



Address

by

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Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21

March 27, 2014

Thank you – I am delighted to be here to celebrate Pier 21 and talk about an issue that has been an important part of my activity at RBC over the past 13 years as CEO – Diversity and Immigration. I have spoken often about this or these topics which are not the same but very much connected.

As Chairman of our Diversity Council for all of my 13 years and of The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council for five years, I have been very active on the diversity file. I suspect that given my retirement, this may be one of my last opportunities to publically speak on this issue – or at least the last time people will be willing to listen.

Diversity and Immigration are such important parts of Canada’s past, present and future. Canada would be a very different place today had immigration not played such a large role in our make-up and our diversity creates a global strength like no other country. And while diversity and immigration have been a large part of our history, they will play an equally important part of our future.

Pier 21, the Canadian Museum of Immigration, is now a national museum with a new mandate to engage with Canadians across the country. This morning’s breakfast has traditionally been an event that only people in Halifax could enjoy. But today, we are kicking off a series of events to help the Museum celebrate and share the diverse story of Canadian immigration to a much wider audience. These events will raise awareness and explain what Pier 21 was, what it is and what it stands for.

Canada is a great nation — a wonderful place to live, work and raise a family. And we are not alone in recognizing this. We hear often from quality of life rankings that Canadians have built a prosperous nation, a civil society, one rich in diversity and opportunity, that people of many different cultures call home. There is no question that our strength and economic prosperity are derived from the combination of what we all have in common and what makes each of us different.

Diversity is not new to Canada. In fact, it has always been a core aspect of the Canadian identity — consider our origins and the coming together of Aboriginal peoples, the French and the English those who have come from hundreds of other countries including those who passed through Pier 21.

The Canadian history of immigration is accompanied by a history of integration. Canada’s experience shows that integration need not come at the cost of diverse identities and those diverse identities create a vibrancy and mosaic that helps define Canada.

The Museum’s own literature has called Pier 21 “a humble-looking building on the waterfront of Halifax.” Don’t judge this book by its cover because Pier 21 has played a monumental role in welcoming new immigrants to our shores. From 1928 to 1971, more than one million people entered Canada via Pier 21 and it is estimated that today, one-in-five Canadians has a direct link to Pier 21. These are simple facts that speak profoundly to how large a role immigration has played in building our country and how large a role Pier 21 played in immigration.

Coming to Canada through Pier 21, these brave men, women and children took their first steps in building new lives in a new country. Pier 21 was a gateway to opportunity for new Canadians to reach for and achieve new heights. And as they followed their pursuits, these people contributed to Canada's economy, its prosperity and to the building of a great nation.

Today, Canada's population growth rate is the highest among G8 nations — and that is thanks to immigration. Canada welcomes almost a quarter of a million permanent immigrants each year — one of the highest rates of all developed countries. It is projected that 28 per cent of Canadians will be foreign-born by 2031 up from 20 per cent today. And without immigration, our growth rate would be in decline, a disaster for any economy.

Immigration and diversity should not be feared but rather celebrated as it is a source of strength for our country and we do multiculturalism like no other. We are far from perfect but we are the model for the world and we should find ways to build on our strength.

Today, immigrants to Canada are coming from different places than during earlier years. Fewer are from European countries. More people come from Asia, South America, the Caribbean and Africa. Today's immigration patterns represent diversity in a different way and reflect changing global demographics.

This diverse population presents tremendous opportunities — I have said many times it is one of Canada's great competitive advantages. But it is only an advantage to the extent we are inclusive. Full inclusion means everyone feels enabled to bring their perspectives, knowledge and experiences to the table. Inclusion goes beyond diversity.

RBC has a saying: "Having diversity is interesting; doing something with it is powerful." What that means is that we work to create an environment with equitable access to opportunities, where we can leverage individual *and* collective strengths. If you only have people who think and act in the same way, you will be very consistent, but not very innovative and flexible.

While immigration patterns have shifted, four fundamental pillars remain the same:

- First, what brings people to Canada - the opportunity to build a future and the desire to contribute.
- Second, the commitment and motivation of immigrants to succeed — let us not forget being an immigrant is not easy in any country.
- Third, Canada's need for immigrants - to grow and to continue the work of building this country.
- And lastly, the welcome immigrants receive as the newest contributors to our society, to a shared economic prosperity.

Institutions like Pier 21 are important because they help us learn from our past to help shape our future. Canada's history is intertwined with immigration. This is a past we celebrate — and it's also something to learn from and build on.

