Good morning to you all, and welcome. We in IDRC are proud to serve as hosts for this important and timely conference. More than that, we are honoured by your presence and grateful for your participation. And let me express our particular appreciation to the International Center for Transitional Justice—and to its President, Alex Boraine. I believe this event demonstrates both the value of our collaboration and the urgency of our work.

As you know, IDRC has been active for many years fostering and financing research in peacebuilding and democratic development. In part, our increasing concentration on post-conflict recovery simply reflects the course of world affairs over the past decade.

But our engagement in peacebuilding and transitional justice also gives expression to a genuinely wide and enduring Canadian interest in these matters—and perhaps even a Canadian talent, developed in our own national experience.

It’s a calling personified, for example, by Louise Arbour, who was recently appointed United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Madame Arbour has been a justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, and before that she was chief prosecutor in the International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Some of you might also know Philippe Kirsch, a Canadian diplomat who was appointed last year to be a judge on the International Criminal Court; in fact, Judge Kirsch was a leading figure in the negotiation of the Rome Statute.

The ICC, of course, represents a critical element of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation—the prosecution of those who have committed gross violations of human rights. The creation of the ICC, the criminal tribunals at The Hague, and the many different national forums, courts and commissions together constitute necessary and sometimes innovative mechanisms for transitional justice.

In short, we know something about prosecuting and punishing perpetrators.
We know much less about helping their victims. What we do know—thanks in good measure to your research and the support of the ICTJ—is that reparation for victims is both immensely complex and often desperately necessary.

Reparation, whether symbolic or material, embraces first of all a profoundly personal dimension: questions of hurt and sorrow, loss, and the reconstruction of private lives. And in any analysis, there are no more acute or disturbing injustices committed during conflict than the sufferings inflicted—sometimes systematically—on women and girls.

Reparation embraces as well a powerful social and political dimension: questions of disputed histories, social cohesion, and the reconstruction of public life and governmental legitimacy. After a conflict has subsided and a crisis passes, divided and dispirited societies have to organize a lasting reconciliation, a new sense of civic trust and shared future.

And the more ferocious the conflict has been, the more complex the transition will prove to be.

Every successful transition, each in its own circumstances and in its own details, will raise issues of high principle and hard politics; issues of morality and money; issues of institutional capacity, legitimacy, and will. Many of you have articulated these issues with insight and eloquence; many of you have laboured to solve them.

At IDRC—an institution founded more than 30 years ago to promote research for development, in developing countries, by developing-country researchers—we focus on making the practical connections between knowledge and policy, learning and action.

And with respect to the complicated issues of reparation and transition, this is where I hope we can direct our most productive energies—to informing public policy, and public education, so that societies can heal themselves, recover from strife, and build the habits and institutions of democratic governance.

As I say, these are challenges both of principle and of practicalities. In Canada, we have experienced some of these problems in our own public life. To cite just one example that you will be addressing in one of your panels, Canadians continue to struggle to resolve difficult issues of reparation for Canada’s Aboriginal people.

And by the way, this is a case proving that even a country of Canada’s unusual wealth, capacity and democratic tradition confronts a severe test when it approaches the real problems of repairing the wrongs of its own past. These are demanding and deeply sensitive dilemmas, wherever they arise.

One of those problems—familiar to everyone in this room—is the common tension between answering the imperatives of development and satisfying just claims for reparation. What we know is that it is not good enough for a society to promote development and to call that reparation. Achieving reparation can contribute substantially to development, without doubt. But the specific obligations and advantages of reparation stand apart from the general justification of...
development. Reparation policy and action need to be distinguished from development policy and action.

For those of us who support and carry out research for development and transition, this is precisely our mission—to explore and illuminate these issues, and then to present them to policymakers as real and practical choices.

We will not have completed our work simply by setting out problems and describing obstacles, essential as that is. To have effect, we must also help people and their governments enlarge their own capacity to devise, decide and deliver reparation, and so to advance the progress of transitional justice.

These are fiercely complex challenges, in concept and in practice. And this is urgent work.

So I will stop here. With all of you, I want to hear more in this day and a half of what we have learned—and of what we still need to know.

Again, I wish you well and thank you.