

Speaking Notes
The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella
Speaker of the Senate

On the occasion of the
Spring Festival Gala Concert 2010

National Arts Centre, Ottawa
March 8, 2010

Your Excellency Mr. Lan Lijun,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I would like to thank His Excellency and the Canada-China Art Association for co-hosting and organizing this reception and tonight's concert. This will be the Canadian debut of the world renowned China Broadcasting Chinese Orchestra, with a performance that will be an interesting fusion of western and Chinese music.

This is a particularly fitting program since tonight is also the official launch of a yearlong celebration of diplomatic relations between Canada and the People's Republic of China. It was forty years ago that our two countries formally joined hands in friendship, but the ties that bind us together go back much farther than 1970.

In fact, individual Canadians and the Government of Canada helped shape the course of China's modern history. Many of you may be familiar with individuals like Norman Bethune, a Canadian doctor who is revered in China for his commitment to, and sacrifice for, a cause that ultimately led to the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. You may not, however, be aware of what some refer to as the "icebreaker" initiative, which was launched in 1961 by the government of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker. The icebreaker initiative was a decision by the Government of Canada to supply grain to China at a time when its people were hard hit by a devastating famine. However, it was more than a simple agreement to lend China a helping hand in its time of need. It was a testament to the goodwill that lies at the centre of our relationship. The fact that we were able to put aside our differences at the height of the Cold War and work together for a better future makes me believe that our partnership can withstand the most difficult challenges that might come our way.

Canada was also at the forefront of history when Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau announced in 1968 that the Government of Canada intended to formally recognize the People's Republic and support China's request to be admitted to the United Nations. Just two years later, on October 13th, 1970, Canada followed through with this pledge and in so doing led a wave of western countries that soon after also recognized the People's Republic.

It is equally important to acknowledge the indelible mark China has made on Canada. Long before October 1970, hard working Chinese immigrants endured difficult conditions as they helped build the Canadian Pacific Railway, which played a critical role in our own history. For that reason alone, we owe a great debt to China and her people. Today, Chinese culture is widespread across Canada and has become infused in the fabric that knits our large and diverse country together. The Chinese language is now the third most widely spoken language in Canada after English and French. Moreover, Chinese-Canadians are, through their contributions in the fields of sport, academia, music, science and technology, commerce, the visual and performing arts, literature, and politics, to name just a few, enriching our daily lives and helping to make this country one of the best places in the world to call home.

As we look to the future, it is encouraging to see our two countries continuing to work together in a constructive and cooperative manner, especially in the areas of public health, education, environmental sustainability, human rights and good governance, poverty reduction, and crisis management. New reciprocal agreements, many of which were signed during Prime Minister Harper's recent trip to China, exist in the realms of trade, consular affairs, health, science and technology, culture, and environmental cooperation. All of these will add further depth to Canada-China relations.

It is also encouraging to see China taking on an important leadership role in multilateral fora such as the IMF. At the same time, China is in a position to take on an even more significant leadership role in the fight to overcome one of the biggest challenges facing us today, climate change, and I hope it will do so. This issue is so important that we cannot afford to delay, nor act in isolation. At the same time, this challenge presents new opportunities to work together and to deepen the intimate relationship we have worked so hard to build.

In closing, please raise your glasses in a toast to forty years of strong and peaceful relations between our two great countries, and the confidence that there will be many more to come.