

Speaking Notes

Speaker Noël A. Kinsella

Opening Session

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Mr. President,
Fellow Parliamentarians
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dobra pozhalovats v Kanadu. (Welcome to Canada)

It is a great honour to welcome you to the 2008 Fall Meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE.

On behalf of all Members of the House of Commons and Senate of Canada, we wish to extend a warm and cordial welcome to Canada. As you are aware, we are in the midst of a general federal election in Canada and most of your Canadian colleagues are out on the hustings, however they are pleased that you have come to Canada for this OSCE meeting. Hopefully, your presence in Canada at this time will also afford you the opportunity to get a sense of the Canadian electoral system.

Canada places a high value on inter-parliamentary cooperation. The OSCE occupies a special place for Canadian parliamentarians given that the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, with 56 participating states, is the largest inter-parliamentary association after the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The values and principles of the OSCE, with its emphasis on a global approach rooted in the human, political-military, economic and environmental dimensions of security, are in keeping with the values Canada supports in the implementation of its security policies.

That the OSCE PA is meeting in Canada in 2008 gives us an opportunity to reflect on the extent the world has changed since it last met here in 1995. And make no mistake ... it is a very different world. Comme le thème de nos réunions l'indique bien, nous sommes véritablement face à un monde beaucoup plus ouvert en termes de commerce, de sécurité et de migration. In this vein, over the course of the following days, as fellow parliamentarians we will engage many of the issues that arise from this more open world in an effort to better understand their impact on the OSCE and define possible responses.

One of the main characteristics of this world openness today is movement ... whether we are talking about the transfer of currency from a bank in Hong Kong to a company in New York, the export of cherries from Chile to Canada, or the migration of a Philippina for domestic work to Kuwait.

But one element that makes this movement possible, indeed a more open world even thinkable, is the movement of ideas, of knowledge. Unbounded knowledge is what lies behind the tremendous progress we have witnessed in all manner of human activity, particularly in technology, economic exchanges, industrial productivity, transportation and communications to name a few. Indeed, in this more open world, it has never been easier to learn about different cultures, to work in a foreign country, and ultimately to share and grow our knowledge as never before.

Knowledge is the basis for the free circulation of people and goods, which itself is an essential characteristic of an increasingly open and prosperous world. As a result, the more our knowledge grows, the greater the benefits for our national economies and for the world itself.

Many of us take knowledge and access to knowledge for granted. But it behooves us to admit that access to knowledge is unequally distributed across countries and is closely correlated with the economic wealth of countries. Nous devons également reconnaître que malgré la circulation des idées et les occasions nombreuses d'en apprendre davantage sur le reste du monde, il existe des obstacles importants, à l'intérieur même de nos pays, à l'amélioration de l'accès à l'éducation. Chief among these obstacles is the high, in some cases, higher, tuition and associated living costs of education today. That the "progressive introduction of free education" is a commitment made according to Article 13 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights makes these developments regarding the cost of education especially distressing. In this respect, the world of education is not as open as we would like to think.

Moreover, a more open world offers learning opportunities beyond our borders ... a global system of education built on the movement of students and learning, where a student from Canada, for instance, has the means and support to study in a foreign country. Some countries and regions are making strides to facilitate the movement of students such as the models being pursued in Europe regarding secondary and post-secondary education.

However, not all of our students have equal opportunities to study abroad and make the world their classroom. In particular, Canada is at a disadvantage. D'une part, le nombre d'étudiants étrangers au Canada a augmenté au cours des dernières années, améliorant du même coup les occasions de contact entre les étudiants canadiens ceux d'autres cultures. However, the reciprocal exchange is disappointing, with the high costs of out-of-country education deterring many Canadian students from pursuing the rewards of a foreign experience.

I for one am not convinced that all is being done that can be done to ensure that the global scope of knowledge and education is nurtured and our commitment to it is fulfilled. In this more open world, we all stand to either lose, or to win.

Finally, an open world also entails its share of challenges and opportunities. As fellow parliamentarians, I ask that we all reflect on the contributions that we may make at international fora such as this to consider the different means by which barriers to a global system of education may be felled.

Since 1975 and the conclusion of the Helsinki Final Act, the OSCE has been about the promotion of respect for human rights. The OSCE in an open world, in part, is about ensuring that the opportunities to promote these rights, such as the right to education, are not missed.

Thank you for your attention. Ya vam zhelayoo oospeshnooyoo konferentseeyoo.
(I wish you a successful and most stimulating conference.)