

## Governor General's Address

***Presented by His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada***

Thank you for your warm welcome.

Allow me to begin by acknowledging that this gathering is taking place on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Nation, which spans the provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

The 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation is an important occasion for all Canadians—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

This extraordinary document is part of the legal foundation of Canada. It is enshrined in the Constitution Act of 1982, and it sets out a framework of values, or principles, that have given us a navigational map over the course of the past two-and-a-half centuries.

The Royal Proclamation showed the way forward for the country that would become Canada.

Its guiding principles—of peace, fairness and respect—established the tradition of treaty-making, laid the basis for the recognition of First Nations rights, and defined the relationship between First Nations peoples and the Crown.

To quote the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

“More than a hundred years (after the Royal Proclamation), the arrangement we know as Confederation would also allow for power sharing among diverse peoples and governments. But the first confederal bargain was with First Peoples.”

This anniversary provides us with a wonderful opportunity to revisit and learn about the origins of this country.

But it is also much more than a history lesson.

All history reverberates through the ages, but the Royal Proclamation is uniquely alive in the present-day. Not only is it a living constitutional document, its principles are of great relevance to our situation today, in 2013, and to our shared future.

Its origins date back to our earliest days together.

Since first contact, the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has been of core importance to all of us. By the time of the Royal Proclamation in 1763, there was a recognition of the fact that we must work together in order to survive and thrive in this land.

That formative period in our history saw several fundamental truths begin to be enshrined in law: we are all here to stay and we are better off as partners.

That is the ultimate significance of the Royal Proclamation, and it is one of Canada's most unique and important contributions to the world.

Today we know: we are not diminished by our differences, but enriched by them.

As a nation, Canada has always been most successful when we recognize and respect each other and work together.

When we fail to do this—when the sense of partnership and dialogue between peoples is eroded and replaced by inequality and paternalism—all Canadians suffer, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

Without a doubt, we have faced and are facing challenges, and we have much hard work to do on the road to reconciliation, but it is a road we must travel together.

In modern times, the successful conclusion of comprehensive land claims agreements are an example of the principles of the Royal Proclamation in action.

I would like to commend the members and supporters of the Land Claims Agreement Coalition, which is hosting today's symposium, for their commitment to dialogue, co-operation and partnership.

You are helping us to realize the wonderful promise of Canada.

The success of these agreements is our success as Canadians—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. As with the historic treaties of friendship and alliance signed centuries ago, they are central to our evolution and to our shared future.

Today, as in 1763, we must once again draw upon all we have in common and recognize our interdependence. If Canada is to achieve its potential, if we are to build the smarter, more caring society of which we dream, we must work together.

The Royal Proclamation represents the very best essence of Canada and of Canadians—who value partnership, diversity and compromise over conflict.

As such, this anniversary is truly reason to celebrate, and to renew our commitment to these principles as we look ahead to the future.

I encourage all Canadians to learn about and respect this essential part of our history.

Thank you.