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Honourary Patron, Community Foundations of Canada

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Good morning and thank you for inviting me to speak to you today on the subject of Canada's communities.

In 2017, six years from now, our country will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of Confederation. Since my installation, I have been inviting Canadians to envision the country they desire. With this in mind, I would like to pose to you the following questions: What do we want our communities to look like in six years? How can we achieve this outlook? How can we create smarter, more caring communities?

To answer these questions, though, we must first explore one of the themes of this conference: "Where are we now?" By taking stock of Canadian communities today, we are better able to see where we want to go in the future.

First, although our communities are disparate and scattered, we are nonetheless united under commonalities. It is this togetherness that defines Canada. Despite our differences and the unique challenges we face, and regardless of language or culture, we are all Canadians.

Another aspect brings us together—as Canadians, yes, but also with the rest of the world. We live in an increasingly global society, where borders are no longer barriers to the exchange of ideas. And, as technology evolves, so too does our society, faster than at any other point in our history.

Think of the fact that it took the printing press in Western Europe—one of the great communications revolutions—almost three centuries to reach a majority of the population. The Internet—the latest communications revolution—took less than a decade to reach over half of the globe.

What this shows us is that no community and no individual in Canada lives in isolation. Let me give you an example of this.

In February, my wife, Sharon, and I had the privilege of visiting Yukon. The original itinerary had included a visit to Old Crow, Yukon's most northerly community. To get to Old Crow, however, is no easy task, which we discovered when our visit there was cancelled due to bad weather.

Each resident of Old Crow, three hundred in total, contributes to the community in some way; they lean on each other to ensure that their way of life is preserved and that their community is self-sustainable. Although Old Crow is geographically remote, the community is far from isolated.

Technology allowed Sharon and me to chat with students and educators in Old Crow via video uplink; a virtual visit, if you will, to a distant community with a proud people. So you see, even the situation faced by the citizens of Old Crow is not enough to keep them from contributing to Canada.

However, while we must realize that no community lives in a vacuum, we must also not lose sight of the unique challenges that individual communities face, as well as each one's distinct goals and available resources.

Old Crow, for example, has far different challenges as a small, northern town than does Vancouver. Both, though, must assess the strengths and weaknesses of their assets, such as land and infrastructure, and, more importantly, the skills, talents and potential of their people. In this way, communities are able to identify the gaps and to recognize the resources available to them.

Finally, there is one more relatively new tool to use when measuring where communities are today that goes beyond the standard methods. The Canadian Index of Wellbeing, based at the University of Waterloo, seeks to improve our lives by helping us to understand key factors that influence our quality of life.

The Index uses eight overall categories, with a subset of indicators, to gauge the health of Canada and of Canadian communities. The indicators measure key, interrelated factors that affect our well-being. They provide a snapshot of our community life, our democratic engagement, our educational status and the vitality of our environment. They help us to determine the health of our populations, our living standards, our use of time and our leisure and cultural activity.

Collectively, this index helps us to determine trends in our overall quality of life, giving us a powerful tool for action. I know that community foundations have been involved with this index since its inception; you recognize it as another important way to assess how our communities are doing, on their own and as part of the whole country.

Knowing where we are, having identified the weaknesses and our potential, the question now must be: what can we do to close the gaps?

I have made it a priority during my mandate as governor general of Canada to speak of the vision of Canada as a smart and caring nation, and to focus on three pillars, all of which I believe play a vital role in Canadian communities.

In helping families and children, we are ensuring community continuity. In strengthening learning and innovation, we are creating community knowledge. And in encouraging philanthropy and volunteerism, we are cultivating community development.

For today's purposes, I would like to focus on volunteerism and philanthropy, two of the most important ways to elevate our communities, collectively and individually. In doing so, I will show that just as no community lives in isolation, so too do these pillars intermingle and support each other.

Canada is one of the most giving nations in the world. Each year, 12 million Canadians spend over two billion hours volunteering.

Many of these hours are spent in the community, helping those in need. I have seen this across the country, wherever I have gone. In food banks and in shelters, in hospitals and in community centres, Canadians of all ages are displaying heart in a multitude of ways.

