



MOSAIC

Closing remarks: Kanya Adam, Retired
Past President of the Board

Welcome honored guests, friends, staff.
It's a pleasure to see you all here this evening.

I want to begin by thanking the Board for giving me this opportunity to say a few words tonight at my last meeting as a MOSAIC Board member.



It's been an amazing seven years, being part of such a dedicated group of Directors, as well as being associated with this dynamic and worthwhile organization. This has been a board which often challenges each others ideas, debates how best to move forward and respectfully argues which each other – I think this has only made our organization stronger. Having the opportunity to Chair the Board for the past two years has been an incredible experience. The work which MOSAIC engages in is perhaps more relevant now than ever before. Every year I continue to marvel at this organization's high standards, goals and achievements, which continually strive to engage our community and serve our immigrants and newcomers day after day with such commitment and compassion.

I myself am the product of two immigrants – one from the Indian Community in South Africa and one from Germany. They chose to come to Vancouver in the early 70s – not being able to marry under apartheid South Africa at the time and wanting to settle in an open society in which to raise to young daughters. Despite the fact that I am the only one in my family who was actually born in Vancouver – I am the one who is always asked "Where are you from?" When I answer Vancouver... the reply is invariably "No... where are you REALLY from?" And so it goes....

Michael Adams in his new book UNLIKELY UTOPIA "The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism" says that when compared with a host of other countries' citizenry, Canadians emerge as exceptionally open to people of different backgrounds and exceptionally positive about the contributions newcomers make. Newcomers themselves also register high levels of pride in Canada and considerable optimism about their future in this country. According to Statistics Canada – 84% of recent immigrants (after 4 years in the country) say that if they had to do it over again, they'd make the same decision and come to Canada.

Canadians also consistently express the most positive attitudes in the world towards immigration. In 2006 an international MORI study found that 75% of Canadians believe that overall, immigrants have a positive influence on the country. The country with the second most positive attitudes, Australia, was slightly over half (54%) with

the US not far behind (52%). Over time immigration and ethnocultural diversity have become central to the way we think about our country.

Yet despite the fact that Canada relies on immigration for population and labour market growth the successful integration of immigrants and the continuing social isolation of many remain huge issues for all of us. While newcomers are now better educated than ever, they continue to have an even more difficult time obtaining employment, reuniting their families, getting language training, proper housing and even health care. Every year Canada welcomes between 230,000 and 260,000 immigrants – the highest rate of new citizens per capita. Yet a number of recent studies have pointed out that immigrants who arrived during the past two decades have a difficult time catching up to their Canadian-born counterparts, a trend attributed in part to cutbacks in settlement services and difficulty finding employment. According to a 2006 Statistics Canada study, one in six young, highly educated immigrants leaves Canada due to the job market. The difficulty immigrants face in getting their foreign credentials recognized has long been a factor.

While a number of initiatives have been undertaken to begin to address these barriers most efforts fail to address a host of other obstacles. Many immigrants now wait a long time for family reunification as the selection system can be onerous. It can take as long as a decade to bring in parents and grandparents. The federal government faces accusations of discrimination against certain types of applicants and causing unacceptable delays. Many immigrant youth also experience discrimination in schools, feel isolated and alone or are simply disengaged.

With the end of the recession in sight, all of Canada's employers need to be thinking about their long term talent strategies. In a recent Globe and Mail article, Gordon Nixon and Dominic D'Alessandro – the CEO of RBC and CEO of Manulife Financial – argue that a global competitive marketplace means tapping into and investing in the strengths of all of the country's work force, including skilled immigrants so that local economies can grow, compete and prosper. "Immigrants bring skills, including language and cultural abilities, knowledge and networks that can help us to reach out to emerging economic giants such as China and India, as well as emerging immigrant and "generation 1.5" markets at home – particularly at a time when the US economy remains weak and we need to be looking to expand our trade and cultural relationships even more".

"Innovate or stagnate" is a term many business leaders know when thinking about our economic future. Implicit in innovation is diversity – diversity of ideas, perspectives and backgrounds. If we want to be truly recovery ready, its argued that now is the time to invest in innovation, in creativity, in diversity. One key element of a successful innovation strategy is clear: better recognize and leverage the skills and experience that skilled immigrants bring to Canada.

In July of this year the Globe and Mail painted a stark picture of how the recession was affecting Canada's immigrants: According to Statistics Canada immigrants are losing their jobs at more than three times the rate of Canadian born workers.

RBC's own 2005 study, *The Diversity Advantage* – estimated that if immigrants had the same likelihood of employment at the same average income as people born in Canada, personal incomes would be about \$13 billion higher. These higher incomes would have obvious multiplier effects in markets for housing and consumer spending, as well as savings and investment – all critical elements in kickstarting our economy out of recession.

Canada has been immeasurably enriched by the contributions of succeeding generations of immigrants and refugees and what we must continue to do is break down the barriers which still impede the successful integration of newcomers. The ongoing work of MOSAIC in all of these areas therefore is as critical now as ever before. I am so proud to be a part of an organization with such high standards and goals, which continually strives to engage its community and serve its immigrants and newcomers day after day with dedication, determination, compassion and zeal.

Thank you to all of you who have committed yourselves in serving this organization, and each of you who in your own way has enriched us with different perspectives and unique skills. This organization would not be the same without the perceptive leadership of our executive director Eyob Naizghi. He has provided incredible leadership to this organization often balancing multiple demands and sensitive to many different needs of stakeholders and communities alike. Eyob Naizghi, his team of senior managers, and the entire staff of MOSAIC—they are the stars of this remarkable agency.

Thank you also to our hardworking executive, board and staff and of course to all of the members and communities we serve who continue to inspire us all on a daily basis.

Thank you to all of you who have put your energy, passion, time and resources into this essential and worthy organization. I wish all of us at MOSAIC, our partners and the communities we serve continued success!