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**Speech from the Chief of Protocol of Canada Robert Peck
on the occasion of a Cultural Evening organized on the eve of
departure for Europe - November 18, 2008, at Rideau Hall**

Excellency, Ambassadors, Distinguished Guests,

I am pleased to be associated with this pilot project in celebration of State Visits to Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia.

This is the first time we have ever celebrated the start of a State Visit from Canadian soil.

And why are we doing this? To highlight to our fellow citizens why we, led by the Governor General, undertake State Visits in the first place.

Now a word about State Visits.

First, they are undertaken at the request of the Prime Minister.

A bit of history:

Governors General first travelled abroad internationally in 1927 to the United States where the then Governor General was received as Head of State.

The first State Visit to the Americas was to Brazil in 1948.

In 1971 – A Governor General made the first state visit to Europe and in the decades that followed these visits became common-place.

Some of you present might ask, what is a State Visit?

In a nutshell, a State Visit is a formal visit by one Head of State to another, at the invitation of the other country's Head of State.

In parliamentary democracies, though Heads of State may formally issue and accept an invitation to visit, they do so on instruction of their governments, who usually agree on when the invitation is to be issued in advance.

State visits are the highest form of diplomatic contact between two countries and often mark the further development in bilateral relations.

They take place only rarely – another good reason to be celebrating today – due to the length of preparation, costs and major ceremonial and protocol activity.

State Visits enhance existing bilateral relations, building on existing international relationships and strengthening ties across a broad range of sectors of Canadian life.

In the case of this four-country State Visit, a modestly sized but high calibre delegation of Canadians – a cross-section of Canadian society – accompanies the Governor General, bringing together civil society if you will, and senior officials of the government.

Behind diplomatic formalities, delegations are offered a chance to network and develop economic, cultural and social links.

And state visits often lead to investment and growth in jobs, giving a new visibility and élan to bilateral ties.

In a world where we need to focus on results-based management, a study by the University of Berlin for the period 1948 to 2003, showed a positive correlation between State Visits and exports of between 8 and 10 per cent.

The Governor General will highlight Canadian successes, celebrate individual achievement, and draw attention to opportunities yet to be realized.



And I think you, as observers, will have noticed that wherever the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean travels, her passage is not soon forgotten! And I speak from personal experience.

Canadian State Visits also play an important part in promoting Canada's interests and in projecting a positive image of contemporary Canada and Canadian values. Even in the Internet age, there is no substitute for direct human contact and "la diplomatie de proximité," where listening and dialogue further new friendships and partnerships for the future.

I should add that in developing programs for State Visits, we work collaboratively with host countries to respect their protocol and traditions, and to bring out all that is meaningful in terms of the ties that bind us.

I want to express deep appreciation to the Ambassadors present today and to my counterparts in the four countries for their welcome, hard work and enthusiasm for this visit.

You know it is often said that in protocol, one usually hears only about what goes wrong and not the many things that go right – such is life and one of the perils of the job of Chief of Protocol.

But I do want to thank members of my protocol team at Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade with whom I am privileged to work, but also to our Rideau Hall partners who are party of our extended family. They are responsible for today's event and are professionals of the highest order.

