

Installation Address, 26 August 2020

Her Honour Salma Lakhani

Her Honour, the Honourable Salma Lakhani, was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Alberta in August 2020. This made her the first woman of South Asian heritage and the first Muslim to hold a viceregal office in Canada.

This address was given in Edmonton, Alberta.

The months since my investiture have been remarkable in a number of ways. First and foremost, the continuing pandemic has changed the way my office engages with the public, replacing the in-person contact of what is traditionally a highly social role with virtual gatherings. At the same time, I find myself in a unique position to see and celebrate the innovation and strength with which individuals and organizations are responding to the challenges of the day. My goal, as we move through the pandemic and beyond, is to bring all of my fellow citizens along with me on the journey. I hope to shine a light on the heroes and community leaders who are finding meaningful ways to make life better for others, while honouring the traditions of service and the protection of democratic principles that stand at the heart of the viceregal role in Canada.

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Premier Kenney; Chief Justice Fraser; Mr Speaker; Honourable Ministerial Colleagues; Honourable Daniel Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs; Members of the Legislative Assembly; British Consul General Carolyn Saunders; Elder Cecil Crier and Indigenous Leaders; Members of the Judiciary; Mr Alain Laurencelle, Chancellor of the Order of St John; distinguished guests; my fellow Albertans; friends and my dear family:

I regret that most of my close family members are unable to be here today, but hopefully they are able to watch online.

I wish to begin by respectfully acknowledging that we are meeting on Treaty 6 territory and a traditional meeting ground and home for many Indigenous people. We pay our respect to the First nation and Metis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with them. I thank Elder Cecil Crier for Blessings as I begin this extraordinary journey and I also thank Rocky Morin for the Honour Song he will be so generously offering later today.

C'est un grand honneur pour moi de m'adresser à vous aujourd'hui en tant que représentante de l'Alberta de sa Majesté La Reine Elizabeth II.

I am both honoured and humbled to be addressing all of you today. I

would like to begin by telling you a little about myself and by sharing how so much of my life has been shaped by a sense of hope.

I grew up in a house full of family in Kampala, Uganda, a beautiful place on the other side of the world. Indeed, there was a time when there were 15 of us living together under the same roof. Extended family and nuclear family were blended together. We didn't know the difference. We lived, we played, and we prayed together. We were simply family, and family was always close, in every sense of the word.

My father was a larger-than-life man and a spirited and industrious entrepreneur. My mother was resilient. She was only three when her own mother passed away and as a child. She often went to school without shoes and would complete her homework by candlelight, long after everyone was asleep.

Our Ismaili Muslim family was rooted in love and an unyielding set of values. The value that everyone deserved an equal opportunity in life and that serving the community was essential; the unshakeable belief that if, in this life there was indeed a golden ticket, it was education. My parents ensured that my two brothers and I studied hard over the years. My father made efforts to get to know our teachers and took the keenest interest in our academic progress, ensuring that we were being supported as best we could be.

I began my university studies in England in the fall of 1971. The following year, I returned to visit my parents in Kampala for the summer holidays. On a lovely tropical evening we were enjoying a family get-together when we heard the then Ugandan President Idi Amin delivering his radio broadcast that was to forever alter the trajectory of our lives. 90 days later, almost every single South Asian had been expelled from Uganda. We were no longer welcome in the only place we had ever known as home. In a matter of days, thousands of families lost livelihoods that had taken entire generations to build.

My extremely worried parents put me back on the first available flight out to England while I was still able to use my Ugandan

passport to travel. Even so, I was now a stateless ex-Ugandan. I did not know where my tuition fees or living expenses would come from, as my family had lost everything.

The British government was exceedingly kind and waived the fees for many of us in this situation, allowing us to complete our studies. My now-husband, Zaheer, who also grew up in Kampala, was in the same situation and he too was a beneficiary of this generosity. Three years later, while the both of us remained stateless, with little in the way of material means, we did have our education and hearts full of hope.

In June of 1977, as newlyweds and with British Government-issued travel documents instead of passports, my husband and I journeyed across the ocean to Edmonton where he had been offered an opportunity to pursue his postgraduate medical training. We landed in Edmonton at midnight, exhausted and alone. There were few streetlights and far fewer people than where we had just come from.

What we promised ourselves would be no more than two years in Alberta, has turned into a 43-year stay in a province we have grown to love deeply and are so grateful to call home. Every long and cold winter we remind ourselves that we are not here for the weather... but we are here for everything else!

I am incredibly proud to call myself a Canadian. Because Canada is the only place in the world where I am not required to be a person with only a single identity or a single story. I am the product of all of my chapters: an ex-Ugandan Canadian Ismaili Muslim of South Asian descent who came here with no country to call home.

Mine is the story of a person whose presence before you in this capacity today is made possible, even probable, by a single fact: that it happened in Canada. A place where the realization of unlikely stories occurs not by accident, but by design.

While my story may sound unique, it is also the story of Alberta: a place where individual stories are woven into our collective tapestry, a province whose narrative is defined by the generations of stories of hope.

Nellie McClung who championed women's suffrage and Dr Thelma Chalifoux, the first Indigenous woman to be appointed to the Canadian Senate, are but two amongst so many amazing people who have contributed to making us the province and the country that we are today.

And in that illustrious group I would include the 18 extraordinary Albertans who have preceded me as Lieutenant Governors for the Province of Alberta. From the Honourable George Hedley Vicars Bulyea, our very first Lieutenant Governor who assumed this office in 1905, all the way to my immediate predecessor, every one of them has left their distinctive stamp, enhancing our Alberta story.

