

**Address to the Honourable John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia,
after his speech to both Houses of Parliament
in the House of Commons Chamber on Thursday, May 18, 2006**

Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister Howard, Prime Minister, honourable senators and members of the House of Commons, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: On behalf of all parliamentarians and all those assembled, I am honoured, Prime Minister, to express our gratitude for your visit and to thank you for addressing this joint session with such clarity and eloquence. Your words here today remind us of the depth of our shared values and of the importance of defending those values.

Prime Minister, that you would visit Ottawa when the tulips are in bloom might have some of the historians in this chamber recalling that at one time the name “New Holland” was associated with Australia.

Mr. Prime Minister, as you said, the last time an Australian Prime Minister addressed a joint session of Canada's Parliament was in June 1944, a year before the end of the second world war, during which 39,000 Australians and 45,000 Canadians lost their lives. Today, it is all too easy to take for granted the freedom we have thanks to their sacrifice.

Two generations have passed since the end of the war, and our two countries have evolved in that time. Our development has been parallel, and our respective current situations are astonishingly similar.

During the 1950s, we undertook ambitious national construction programs to build the infrastructure for our modern societies. Since the 1960s, our societies have welcomed waves of immigrants, as I mentioned, from all over the world. They brought with them a variety of ideas and talents. They helped create the dynamic societies we live in today.

In fact, Australia and Canada are among the most diverse, dynamic and prosperous countries in the world.

Prime Minister, we must not forget that the reason our forward-looking societies are so successful is that they are based on the same fundamental values that our predecessors fought for, values, as you have mentioned, that we continue to defend in places such as Afghanistan. Most important, Prime Minister, again as you have mentioned, we share the precious heritage of parliamentary government. We have each grown our parliaments, recording changes whether great or small, and always with the practice of freedom as our beacon.

Like a huge extended family, Australians and Canadians have forged strong ties. We visit each other, enjoy each other's films, music and literature, and exchange ideas and goods with each other. When we meet, we recognize in each other a familiar set of ideas.

Prime Minister, by your words and your deeds, you have reaffirmed the lasting ties between our two great countries. Your address today at this joint session of the Parliament of Canada has resonated with the members of both Houses. Our members are attentive to your message and your words, which are unabashedly and refreshingly open to the world of 2006. We share with you, Mr. Prime Minister, the contemporary thirst for the inherent goodness of nature and culture and are unafraid of dialogue with human kind, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, political ideology or creed.

Allow me, therefore, Prime Minister, to once again thank you for having expressed your thoughts so clearly, and on behalf of all present, we wish you Godspeed.