Greetings, members of His Highness’ family, colleagues from the Parliament of Canada: The Hon. Shelly Glover, The Hon. Chris Alexander, The Hon. Joe Oliver, Senator Salma Ataullahjan, MP Joe Daniel, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, and of course, special greetings to those of you watching from all across the country.

Your Highness, four years ago, we stood together, on this very site, for the foundation ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, Aga Khan Museum and Park.

I said then that these projects “promise to be another stunning addition to Canada’s growing array of architectural treasures.”

We celebrate today the fact that that ambitious promise is now a splendid reality.

For generations to come, this site and these buildings, as well as the fabulous collection of art and artefacts contained in the Aga Khan Museum, will be a source of inspiration, spiritual renewal and cultural awareness.

They will inspire not only Torontonians, but also all visitors to this place, Canadian and international.

I look forward to my first visit to the Aga Khan Museum in just a short while.

For all of this, and many more acts of goodwill, we will always be grateful to our esteemed fellow Canadian, His Highness Karim Aga Khan.

We celebrate today, then, not only the harmonious meeting of green gardens and glass galleries, or of Italian marble and Canadian maple.

We rejoice above all in the special spirit which fills this place and gives it its soul.

For a very, very long time this priceless gift will bring joy to the eyes and jubilation to the hearts of countless visitors.

À partir d’aujourd’hui, le Canada s’enrichit d’un nouveau point de contact avec la riche civilisation de l’Islam.

Je souhaite de tout cœur que le plus grand nombre possible de nos concitoyens et concitoyennes prendront avantage de cette avenue de connaissance et de partage qui s’ouvre devant nous.

Since his accession to the Imamat in 1957, as hereditary spiritual leader of the world’s fifteen million Ismaili Muslims, the Aga Khan has devoted an extraordinary amount of time, toil and resources to the ideals of Islamic culture and history.

In doing so, His Highness has greatly contributed to demystifying Islam, throughout the world, by stressing its social traditions of peace, of tolerance and of pluralism.
This is a vision of Islam of which all Canadians can be proud especially when a contrary and violent distortion of that vision so regularly dominates the news.

Your Highness, I remember well the wise words you spoke in the House of Commons, last February.

“Increasingly” you said then, “I believe the voices of civil society are voices for change, where change has been overdue. They have been voices of hope for people living in fear. They are voices that can help transform countries of crisis into countries of opportunity.”

This is a message that is both universal and eternal.

And it does us great honour, as Canadians, that it is now being propagated so powerfully from our country, thanks to you, Your Highness.

Indeed, the decision to establish this significant initiative in Canada reflects the deep and longstanding partnership between the Imamat and Canada.

This partnership stems from our shared commitment to pluralism, to civil society, human dignity, peace and understanding.

And the impressive facility we are inaugurating today is not the first contribution the Aga Khan has made to the Canadian urban landscape.

A first Ismaili Centre in Canada was opened in 1985, nearly thirty years ago, in Burnaby, British Columbia.

In December 2008, I had the pleasure, again in the company of His Highness, of inaugurating the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat on Sussex Drive, in Ottawa.

That building, which has also been singled out for its architectural elegance, is now the seat of the Aga Khan Foundation Canada, and the Global Centre for Pluralism.

The Centre, however, will be moving to a new location, also on Sussex Drive, at the former site of the Canadian War Museum.

By a happy coincidence, that move will be completed in 2017, the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Confederation.

I see strong symbolism in the conjunction of these two events.

They remind us that Confederation was, in fact, an early political application of the sense of pluralism which still guides today.

As many of you know, this year, 2014, happens to be the bicentennial of the birth of George Étienne Cartier, along with our first Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald, one of the principal architects of Confederation.

It was Cartier who most thoroughly articulated, and ultimately convinced, the other Fathers of Confederation that this new country would only succeed if it could accommodate the common interests and needs of people of different cultures and faiths through the development of a new, federal system.
C’est grâce à la vision de Cartier, grâce à sa foi dans le respect des différences et le partage des responsabilités communes, que la Confédération est née.

Et c’est comme cela que le Canada va continuer de faire l’admiration et l’envie du monde entier.

The wisdom that Cartier advanced one hundred and fifty years ago, the wisdom of acceptance and tolerance, are lessons that the Canadian Ismaili community teaches still.

In so doing, they, you, have contributed to keeping these fundamental values at the heart of our national identity.

And I am therefore delighted to join you in declaring the Ismaili Centre open.