Lester Pearson understood the connection of Canada's history and future immigration when he said, "The destiny of Canada is to unite, not divide; sharing in cooperation, not in separation or in conflict; respecting our past and welcoming our future."

I strongly believe diversity and inclusion has a central role in driving productivity, innovation and growth in economic prosperity. Canada's future prosperity will increasingly depend on innovative, highly productive businesses with the flexibility to capitalize on opportunities wherever and whenever they emerge.

But we must remain a destination of choice for skilled immigrants — for entrepreneurs, professionals, scientists. Talent is more mobile than ever, and skills shortages are predicted for many economies. Potential immigrants have more choices than ever before and simply having our doors open will not be enough.

Everyone knows Canada's large companies like RBC, but we are a nation of entrepreneurs and small businesses. The financial towers may be the landmarks of our Toronto business centre but go north of the 401 and you will find an incredible number of thriving companies – growing and creating jobs and many of them were founded and are run by visible minorities who are first and second generation Canadians.

Canada needs to leverage the diversity of our workforce today, and the workforce of tomorrow and large companies like RBC need to step up to the plate. As important as immigration has been to our economy in the past, it will be even more so as we face an aging population and global competition for talent intensifies.

Yet current newcomers to Canada have a harder time adjusting than previous generations. A 2012 RBC Economics study found that if immigrants were earning equal pay to Canadian-born peers, personal income would be \$31 billion higher. That's more than 2.1 per cent of Canada's GDP. That means we are failing to tap the full potential of these highly skilled people, and the full economic potential of our nation.

We have choices to make — choices which will determine if we become more inclusive, innovative and prosperous, or face an uncertain future.

With Canada's growth depending on immigration as much today as a hundred years ago, we must recognize that there are new challenges that require new solutions.

We are building the next phase in the growth of our great country and there are many partners and players in this important work. These include businesses and business leaders, government at all levels, the agencies that support newcomers and the newcomers themselves.

I'd like to offer some suggestions and ideas for each.

For businesses, competition is global — whether directly or indirectly. The best way to compete is with a workforce with global experience. I'd like to provide you with an example of what that means to RBC.

We're a Canadian company with operations in more than 40 countries. Our talent flows need to be two-way. We send Canadians to work internationally because we need an understanding of those markets coupled with an understanding of how to leverage what we have in our home market.

At the same time we're hiring bankers with experience from many different countries. One might wonder how relevant banking experience in Brazil or China might be for Canada. But because of Canada's immigration patterns, we have many clients — and potential clients — from those countries.

It's a valuable asset for our business to have people who know the banking expectations and norms for these clients. Better yet, those employees will have gone through the immigration process to come to Canada. Who better to empathize with newcomers and help them build a new future?

A view that international experience is an asset is beneficial to business. Too often we hear an alternative view that is narrowly and negatively defined — it states that newcomers with no Canadian experience would be hard to fit into the Canadian workforce. This change in perspective recognizes that international experiences relate directly to the modern Canadian context. In fact, the Ontario Human Rights Commission has recognized this and recently declared the requirement for "Canadian experience" is a form of discrimination.

Overlooking new Canadians with both the skills and credentials, in terms of education or technical certifications, to do the job makes little sense. Many will speak multiple languages and understand different cultures. They will help you reflect the communities and clients your businesses serve, and can help you pursue new markets.

Giving newcomers a chance to apply the skills they have learned and to build Canadian experience also pays an employee engagement dividend. In RBC's experience, employees who are newcomers are among the most engaged. And employee engagement is good for business. Being more open to immigrants is just one action employers can take.

At RBC we have diversity objectives built into our business plans including hard targets for both women and visible minorities in senior management. I am pleased to say we are at 37 per cent and 15 per cent respectively in Canada, but we are looking for new ways to maintain our momentum.

Those of us in leadership positions have an obligation and responsibility to get involved. The business case is clear - diversity and inclusion are both the smart thing, and the right thing to do.

Business leaders can and should play an active part. A simple place to start is in guiding your company to encourage diversity and to be inclusive. Leaders set the tone for their organizations. Leaders who get involved see the benefits and opportunities and they encourage others to do so.

Business leaders should be visible in their efforts. We are role models to many – in what we do — and in what we choose not to do. Leaders should be mentors and sponsors. We have learned through the RBC Diversity Dialogues program that mentoring is two-way. Mentees also learn about Canadian workplace norms and leadership, while mentors gain insight into wider talent pools and cultural markets. You will learn and you will help new Canadians feel — and be — truly included in our society.