This spirit of "neighbour helping neighbour" is prevalent in so many places, and I am proud to see this thriving in Vancouver as well.

It is fitting that this city is hosting this conference, as just over a year ago, communities across the country were united with the excitement of the Vancouver Olympic Winter Games. We saw the enthusiasm and hospitality of our country's volunteers who helped out during the Games, proud to represent Canada.

I can only hope that when those volunteers went back to their homes, and when the adrenaline of the Olympics abated, they were able to take that passion into their own communities and be ambassadors for volunteering, because there should never be any doubt of the impact that volunteers can have.

A single drop of food colouring into clear liquid is enough to change its hue. That is what volunteers do every day: one good deed at a time, they are changing the world.

We must therefore take the time—as parents, as siblings, as teachers, as a society—to ignite and hand over the flame of giving. In fact, think of this exercise as the Olympic volunteer torch relay. By passing the flame from one torch to the next, by passing on the importance of giving from one generation, one community, to the next, we are ensuring that Canadians, particularly young Canadians, understand this vital part of our country.

So we have demonstrated that Canadians are caring, but we have to be smart about it as well.

Using innovative approaches, such as social media, can be advantageous in spreading a message and getting people involved.

Paul Hoffert, in his book, *All Together Now*, explored interconnectivity through technology. He had designed an online community, a kind of intranet for the neighbourhood, which served to bring people together. Using this tool, socialization in the community increased, trust in the community increased, and neighbours were able to help each other. These "habicons," as Mr. Hoffert called these

communities, used technology to connect people in ways that would have been unheard of a few decades ago.

Yet, while we can rely on technology to link us, we should not forget the physical community.

During my time in Montréal, where I was principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University, I was honoured to be co-president of Centraide Montréal. This position opened my eyes to the community in which I was living, yet barely knew. It allowed me the opportunity to walk the streets, to experience and familiarize myself with the challenges and the triumphs of the people there.

It is important to inform people of your cause and goals, but it is equally important that people are given a chance to understand and to learn about the community of which they are a part. In this way, we are not only strengthening our volunteer sector, but we are also encouraging philanthropy.

Trust allows people to connect, to gain confidence and to rely on each other for the common good. This is the case in Old Crow, this is the case in the “habicons,” and this is even the way in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands is the only country with a stronger volunteer sector than our own. One of the main differences between our societies is that they have been promoting trust in an official capacity, through the Central Bureau on Fundraising, for over 80 years. Those organizations with the Bureau’s seal of approval have been closely watched and vetted, and are therefore trusted by the public. As such, they are able to attract more volunteers and contributors.

Giving, after all, always involves some measure of trust.

For many years, I played hockey, and being part of a team was the epitome of trust. The coach would drill that into each of us; that even the strongest and most skilled player could not go out onto the ice alone. I trusted that when I passed the puck, my teammates would be there to receive it; that when I went to the boards, that they would watch my back for the opposing team. I trusted them and they trusted me, which translated into wins. Trust is what any relationship is built upon, whether on a team or in the voluntary sector.

Community foundations work within Canada to strengthen our country at all levels: environmental, economic and societal. You have endeavoured to build trust, not only between you and volunteers, but also with other non-profit organizations, with all levels of government and with philanthropists.

You have worked hard to earn that trust, but you must work equally hard to keep it. Because, as Ken Dryden—another hockey man—wrote in his book, *Becoming Canada*: “Today’s problems and today’s opportunities are too big to handle alone. Collaboration, co-operation, working together—this is where the world is going.”

The 150th anniversary of this country will unite communities across Canada in one, giant celebration. For today, I hope that you will set goals and priorities for what we want our country to be as we approach this milestone—as a smarter, more caring nation.

After all, Canadians have always imagined what can be and have worked hard to achieve it. We dream of new possibilities and set out to realize them.

In the words of George Bernard Shaw, a famous British author: “Some people see things as they are and wonder why. We dream of things that ought to be and ask why not.”

Thank you.