

Installation Speech from Her Excellency the Right Honourable Louise Arbour, 31st Governor General of Canada

June 8, 2026

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Dear Canadians.

I am deeply honoured to stand before you here today. These halls were built on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg Nation, a proud people who have cared for these lands and enriched them with their culture for millennia.

We are gathered today in this Senate Chamber, where careful scrutiny is applied to the laws that will shape our future.

Like the Supreme Court of Canada and the House of Commons, the Senate contributes to the dialogue through which Canadian democracy is expressed.

I want to thank Prime Minister Carney, and His Majesty King Charles III, for entrusting me with the opportunity to serve another great Canadian institution in a new role over the coming years.

I also wish to thank the Right Honourable Mary Simon for her remarkable service.

Her Excellency stood with Canadians through defining moments—from the COVID-19 pandemic to periods of economic strain and profound shifts in the global landscape.

Her tenure as Canada's first Indigenous governor general will be viewed by history as both significant and timely. I admire the hand that Her Excellency has extended to all Canadians. She has reminded us that reconciliation is a lifelong journey that begins with listening and with empathy.

Listening to voices that challenge our understanding of history.

Listening to Indigenous environmental and spiritual knowledge, deeply sophisticated yet long overlooked.

Listening to languages unfamiliar to many of us, that have resonated from coast to coast to coast for centuries.

And embracing a future in which First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples are no longer cast aside.

For my part, I have learned the importance of understanding differing points of view, both through my education and throughout my professional life. In fact, I have experienced both the comfort and discomfort of homogeneity.

I grew up in Montréal in a comfortably homogenous environment.

I grew up in uniform, educated exclusively by women: my mother and the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame. Until the age of 20, I was surrounded by classmates who were all Francophone, white, Catholic girls, just like me.

I then worked in another largely homogenous environment—one that was predominantly Anglophone and male-dominated. And despite the promise I made to myself at age 20 to never again wear a uniform, I donned my judge's robe without the slightest inkling of the surprises life has in store for us.

I then had the incredible opportunity to work abroad. I discovered the richness of the connections to be made with people with whom we thought we had nothing in common.

My work, both as a judge and in service to the international community, exposed me to a wide

range of perspectives. The same is true of the privilege I had of living abroad and working in countries that are vastly different from Canada. I have seen regions ravaged by war and poverty, where people, like all of us, yearn to live with dignity, in peace and security.

I have always been struck by the fact that, after all, everything is a matter of perspective.

I remember standing outside the United Nations headquarters in New York in the 1990s, confronted with my own biases. I came across a group of Chinese tourists and asked a young woman about her impressions of the city. She replied: "It is so old!" I was surprised.

Then I realized I had been projecting a story onto her, imagining her as coming from a civilization of centuries-old splendour, gazing out at a vibrant city in a younger country. In reality, she was more likely born in futuristic Shenzhen or Shanghai, glittering metropolises of glass towers.

There I was, looking at New York, looking at her, and making assumptions.

Perspective is everything.

I look at Canada through the eyes of someone who has known it both up close and from afar, always with admiration. A country that is not afraid to reinvent itself.

Our future is our shared project, a project that calls on us to balance the many perspectives that shape our collective identity.

We do not all share the same understanding of our history.

Nor do we all share the same origins. We, or our ancestors, come from all over the world.

Peoples have always travelled. I am thinking in particular of Inuit families, who have always traversed the vast expanse of the Arctic.

Humanity has always sought to go further, to push the boundaries. And to go higher, as our Canadian astronaut Jeremy Hansen did on his mission into space.

How could anyone be anything other than awestruck by the thought that he set his eyes on

places no other human being had ever seen before?

I say this with confidence: let us not slow our momentum toward progress out of fear of differences.

Extreme polarization is dangerous—but so is extreme consensus.

It is through our differences, and our fundamental right to express them, that we will nourish critical thinking, creativity and innovation. It is through our differences that we will build our common future.

As Canadians, we have the extraordinary privilege of living in a mature democracy. We benefit from strong institutions that allow different views to be expressed.

We must continue to protect the public space in which our national debates take place: from schools and universities to the media, political parties, unions and civil society organizations. From theatres, concert halls and museums to courtrooms and the floors of our legislative assemblies.

The peaceful management of our differences is nowhere better expressed than in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter guarantees that our cherished individual rights are subject only to the reasonable limits necessary for life in a free and peaceful democracy.

This is what it means to live under the rule of law. In an open society like ours, the purpose of law is not to restrain, but to construct a greater freedom for all.

We have a constitutional and cultural framework that allows us to imagine, to explore, to innovate, to experiment.