As a tall, white, Anglo-Saxon, male, I am in many ways the anti-diversity stereotype and, frankly, for much of my working life never thought twice about whether my career was advantaged due to my background. But it is perhaps because of my background that I have come to realize the incredible richness and competitive advantage that we gain from diversity and it has made me more focused on ensuring fairness and equality across our workforce.

We all have and are impacted by systemic biases and rather than pretend they don't exist, we must find ways to identify them and develop strategies to compensate for them.

Chairing our diversity council since I became CEO has helped set a tone and it is thanks to people like Zabeen Hirji, and others that I have learned from, that diversity is well entrenched in our values and culture. When people begin to understand the value of diversity it is wonderful to see behaviour change and good things happen.

We often hear that government's role is to create the right circumstances for the private sector to drive economic growth. Governments need to continue to work together to find ways to improve labour force participation for recent immigrants. They need to continue addressing interprovincial barriers to job movement and invest substantially in bridge training programs, which help immigrants settle and prepare to enter the labour market.

Governments of all levels can create opportunities to bring people together. Coordination of efforts makes the transition into Canadian life for newcomers easier and enables faster contribution to economic growth.

Immigration policies can encourage integration and still actively promote awareness and retention of diversity in a variety of ways, including education, support for community centers and funding for cultural activities.

Cities are a particularly important level of government. Cities deliver social programs that help immigrants the most directly. Cities can develop strategies and even brands that attract skilled newcomers — strategies that help immigrants find employment equal to their education.

And cities are much more than purely economic arrangements. They bring people together and create new possibilities. Immigrants often come in pursuit of a better life so their new chosen city embodies the hope of positive change. This change is much more possible in cities that are diverse, stimulating and provide a wide range of amenities.

Cities that offer this kind of rich, vibrant environment will attract skilled newcomers, enhancing their likelihood of becoming centres of economic growth. Cities have to be liveable, walkable and have good transit systems, services and parks. Liveable cities are inclusive cities that build a sense of community, a sense of belonging and a desire to contribute to the greater good.

Because more than 80 per cent of the Canadian population lives in urban areas, a large number of us benefit from integrated strategies in these areas — from newcomers to aging populations.

Cities like Toronto, Vancouver and provinces like Alberta naturally benefit from immigration but it is the future of cities like Halifax and Montreal that must find ways to attract and retain newcomers. You are either growing or declining and the ability to attract and retain people will be a large part of that equation.

We also need to recognize the role support agencies, not-for-profits, and immigrants themselves play in a successful immigration system.

The private sector and governments need to work together to provide support to both small businesses and the broad range of agencies that exist to provide services to newly arrived Canadians.

These organizations include TRIEC, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, the Immigrant ACCESS Fund and CareerBridge. The United Way also supports many agencies for new Canadians. These organizations often provide a vital networking path for immigrants, helping business better understand their skills and capabilities. This is the kind of action that is required to make it easier for small businesses to tap into pools of newcomers to bolster their participation in the labour force.

And finally, immigrants themselves must take ownership of their development. They must understand the limitations that their comfort zones place on them and push beyond. Immigrants must pursue and build professional relationships and networks in their field and participate in events and programs to help them become ready for their next new job.

New immigrants should seek advice and information on labour markets and not hesitate to get involved with volunteer services to gain valuable experience and to build connections.

We study history to learn from our past so we can help shape our future. The lesson of our history is clear and also points the way to future economic prosperity and success: Canada has relied on immigration to build a prosperous economy and will continue to do so in the years ahead.

Canada has benefited from its diversity and it remains one of our critical competitive advantages.

We are good at it but we need to get better to maintain that competitive edge.

The Pier 21 National Museum reminds us of the opening chapter to the stories of a million people, who literally stepped through its doors ... to the opportunities offered by Canada. The museum is also responsible for the many, many millions of descendants of those people.

Pier 21 played a major part in welcoming immigrants to Canada. Importantly, it also played a fundamental role in helping shape Canada, because of the critical place immigration holds in building Canada's growth and prosperity.

The Pier 21 National Museum tells us the story of new Canadians. We need to tell this story and it needs to be heard. That's why events like today's are so important.

And that's why, today, RBC is proud to announce a gift of \$500,000 for the museum's Canada: Day 1 Project. This national travelling exhibit will offer visitors a powerful living history experience, including displays of personal stories, original artworks and archive images.

We hope everyone will have a chance to see the exhibit, and truly appreciate what diversity, inclusion and immigration have contributed to Canada.

Thank you.