Distinguished guests, colleagues, good afternoon.

It is an honour for me to be with you today to share a Canadian perspective and my thoughts on the role of parliamentarians in conflict resolution and peace-building.

Let me start by reading some very old words which are every bit as true today as they were over 2000 years ago when they were first written:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

These wise and timeless words are, of course, taken from the old book of Ecclesiastes (eh-clee-zee-Ass-tees), and I think we always need to keep them in mind when we discuss topics like peace-building.

After all, no two conflicts are identical and neither are the local reasons for war or for peace.

That said, I think we can all agree that the “good” in us, the best part of humanity longs for peace.
Looking back on my life, I know I am a lucky man and that I have been blessed.

But, I remember a very different time in my life, before moving to Canada and as a young man in Northern India, when everything around me, all of a sudden, swiftly exploded with religious-based atrocities, cold-blooded killings and violence.

And, when the conflict wound down, that worry, that mistrust of your neighbour or of the intentions of that stranger walking towards you was not something that went away overnight, I know this.

Here in this room, we parliamentarians come from many different backgrounds, but we want to make a difference.

So, first of all, I want to focus specifically on the smaller building blocks or the little bridges that can be built by individual parliamentarians, and I want to start by using my own constituency as an example.
Calgary Northeast is a large urban riding. It has a population of over 150,000 constituents in a city of over a million. In my riding is also the Calgary International Airport, third busiest in all of Canada.

Clearly, by looking at me or listening to me, I might not look or sound like the average Canadian politician. Yes, there are many caucasian voters in Calgary Northeast, but we also have a total of 48.5% of constituents that identify themselves as visible minorities. 37% of them are new immigrants to Canada. To break this down a little further, in a recent census:

- 22.6% identified as South Asian;
- 11.1% as Punjabi;
- 6% as Chinese;
- 4.9% as Filipino;
- 3.3% as Southeast Asian;
- 2.6% as Latin American;
- 2.5% as African.
This diversity is a part and parcel of Canada. So, why do I bring up these points, and what does this have to do with post-conflict peace-building?

Because, just as conflicts between different groups often can be divided along religious or ethnic lines, it can also be only natural for us parliamentarians to primarily focus on serving those people with whom we share the most in common.

Therefore, I believe one of the first steps in bridge-building - whether post-conflict or otherwise - must be an honest and long-term effort for us to represent those with whom we wouldn’t normally connect.

In my multicultural and multiethnic riding of Calgary NE, I represent anyone and everyone without looking at their colour, creed and religion. I don’t look at their age or their ethnicity.

Why do I do it? Most basically, it’s the right thing to do.
We can’t simultaneously be all things to all people, but we can always try to be forces for good and agents of healthy change.

Second, when we learn more about others, we educate ourselves and become better parliamentarians. I started off my talk today with a passage of Scripture shared by Jews, Muslims and Christians, but whether you are Hindu, Sikh or atheist, these are words of truth from which we can all learn.

Finally, we also must remember that pluralism is not something new to our generation. Free institutions and tolerance are the hallmarks of parliamentary democracies, and part of our British Commonwealth heritage.

In the Canadian context, Canada has for centuries been grappling with how to embrace diversity in an equitable and pragmatic way, be it between British and French settlers, or Europeans and First Nations people.
Even though the pluralism of yesterday doesn’t look exactly like the pluralism of today, the goal is the same – to knit everyone into the fabric of society and to build bridges between all groups.

It’s also about finding the ties that bind us together versus the things that make us different. I don’t know how many of you have ever watched an ice hockey game, but it is understood to be Canada’s national sport. People go crazy about it in Canada. Let me paint you a picture: in this corner, you have people calling themselves French-Canadians, in that corner, you have Italian-Canadians, in this corner you have your Indo-Canadians, in that corner, you have your Afro-Canadians, BUT...

When Team Canada steps onto that sheet of ice, and when the captain slaps the winning puck into the Team USA’s net in overtime... beating those Americans AGAIN... EVERYBODY jumps to the air, as if to scream in unison: “I AM CANADIAN!!!”
Recently, I know we all probably witnessed a similar phenomenon with our countries’ athletes in the London 2012 Olympics.

Yet, even when we share an incredible love for country with people of all backgrounds, the roar of the crowd fades. And, at the end of the day, it can sometimes be extremely difficult for parliamentarians from different parties to work together for the good of their country, even when they both love it.

I know that I am very fortunate to be a member of the governing party in Canada. But, in those difficult moments and showdowns when one side is ready to walk away from the table over words and clauses, ego and pride, it’s always good for members of the ruling party to remember four little words: Her Majesty’s loyal opposition.

The purpose of the opposition as part of our system of government is precisely to oppose.
It’s not treasonous, but it is, in fact, part and parcel of the process to find the best solutions for all of the people we represent.

The questions are? Is it perfect? No. Does it always work? No. But, we must accept it, embrace it and then work even harder to build and maintain bridges between our fellow parliamentarians from different parties for the good of our countries.

I know it would be ridiculous for any one of us to stand here today and claim we have a generic one-size-fits-all prescription for world peace.

But, at the very least, I believe that when we as parliamentarians build bridges between each other, and when we show mature leadership by reaching out to the marginalized groups in our own societies - regardless of past conflicts - we are doing our part to ensure a brighter future: one where everyone can share fully in all of the risks and rewards, and all of the rights and responsibilities which our parliamentary democracies strive to afford to one and all. Thank you.