

**SPEAKING NOTES
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE**

**AT A LUNCHEON HOSTED BY THE DEPUTY-SPEAKER
OF THE LATVIAN SAEIMA**

**LATVIA
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Your Excellency Deputy Speaker Aboltina,
Honourable Parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please join me in raising a toast to the Deputy Speaker of the Saeima – the Honourable Solvita Aboltina.

Your Excellency, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for hosting this luncheon. It is through events such as these, in addition to our more formal meetings, that we can really get to know each other.

Deputy Speaker Aboltina, you have had a long career in Latvian public life. You were a lawyer before entering politics, and you continued this interest by serving in a number of positions related to law, including with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. You were also the Minister of Justice. We are very fortunate to be able to benefit from your wide-ranging experience.

During your time in politics, your country has made remarkable strides. It seems but a short while ago that Canadians watched with fascination as the drama of the Soviet Union's collapse unfolded. We held our breath after you declared independence, a step that required immense courage, and then marvelled at the speed with which events developed. Now, almost two decades later, we are able to witness the extraordinary progress you have made.

Canadians admire the way you have rebuilt your country and your institutions. You had to build a democratic political system from scratch. Once you had laid down this foundation, you had to face the challenge of integrating into the international

system and forging ties with other countries with vastly different experiences. This too you accomplished successfully.

Of course, Canada and Latvia work in partnership on matters of mutual concern. Our military alliance in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) promotes stability, freedom, and democratic principles to help bring greater security to the international community. These are the same values that Latvia has worked to achieve since independence, both domestically and through its involvement in multilateral organizations.

Today, we serve together in Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and our efforts are united towards the goals of peace and security. Latvia's commitment to NATO is evident, and we are grateful to Riga for hosting the 2006 NATO Summit, where we recognized the importance of reconstruction and development in Afghanistan.

Our joint efforts pay tribute to the mutual friendship between our two countries. This friendship is based on shared values and the desire to make the world a better place.

Although many of the formal ties between Latvia and Canada are recent and are still being developed, contact between our two countries goes back a long time. In the 1890s, the first Latvians immigrated to Canada, where they settled as farmers in western Canada. After the end of the Second World War, many more Latvians moved to Canada, many of them professionals, such as doctors, engineers and lawyers. They tended to settle in Ontario and Toronto has become the centre for Latvian culture in Canada. Canadians of Latvian origin are proud to keep close links with their ancestral homeland.

In closing, Deputy Speaker Aboltina, on behalf of our delegation, I would like to thank you for your kind hospitality. Be assured that we will share with others the knowledge and insights gained during the course of our visit, and that we will follow events in Latvia with renewed interest after our return home. Uz veselību! (To your health!)