



Your excellencies, Distinguished guests,
Dear friends of Canada,
Dear Prof. Awashti, dear Prof. Mohan

It is a great honour and a privilege for me to represent the International Council for Canadian Studies here at Khajuraho where the Centre for Canadian Studies of the Dr. Hari Singh Gour University of Sagar has organized this international Canadian Studies conference on Indigenous Art and Economic Development in Canada and India. This is actually my second visit to India – my first visit dates back to the Goa conference of the early nineties – and I must say it feels really good to be back.

The International organization that I represent promotes and facilitates the study of Canada in almost 50 countries, where over 27 national and multinational associations are active in the field. The ICCS network links over 7,800 academics and researchers, who publish widely on Canadian topics, organize colloquia, seminars and conferences, and through their teaching expose many thousands of students annually to things Canadian. I certainly do not exaggerate when I say that this international community of scholars serves as cultural ambassadors for Canada and play an important role in enhancing Canada's network abroad.

The last three years the international community of Canadianists has lived under severe stress that was caused by considerable political changes in Ottawa that sent shockwaves through the international community.

It started with the quickly revoked decision of the Treasury Board to discontinue government support for international scholarly exchange. A decision that ran counter to the St. Petersburg G-8 decision to promote, not end, international scholarly exchange.

Then there was the threat of more and more substantial budget cuts, which turned out to be not so substantial as first thought. A negative side effect, however, was that the Canadian Studies budgets were approved by Ottawa only at a yearly basis, which would make mid-term planning extremely difficult.



And then there was the in-house review at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade as to the place of the Canadian Studies Program in Canada's foreign policy.

As we now know, the Department decided that there is an important role for international Canadian Studies. Apparently Ottawa realized that the expertise on and the understanding of Canada abroad directly impacts on Canada's bilateral relations, because foreign academics often serve as consultants for media and policy makers in their home countries.

Realizing this, the Department revamped the Canadian Studies Program which as of April 1st of this year is now called *Understanding Canada*. This is not just a change in name, but also in structure. The program has become more competitive in nature, Canadian Studies Centres are not subsidized any more and must compete with others for funding of their activities, as the Centre for Canadian Studies of the Dr. Hari Singh Gour University of Sagar has successfully done to organize this very conference.

However, there is one aspect of the *Understanding Canada Program* that has been the cause of great concern among the academic community and that is its linkage to Canadian government priorities. These are:

- ❑ Peace and security, in particular Afghanistan;
- ❑ North America Partnership (including key Canada-US bilateral issues);
- ❑ Economic Development and Competitiveness;
- ❑ Democracy, rule of law, human rights;
- ❑ Managing Diversity;
- ❑ Environment.

With the exception of Afghanistan, these priority issues are not new, the jargon perhaps is.

- ❑ Peace and security has been part and parcel of international Canadian Studies from the very



beginning when political scientists and international relations experts addressed problems of international peace keeping where Canada has quite a record;

- ❑ The special relationship of Canada to the United States has from the very beginning called the attention of Canadianists in a wide variety of disciplines; so that is not new.
- ❑ The same holds true for economic issues and issues of competitiveness that have been studied for a long time by our Canadianist economist colleagues, many of whom are from India.
- ❑ And what to think of democracy, rule of law and human rights? Haven't they been on the Canadianist agenda ever since Canadian Studies came into being?
- ❑ And what about managing diversity? Canadianists didn't use those terms when they studied immigration, multiculturalism, Aboriginal issues, and so on. But from the very beginning they have tackled the problems that are now hidden by this new term that finds its roots in a managerial culture.
- ❑ And is the attention paid to environmental issues by Canadianists a post-Al Gore phenomenon? By all means no! In my own country, the Netherlands, the ACSN organized a conference on inconvenient truth issues way back in 1988.

So why these concerns?

In my personal opinion, the international academic community of Canadianists was shocked because Ottawa did tell us for the very first time in the existence of Canadian Studies what it is interested in. It has never done so before, and perhaps it is this what makes us frown our eyebrows and feel uncomfortable.

But what about our own national governments? Do they not have policy priorities ? And do we not in our own academic institutions have to adapt and live with these priorities? Again, priorities are not new. For the past decade or so we have encountered similar situations at home and we have learned to live with it. So why can't we in this case?



Apparently *Things New* do make us feel uncomfortable. Government priorities certainly do! We are afraid that our academic independence and freedom may come into jeopardy and that working within this priority framework may turn our academic work into advocacy rather than scholarly scrutiny. This certainly is the case when the Canadian government would be telling us *How* to do our research and *What* scholarly parameters to use. But it does not ! Until we have evidence of the contrary, we have to believe that the Canadian government will respect our academic freedom and that the primal criteria for selection of our applications will be academic excellence.

All this is not to say that Canada's government priorities do not present a challenge to us. They do! And it is up to us to meet that challenge. We can do so by using our intellectual imagination and creativity, by looking for new paths to approach old problems and tackle new ones that are appearing on our intellectual horizon. I encourage you to take up this challenge and by doing so to renew the study of Canada and bring it to a new stage in its development. Now is the time and now we have the opportunity to do so, so let us join forces and try to meet the challenge.

I specifically encourage young Canadianist to take up the challenge and take the lead in developing new research. We from ICCS, will try to facilitate that process and we have already taken the first step in that direction. At it's annual meeting of May of this year the International Council for Canadian Studies has decided to established the ICCS Young Scholars Research Seminar that will start in the fall of next year. This biennial seminar will bring together bright young students who are researching for a doctorate on a Canadian subject, be it from a disciplinary, multi-disciplinary or comparative point of view. During the seminar the young scholars will present and discuss their research findings in a conference setting.

While academic excellence is the primary aim of the seminar, participation will also allow young international Canadianists to enhance their understanding of Canada and Canadian society. To that end we will organize master classes given by Canadian experts and expert Canadianists.

The young scholars will also be able to meet with leading people from the public sector, the business community and the media in Canada, to communicate their insights on Canada to a



wider audience.

We have great expectations of this ICCS Young Scholars Research Seminar, which, we hope, will be a good instrument in rejuvenating the ranks of the international experts on Canada. I strongly encourage young scholars from India to participate in this seminar. This great country with its longstanding cultural and intellectual traditions certainly has great potential for participation.

In closing let me draw your attention to the 2010 ICCS Biennial Canadian Studies Conference which will be held, so is our plan, in co-operation with the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. The conference will deal with the challenges for younger generations of Canadians presented by the rapidly ageing population. We will probe the implications of such unprecedented demographic change for Canadian society and the continuity of its quality of life.

In the course of this year you will receive more detailed information on this conference, but I can promise you that it will be a very timely and very topical one. Participation from within the ranks of Indian Canadianists will be highly appreciated.

Finally, let me commend the organizers of the conference which is about to start. The program they have developed amply demonstrates the intellectual imagination and creativity that I earlier referred to. I therefore wish you and all participants every success. I do so with conveying to you the very best wishes of the international community of Canadianists, united in the International Council for Canadian Studies.

Thank you

Cornelius Remie
ICCS President

Khajuraho, India
September 25, 2008