Our province has much to be grateful for to the Honourable Lois Mitchell, including her many years of dedicated service and her contributions in so many areas of human endeavour. The initiatives that she has so thoughtfully championed, and which I sincerely hope she will continue to remain engaged with, will benefit Albertans for decades to come. On a personal note I want thank her for her warm friendship and the wise counsel that she has so graciously extended to me during the transition period. I realise I have very big shoes to fill!

I am also deeply mindful that I am assuming this role during what is undoubtedly a unique and very difficult time. We are, individually and collectively, dealing with the devastation that COVID-19 has inflicted on us, as individuals and as communities, in many different ways. So many of us are dealing with financial uncertainty, anxious over what the future holds. Others of us have had to deal with the pain of distancing ourselves from those near and dear to us. A number of us have also suffered the loss of loved ones to COVID, and to them I express deepest sympathies and prayers for courage.

But despite these significant challenges, if this cloud should have any silver lining, it has taught us that in relying on the tight bonds of community, like a large and resilient family, we can weather the most difficult of storms. From the kindness of restaurant owners delivering food to those in need, to the sacrifice of frontline workers risking their health for the wellbeing of our communities from Fort Vermillion to Fort Macleod, we have seen the depths of care that exist within our communities and the capacity for that care to sustain us all.

This challenging time has reminded us of our collective strength, and we will need that resolve going forward. These events have also reminded us, poignantly, that the richness of this province and indeed this country lies in its diversity, from our indigenous sisters and brothers to those who have come here from distant shores seeking better lives. As Maya Angelou so beautifully put it, 'Diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value.'

As a Muslim Canadian, I share my faith with a billion and a half others across the globe. As many of you will know, this part of Canada has been home to Muslims since the late 1800s, when immigrants from what is now Lebanon, Syria, and surrounding areas settled here.

It says a lot about our Province that the very first mosque in all of North America was built right here in Edmonton some 80 years ago, close to today's Royal Alexandra Hospital. Historical accounts about this first mosque speak to the generosity and the coming together of Albertans of all different faiths who worked with their fellow Muslim Albertans to bring this building to life, reminding us that wanting for one another what we want for ourselves serves to enrich all of us.

I am constantly reminded of, and grateful for, the values of pluralism, inclusion, and care that continue to guide our province and country. Every time we proudly sing our national anthem and promise Canada to 'Stand on Guard for Thee', we should reflect on the fundamental principles of this great nation that are enshrined in our Charter and Constitution. It is these very values we are promising to stand on guard for, and in that context let us always remain vigilant and call attention when we see these values being undermined.

My own voluntary efforts, which have largely been at the grassroots over the past many years, have been deeply influenced by my own life journey and my lasting gratitude to those who reached out to me in my own desperate time of need.

I have been passionate about women's health, education relating to human rights and, in particular, making higher learning accessible to newcomers and others who have been marginalised by life's unpredictable challenges. Helping those in need take that first step up the ladder to better opportunities is one way of making a lasting difference in the lives of so many. It ensures that these individuals

become even more productive members of the community and much better able to provide for their entire families going forward.

I have gained so much not only because of the substance of the work I have been involved with, but because of the remarkable, resilient, and inspiring individuals I have been privileged to meet along the way. Many have been through far more horrific experiences than the one my family had to endure, but all of them echo the sentiment about the generosity and spirit of care that guide this province and country. I am repeatedly reminded of the commitment of fellow Albertans who give so generously of their resources, their time, and their intellect – be it around boardroom tables, in the community, or through simple everyday acts of care and kindness that raise our collective spirits and our sense of hope.

Coming as I do from Uganda, let me share with you an African expression that is worth remembering. It is the term ‘*ubuntu*’, which very simply translated means ‘I am because we are.’ It speaks to the ties that bind us as a community and reminds us that our futures and our successes are closely intertwined.

We have much to be proud of, but our striving for justice and equity does not end here. We must continue to work together to make this province the best it can be, to ensure that all Albertans are able to achieve their full potential and feel a sense of belonging and promise, regardless of means or ability, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, regardless of race or religion, regardless of political affiliation. Let us commit to uphold the values of a province that carries everyone forward.

As an urban dweller there is so much I have to learn about the communities that make up our province and contribute to its successes, including in particular our rural citizens. As well, during my four decades in Alberta, I have come to share the greatest respect for our women and men in uniform, from our first responders to members of the military who put their own lives at risk as they selflessly serve to protect us all.

I hope to meet with many people across the province in the months and years to come, and to hear of their aspirations, concerns, and stories.

I also sincerely believe that there is a need for many of us to better educate ourselves about the rich history of our Indigenous communities in order to better understand our present and collective futures. The Lessons of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with recommendations, published five years ago, remind all of us of the work that still needs to be done.

In my time in office I look forward to many opportunities to connect with the diversity of people that make us the Alberta that we are today.

As your nineteenth Lieutenant Governor, I want to share that on this most significant and important occasion, steeped in tradition and deeply linked to the history of our province and our country, I promise my fellow Albertans that I will do my best to fulfil my responsibilities and the trust that has been placed in me.

I have spent many days reflecting on the immense significance and incredible privilege of being appointed as Her Majesty’s representative in this great province, almost 50 years after the British government graciously allowed us to complete an education that brought us here to this remarkable country and extraordinary

province, which opened its arms and became a home to a young couple who arrived in the middle of the night, from a world away, unsure of what the future would bring.

It has been many lifetimes since I lived in Kampala with a family of 15, but what I learned then, and what I will carry with me every day, is the enduring belief that we are all part of a bigger story. We are all bound together in our successes and our setbacks, our trials and our triumphs, and the measure of any society rests in its commitment to lifting up even its most vulnerable in recognition of our shared responsibility to one another and this place we call home.

It is my hope that as we begin this journey together, our generations, and those that follow, will always strive to realize the very best of what our province can be.

Thank you! *Merci beaucoup!*

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

And God save the Queen.