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H.E. JANICE CHARETTE SPEAKS AT THE CAMBRIDGE UNION

On the 23rd of January 2017, the Cambridge Union welcomed the Canadian High Commissioner to the UK, H.E. Janice Charette. The High Commissioner's address focused on Canada's current and future relationship with the UK, and was followed by an opportunity for the High Commissioner to respond to questions from the audience.

The High Commissioner commenced her address by noting that her primary role is to strengthen ties between Canada and the UK. She reflected that Canada does not take its relationship with the UK for granted, and stated that the two countries "begin from a coveted position" with shared ties including a common language, laws, and a belief in democratic principles.

The High Commissioner then explored the future of the Canada-UK relationship. She questioned what, at first blush, a country like Canada – best known for its "Mounties, mountains, mining, and maple syrup" – has in common with the UK. She argued that Canada is much more than these symbols and described Canada as a global innovator, committed to free trade and open borders in a time of growing protectionism. She reflected that Canada and the US enjoy the world's largest trade agreement, and that Canada is currently engaged in fifteen other trade agreements with eight more in progress.

Continuing the theme of Canada's innovation and trade, the High Commissioner stated that Canadians are "proud free traders." She noted that the new Canada-EU trade agreement, CETA, is a source of particular pride, and offers a model for future free trade agreements because of its focus on protecting areas of mutual interest, a feature "intrinsically valuable to the people of Canada."

Next, the High Commissioner reflected upon trade between Canada and the UK. She noted that the UK is Canada's fourth-largest trading partner, and that the heads of the Bank of England and the Royal Mail and the new vice-Chancellor of Cambridge are Canadian. £35 billion has also been invested by Canadian pension boards in the UK. The High Commissioner also provided an anecdotal example regarding Canadian-British trade, noting that baking giant Warburton's is the largest end user of Canadian wheat in Europe, and joked that "high-carb lovers can thank Canada."

The High Commissioner also stated that Canada's focus on international trade speaks to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's belief that "it's time to show that open trading relationships are good" and that this could be best achieved through providing tangible examples, rather than more conceptual ideas. Indeed, she noted that trade in Canada is an ongoing story, and a story that "great trading nations like the UK and Canada" need to share.

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The High Commissioner then transitioned to the theme of immigration, stating that Canada has for the past decade accepted 300,000 immigrants per year, and will continue to do so this year. Of these 300,000 immigrants, 40,000 are expected to be refugees or protected persons. These numbers, she argued, speak to the profound belief notion amongst Canadians that diversity is a strength and that “Canada is a proud, inclusive, tolerant country.” However, the High Commissioner also cautioned that although Canada’s immigration model has been widely studied by policy makers from other countries, Canada should not be smug in its success, as Canada does experience immigration-related issues. Nevertheless, she noted that “the more experience we have at settling new immigrants, the more we grow.”

Next, the High Commissioner explored Canada’s dedication to inclusion, gender rights, freedom of expression, and rights of the LGBT community, noting that Canada is the world leader in the number of women in the public service. On the international stage, she argued that Canada is a strong global player with contributions to make, and evidenced Canada’s leadership efforts to improve maternal and child health, chairing the contact group on nuclear security, and standing alongside allies in the fight against terror. On a more personal note, she also mentioned her commitment towards reducing the stigma around mental health.

The address then shifted towards analysing Canada’s future relationship with the UK. The High Commissioner stated that the UK, in the wake of the vote to leave the European Union, is experiencing profound change, but that “there is opportunity in times of change” and that change offers “a time to look outward, think globally, and advocate for tolerance and inclusion.” In the closing remarks of her address, the High Commissioner outlined Canada’s commitment to offer the UK with the support that a “long-time friend and ally can provide.”

The High Commissioner then accepted questions from the audience. Responding to a question that asked for advice for early career professionals, she stressed the importance of “loving what you do”, working in a team-based and collaborative environment, and having a supportive partner. She also noted that the key attributes to a successful application to the Canadian public service are good grades, bilingualism in both official languages, and a willingness to work anywhere in Canada. With regards to a question that asked what lessons the UK could learn from Canada’s immigration policies, the High Commissioner stated that although Canada has a close relationship with UK immigration bodies, each country needs to decide for itself what its immigration policies should be. Another question asked how Canada has engaged with the Québec secessionist movement. The High Commissioner responded that this movement has been less apparent of late, largely because the government has taken measures to better reflect Québec’s interest within Canada. Finally, when asked about Canada’s relationship with First Nations peoples, she stated that this has been the largest public policy problem for the Canadian government, and stressed the substantive and symbolic importance of viewing it as a government-to-government relationship.

--END--For footage of the event go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc>