too great to permit frequent travel, and there are language barriers as well.

As parliamentarians, it is up to us to help break down these barriers and to foster a greater understanding between our countries. By meeting through exchanges such as this, as well as through multilateral forums such as the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, we can identify areas of common concern and discuss issues that affect us both.

Your visit gives us the chance to review our inter-parliamentary relations, our broader bilateral relations, and hemispheric security and economic issues. These issues are inter-related, and by discussing them with you in person, we will get a more complete picture of the expanding ties between Canada and Chile.

Be assured that we will use what we have learned when we make decisions about issues involving our hemisphere, and we will continue to follow developments in Chile.

In closing, on behalf of my Senate colleagues, I would like to thank you for travelling so far to come and see us.