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NOTES FOR REMARKS

BY

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MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

AT

THE FORUM OF FEDERATIONS' CONFERENCE:
THE CHALLENGES OF FEDERAL GOVERNANCE

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Thank you, Mr. Lysyshyn (Ralph) and good morning, Madame Pollyeva, Premier Romanow, guests, ladies and gentlemen. It’s a pleasure for me to welcome you to this Russia-Canada conference on the challenges of federal governance. It’s a very timely conference about an issue of great interest to all of us.

As you all know, Canadians have just emerged from a national election. The challenges of federalism were the subject of lively debate from coast to coast to coast. That debate is still very fresh in our minds, and this workshop is a wonderful opportunity for us to share and learn about a subject very close to our hearts.

We will always be balancing a national vision with provincial needs and interests. We will always celebrate diversity as one of our greatest strengths.

I know that you, our Russian partners and colleagues, understand the tension that underlies our management of the federation. Of course, there are differences between us. In Canada, our federal structure is simpler, our population is smaller and more concentrated in the South.
But we have a lot in common. We have the same sweeping northern geography; the same diversity of peoples and cultures; the same rich heritage of natural resources. We can both boast that we have the best hockey players in the world - and thanks to our cooperation program, we can also lay claim to the best federalism experts.

CIDA’s ten-year partnership with Russia has evolved into my department's sixth largest cooperation program, for a total of $150 million. This year alone, we are working on over 50 projects, including two in federal reform. There have been a number of very fruitful exchanges between Canadian and Russian experts in this critical area. I understand that many of the key Russian and Canadian partners are here today, and I would like to congratulate you on the work you have accomplished to date.
I would just like to quickly mention our key Russian partners, the Working Centre for Economic Reform, the Institute for the Economy in Transition and the Academy of National Economy. They have been working in partnership with senior Canadian experts from across the country — many of them retired civil servants — brought together by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. Your efforts in the Consortium for Economic Policy and Research Advice promises to make a significant contribution to the dialogue and learning on fiscal issues, economic policy and regional development.

Canada’s Parliamentary Centre, and its partners, the Russian Federal Assembly and several of the northern regional legislatures, have also made major strides in the Northern Regional Parliamentary Reform project. This is not just about reforming operations and structures in legislative bodies; it also focuses on policy issues related to the north, such as municipal government arrangements, aboriginal issues and legislative coordination between different levels of jurisdiction.
We’ve covered a lot of common ground together - and the process continues. I am pleased to announce the launch of a third initiative, the Fiscal Decentralization Project, for which Canada provided $740,000. This project will provide training and international expertise in the field of intergovernmental fiscal relations and it will also establish information sharing networks. CIDA's partnership with the World Bank Institute will permit us to bring the best expertise from around the world to bear on training in fiscal federalism.

This weekend’s workshop is part of that process of learning, sharing and networking. It gives us an opportunity to build on the excellent work accomplished last year at Mount Tremblant and through our cooperation program. The matters you will be discussing reflect the progress we’ve made together, and I understand that the results of this conference will be shared with Prime Minister Chretien and President Putin on Monday.
I wish you a rewarding and productive exchange today and tomorrow. I know that the dialogue will continue well beyond the close of this workshop. I know that you will continue to find allies among reformers to enlarge and expand on that dialogue and to put its knowledge into action. We remain committed to supporting you in that process and to working together towards a better understanding of the practice and the promise of federalism for both our countries.

Thank you.