

"MY SMILES MATCHED YOURS"

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✖ Gov.-Gen. Michaëlle Jean, [The Toronto Star](#), 30 September 2010

Farewell message of former Governor-General of Canada



As my mandate as governor general and commander-in-chief of Canada draws to a close, I have only one wish, and that is to say: "THANK YOU!"

What an incredible journey I have taken since Sept. 27, 2005, travelling all across the country to meet you and be by your side, and around the world nearly 40 times on your behalf. Thanks to you, the hope that drove me from that very first day has stayed with me all along, strong in the belief that Canada can continue to accomplish great things, as long as we all work together for the well-being of the population and humanity as a whole.

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In my installation speech, I spoke of the urgency of ending the narrow notion of "every person for himself," which does not belong in today's world and demands that we learn to see beyond our wounds, beyond our differences for the good of all. We must urgently eliminate the spectre of all solitudes — which I even took as my motto — in order to promote solidarity among all the citizens who make up today's Canada. At the time, I also said that we must make good use of our prosperity and our influence wherever the Canada that I love, open and friendly, offers the world an extra measure of harmony.

Thank you for answering this call with such enthusiasm and for rallying to my commitment, and that of my husband, Jean-Daniel Lafond, to help make the institutional space we have occupied these past five years more than ever a place where citizen voices are heard, and where the values of respect and sharing, and the willingness to listen to one another and start the dialogue prevail. Along the way, we identified, supported and recognized the vibrant, inventive and creative people who work in every province and territory, in our cities and in our smallest communities. On countless occasions, you told me about your concerns and your aspirations, the sum of your ideas and your

actions. And you did so in complete confidence, in total freedom. And every time, we wanted to bring citizens and decision makers together, as it is important to encourage productive synergies and a more inclusive governance.

My smiles matched yours, and your tears matched mine. In one of the most heartbreaking moments of my life, faced with the unbearable images of the devastation caused by the Jan. 12 earthquake that killed nearly 300,000 people in Haiti, the country of my birth, the priceless range of the generosity you showed, individually and collectively, was both astounding and completely reassuring. It is also very comforting to see that the reconstruction of the poorest country in the Americas is important to you and that, like me, you want to see it succeed.

I will soon join the big United Nations family to take part in this reconstruction, proud of our Canadian perspective and of our contribution. Moreover, although I will be working with UNESCO, whose headquarters are in Paris, I have chosen to work here primarily, and I thank the University of Ottawa for offering me offices on its campus.

Whether in a country that has known so much misery, like Haiti, or one rich in resources, like Canada, it is essential that we make it a priority to build on access to education for every child and to invest in education for young people. We must also bridge the gaps here at home if we do not want them to widen any further.

In September 2005, I told you that nothing in today's society is more disgraceful than the marginalization of certain young people who are driven to isolation and despair. That we must not tolerate such disparities. That it is our duty to encourage them to join us in this reinvention of the world and, to do so, we must give our young people the power and, even more, the desire to realize their full potential. I made this one of the priorities of my mandate.

Thank you to all these associations and to the thousands of young people brought together at the dialogues and forums I have held across Canada, those who work to fight exclusion through great imagination by using all forms of artistic expression as a means of transforming individuals and society as a whole.

At their request, and with the support of the Government of Canada, a number of philanthropists and partners in the private sector, the establishment of the Michaëlle Jean Foundation will serve as a kind of legacy to maintain our commitment to them and to continue the work we have done over the past five year in the cultural community. We can never say enough that what shapes Canada is essentially the women, men and young people who create and take part in the vibrancy of our rich social fabric, which we must continue to cultivate.

I have taken the pulse of the nation, and I have seen that we are stronger when we join efforts; this I have witnessed.

I was called to work on an immense stage, in a land of dazzling beauty where I went from the

known, to the unknown, to the infinite. I have travelled, filled with wonder, all across this generous country, which for millennia has guarded the memory of our aboriginal sisters and brothers, who look to it for the strength they need to be reborn from their pain and misery, a country they cherish like a mother. I have explored areas of misery and of happiness, without ever growing weary. I have also drawn a lot of lessons from this ancestral heritage, and found within it our joys, our pains and our deepest roots.

Representing Canada on a number of occasions on the international scene, and leading several missions — as de facto head of state — from one continent to the next, has allowed me to see the world, both larger and smaller than ever before. The sizeable global issues we are now facing urgently require joint strategies to resolve them. The economic crisis affecting the world is also a crisis of values that strongly calls for a new ethic of sharing and responsibility. This was often a concern not only in my discussions with all the heads of state who welcomed me, but also at the very intense and animated public forums held with the people of those countries, in that spirit of close, human diplomacy that I like to practice.

My mandate was therefore not at all a quiet one, far from it. As for my constitutional responsibilities, I had to face the specific challenges of all minority governments in exercising the duties of the governor general. A moment in our political history that very likely made the population question our system and how our institutions function.

I have worked with two heads of government, the Right Honourable Paul Martin and the Right Honourable Stephen Harper. I would like to thank both of them. One for believing in my abilities in designating me the 27th governor general of Canada, and the other for the reciprocal respect that has marked our relationship over the past four years.

The difficult and dangerous mission in Afghanistan is a test for the entire country and especially for our soldiers and their families. Throughout my mandate, I have striven to share their anxieties, their pain and the weight of their mourning. I have also been amazed by their courage and the incredible generosity of the women and men who wear the Canadian uniform as they answer the call of duty and help build peace, security and stability in a region of the world that has been shaken by decades of deadly conflict. I will always be grateful to them for opening their hearts to me.

You are not born the governor general and commander-in-chief of Canada, you answer the call of destiny with a desire to serve your fellow Canadians and invest years of your life and all your energy to become these. With all of you by my side, all of you who have inspired me, I was able to embark on this adventure with the greatest hope and all the conviction I needed. THANK YOU!

Michaëlle Jean

