

Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy

Special Citizenship Ceremony

February 16, 2007 – 1 p.m.

I am very happy to be here today on the occasion of this very special citizenship ceremony. Today, you will become citizens as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of Canadian citizenship. It is hard to believe that until 1947, there was no such thing as Canadian citizenship. Even our Prime Minister William Lyon MacKenzie King, who served the country so ably during World War II, was a British citizen. On January 3, 1947 when the first citizenship ceremony was held, our Prime Minister was one of the first to become truly Canadian.

Our first Citizenship Act was introduced in the House of Commons with these words which still apply:

Our "new Canadians" bring to this country much that is rich and good, and in Canada they find a new way of life and new hope for the future. They should all be made to feel that they, like the rest of us, are Canadians, citizens of a great country, guardians of proud traditions and trustees of all that is best in life for generations of Canadians yet to be. For the national unity of Canada and for the future and greatness of this country it is felt to be of utmost importance that all of us, new Canadians or old, have a consciousness of a common purpose and common interests as Canadians; that all of us are able to say with pride and say with meaning: "I am a Canadian citizen."

Canada is an immigrant country. Except for our first nations, we are all immigrants or their descendants in this country. In 1947, soon after the end of World War II, many Europeans came to Canada in search of a better life.

I came here from Hong Kong in search of an education at McGill University. I was expected to get an education, go home to Hong Kong, and marry. I had not intended to stay, but love altered my plans. I met my husband, Dr. Neville Poy, and now I have been in Canada for most of my life. We've been married for over 40 years.

I can't tell you how much this country has changed since the 1960s. Suffice to say, Canadians were mostly white at the time, and I sometimes felt like I stood out in Toronto. Now that Canada has really embraced diversity, as you know by walking down the street in Toronto, or in looking around this room, I find Canada much more interesting. Toronto qualifies as the most multicultural city in the world. It is home to virtually all the world's cultures, and more than 100 languages are spoken here. If you are a citizen of the world, like me, I think you'll feel right at home here.

Since you are receiving your citizenship today, I presume you have had some time to think about what this means to you. You've had a chance to learn about Canada, and now you know more about Canada than most Canadian born individuals. But the most significant aspects of Canadian citizenship can't be learned from a book. They are the values that shape the Canadian character.

In Canada, we celebrate diversity. Canadians respect and embrace differences. We want to welcome you to Canada, and learn more about you, and the culture that you bring with you. We want you to feel you belong here, so you can work, and raise your family. Just as in the past, immigrant communities have come, and left their indelible mark on our country, you will do the same.

What do we expect of you? We expect you to join in this great project that is Canada. We expect you to get involved, and participate in your community, and the lives of your children. We hope that you'll get to know others who may be from other backgrounds than your own, and maybe, if you have free time, to volunteer. All of this is a great way of immersing yourself in Canadian life.

If you want to know more about Canadians, and our values, I suggest you read the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, one of our most important pieces of legislation, which I will give you today. Over the past 25 years, I think the Charter has made our society more progressive.

In a few months, when winter finally leaves us, it will be July 1st, Canada Day, and your first Canada Day as Canadian citizens. I hope that you will celebrate this day, and that over the next few years, you will learn

more about what it means to be a Canadian. Canada has much to offer – you only have to open your arms to the experience.