

Draft Speaking Notes for Prime Minister, M. Jean Chrétien

On the Occasion of the World Summit on the Arts and Culture Ottawa, November 30-December 3 2000

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to Canada for this historic conference - the very first opportunity ever provided for national arts councils and arts funding bodies from all regions of the globe to gather together.

It is a real tribute to your devotion to the arts that you agreed to come to Ottawa during the Canadian winter, which our great novelist Robertson Davies once described as "lovely and dangerous"!

It is fitting that a Canadian institution - the Canada Council for the Arts - has taken this initiative of drawing together the senior representatives of national bodies which fund, support, promote and encourage the arts and culture in countries around the world. As a country with two official languages, a substantial Aboriginal population, and citizens from every part of the world, Canada is a pluralist nation, enormously enriched by the diverse identities and cultures of its people. Preserving and promoting this diversity within our nation and internationally is an important Canadian objective.

The first Prime Minister of India, the great leader Jawaharlal Nehru, once said, "I am completely international because I am completely rooted."

This profound remark goes to the heart of your work at this conference. Artists who are confident of their identity, as it derives from and is supported in their place of origin and residence, are best equipped to function successfully in our increasingly border-less world. The global interconnections which define contemporary life present both extraordinary opportunities and challenges for the arts and cultures of the world. You are uniquely well-situated to seize these opportunities because you have the responsibility within your countries of developing, nurturing and promoting the indigenous arts and cultures of your lands.

With this national responsibility, you can explore with your counterparts from other countries more and better opportunities for your artists to find their way in the world at large, to increase cultural exchanges, develop new audiences, and gain new skills and experience. I am pleased to learn that this conference will discuss means of strengthening international partnerships and cooperation for the benefit of artists and citizens everywhere.

In 1996, the Government of South Africa, under the inspirational leadership of Nelson Mandela, published a White Paper on the Arts and Culture which, among other things, led to the creation of the National Arts Council of South Africa. To guide your important deliberations at this conference, let me leave you with these words of wisdom from that document:

"Access to, participation in, and enjoyment of the arts, cultural expression, and the preservation of one's heritage are basic human rights; they are

not luxuries, nor are they privileges as we have generally been led to believe

No government can legislate creativity into effect. At best government can seek to ensure that its resources are used equitably so that impediments to expression are removed, that the social and political climate are conducive to self-expression, and that the arts, culture and heritage allow the full diversity of our people to be expressed in a framework of equity which is committed to redressing past imbalances and facilitating the development of all of its people."

On behalf of the Government and people of Canada, welcome to Canada and our very best wishes for a fruitful and productive conference.