

**Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean
Speech on the Occasion of a “Multicultural Dialogue”
Conference on the Integration of Minorities in
the Urban Centres
Prague, Tuesday, December 2, 2008**



My husband, Jean-Daniel Lafond, and I are delighted to join you this morning as you reflect on the challenges posed by diversity in the Czech Republic.

Many of the issues you are discussing today are being debated in urban centres around the world, as cities grapple with the challenges of global urbanization, the integration of markets, and the fact of global mobility and migration.

I must admit that Canada has had a bit of a head start.

The historic blending of Aboriginal nations, French and British settlers, African slaves, and subsequent waves of immigrants from all corners of the globe has created a country that, as I love to say, “contains the world.”

This mingling of peoples, languages and cultures has never been easy.

Situations of injustice and inequality are strewn across the pages of our history. And some even manage to rear their ugly heads today.

Yet countless women and men have, over the centuries, carried our country to a place where it can now acknowledge the darkest chapters of its history and work assiduously to realize the ideal of a society in which freedom, justice and democracy are available to all.

This, as you will appreciate, is an ongoing project.

A project that requires a significant amount of openness, dialogue, solidarity, and compassion, and a willingness to learn and be inspired by others.

That is why we decided, as part of the State visit to the Czech Republic, to be with you this morning.

We like to take the time to hear, to listen, to share, and to enter into a dialogue with civil society, NGOs and decision makers. To take a closer look at our own ideas, initiatives, experiences.

For we are fascinated to learn about the ways in which diversity is being addressed in your country.

What are some of the challenges you are facing?

How are you developing solutions to these challenges?

What role do citizens play in identifying ways forward?

What are the obstacles that continue to lie in your path?

As you will see, I am accompanied by a delegation of eminent Canadians who represent a cross-section of Canadian civil society.

They will share their experiences working on diversity in Canada, and help to lay the groundwork for an enriching dialogue about our two countries.

As we share our ideas and our points of view, promises for the future will begin to emerge, for us and for all of humanity.

I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Thank you.