

Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean
Speech on the Occasion of a Roundtable Discussion on
Civic Engagement
Oslo, Monday, April 27, 2009



My husband Jean-Daniel Lafond, the members of the Canadian delegation accompanying us and I were just this morning in Ukraine.

What we witnessed there spoke of perseverance and miracles.

In a country that has known a century of misery under an authoritarian regime and has recently seen its foundations shaken by economic turmoil, the determined efforts being made by its civil society are worthy of admiration and celebration.

We left Ukraine with the certainty that the true strength of a society resides in the willingness of its citizens to change things for the better and to kindle a spark of hope.

Because that is the level at which profound and sustainable changes take effect.

It gives us great pleasure to continue in Norway the reflection on civic engagement that we began in Ukraine.

In a world in which indifference and the “everyone for themselves” mentality is gaining the upper hand, Norwegians are models of engagement and models of mutual assistance.

Your accomplishments are remarkable.

I am told that 84% of Norwegians are members of non-governmental organizations.

That is incredible!

We obviously have a lot to learn from you. A lot to share. Canada also has a very dynamic social fabric.

I am especially interested in hearing the solutions proposed by young Norwegians and the efforts they are making to ensure that their schools, neighbourhoods and communities are places where people are happy to live.

As governor general of Canada, I have made youth my priority and believe we must listen to them and support them in their dreams for a better and more just world. A world they have already filled with hopes and possibilities.

We are anxious to hear how non-governmental organizations are forming social connections in Norway and helping to preserve the values you hold dear, the values we

share.

This meeting may just yield some productive collaboration between us.

Thank you.