Our humour is grounded in self-deprecation. We believe in leading as a team. We do not mistake humility for weakness, nor do we measure a person's worth by the thickness of their wallet.

We don't think we are perfect, but we believe we are pretty well on the way there.

We have a remarkable capacity to pause, to examine our failures and to learn from them. When we do, we seek to understand, not just to blame.

And we know we are not yet doing enough—not enough for each other, let alone for the billions around the world who look at us with justifiable envy.

Our country covers nearly 7% of the world's land mass and holds 20% of its freshwater—yet we make up just half a percent of its population.

We have the talent and the resources the world will need most in the decades ahead.

Young Canadians are citizens of the world—they are well educated, with both a deep climate awareness and remarkable digital literacy. Yet not all of them are able to reach their full potential as they face the headwinds of inequality. In that, we are failing them. It is our shared responsibility to correct course.

The better we advance our common project to build a great future for Canada, the greater our influence on the world will be. And for that, our ambition must be bold and sustained.

To help Canada reach its full potential, we must adopt a new perspective—one that is ambitious and confident—on ourselves and our place in the world of tomorrow.

Some of you may have heard the parable of the three stonemasons.

A traveller comes across three stonemasons at work and asks, "What are you doing?"

The first replies, "I'm cutting stones." The second says, "I'm building a wall."

The third replies, "I'm building a cathedral."

I know that it can be difficult to feel as though you are part of the ambitious project of building the Canada of tomorrow.

We all get caught up in the busyness of our day-to-day lives: meeting the demands of our children, of our colleagues, grappling with the cost of living.

But the fact remains that each and every one of us, in our own way, is helping to shape what Canada will become.

Our country is our shared work. So, too, is our influence on the world.

Our expertise already positions us among global leaders in many fields—from ethical artificial intelligence to clean technologies, and from creative industries to medical research.

The new technologies at our disposal are more powerful than ever—highly attractive and widely accessible.

But we must ensure that their convenience does not lead us to overlook the profound societal shifts they are driving.

With instant access to vast amounts of information, it is very tempting to pay little attention to the reliability of sources.

The lines between knowledge and belief, between truth and falsehood, between facts and assumptions, are increasingly blurred. AI could be threatening not only the way we live and work, but also the control we exercise over our own destiny.

Yet these challenges are not insurmountable.

If we remain vigilant, we can meet them—with public institutions that remain trustworthy, a strong education system at every level, sustained investment in science, research and development, and a private sector that upholds the standards of integrity that Canadians expect.

I would now like to speak to young Canadians in particular.

Right now, you are starting to build the world in which your children will grow up. Your first task is to build yourselves: learn, explore, dream, but also listen, pause, take a step back.

Like the generations before you, you have at your disposal tools that didn't exist when your parents were born. Surprise us.

And don't underestimate how lucky you are to grow up here, even if you're rightly concerned about the major challenges of our time: the health of our

planet, the inequitable distribution of wealth, the violence of armed conflicts.

But trust in yourselves. Canada offers you tremendous freedom and possibilities.

The world is watching the country that we are building together.

Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan often spoke of the three pillars of the United Nations: security, development and human rights.

He stressed that there can be no security without development, no development without security, and neither without the protection of human rights.

This is as true in Canada as it is everywhere else.

As we undertake major initiatives to strengthen our security and grow our economy, including in the Arctic, we must remain attentive to the rights of those directly affected and we must always ensure a fair sharing of both burdens and benefits.

Our collective security rests, above everything else, on the trust that we place in each other.

Of course, I cannot speak about security without recognizing the vital contribution of the Canadian Armed Forces to peace, stability and security—both around the world and here at home when there are times of great hardship.

I recently came across a remark by General Jennie Carignan, Chief of the Defence Staff, who described the Forces as long-standing “exporters of security.” I think today, those vital efforts are complemented by a renewed focus on defending our own vast territory.

To our uniformed members, I express my deepest gratitude for your service, professionalism and commitment to excellence. And I stand with your families, who share in the sacrifices that this commitment entails.

I am very encouraged to see recruitment efforts bearing fruit, with more Canadians—from diverse genders, backgrounds and perspectives—choosing to serve.

Significant progress is also being made within the Forces to foster inclusion with dignity. Building on a proud tradition of respect and honour, this continued modernization will, over time, strengthen effectiveness and morale. It will also enhance your capacity by better reflecting the country you are called to protect.

It is a profound honour for me to assume the role of commander-in-chief of Canada.

As I take on my new role, I am mindful of the privilege given to me to go out and meet with Canadians across this country and to discover the wealth of ideas and ideals that inspire them.