



Hon. Deepak Obhrai, P.C., M.P.
Member of Parliament - Calgary East

Media Release

November 9, 2013

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**SPEECH BY HON. DEEPAK OBHRAI, P.C., M.P., PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO
THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FOR INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS
AT THE 13TH NATIONAL DIWALI CELEBRATION TORONTO**

Rt. Honourable Prime Minister,
Excellencies,
Honorable Religious dignitaries,
My Parliamentary Colleagues,
Dear friends
Ladies & gentlemen,

Welcome to the 13th National Diwali Celebration.
Happy Diwali to all of you.

As you know, the National Diwali Celebration has been held in Ottawa on the past 12 occasions. This year we have brought the event to Toronto. to give more people the opportunity to witness and appreciate the National Diwali Celebration.

Toronto is home to more than 150 Temples. So this is a great place for our community to share their religious and cultural heritage with fellow Canadians.

We have come a long way since I inaugurated this event back in 1998. As I stand here for the 13th year and look around this large auditorium with an overflowing crowd, I can be happy that we have achieved what we set out to do.

Today, Diwali is truly a national Canadian celebration. People have travelled from all across the country to be a part of this national celebration. We not only have people here from the Greater Toronto Area, but we have representatives from Montreal, Ottawa and from Calgary. All in all, we have over 5,000 people here today. I welcome all of you.

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We have more than 40 religious and community organizations & media outlets, who have come together as the sponsors of the 13th National Diwali Celebration. I shall be acknowledging them later on in the programme.

Together, they represent the very best of multicultural Canada, where people from a multitude of ethnic backgrounds harmoniously co-exist in this great urban landscape, joyfully sharing their history and heritage with others. Events like these make Canada the greatest country in the world.

Many of you know that on September 19th this year, on the advice of the Prime Minister I was sworn-in as a Member of the Queen's Privy Council of Canada in the distinguished presence of the Governor General, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs

At the swearing-in ceremony held at Rideau Hall, I took the oath of allegiance using the Hindu Holy Book, the Bhagavad Gita. I am proud to tell you that this was the first time the Bhagavad Gita entered Rideau Hall and it was officially signed by Prime Minister & Governor General.

Since I started this event in 1998, many people have helped me make it successful and stood by me with their support and encouragement. I would like to recognize the Late Shri Gopal of Ottawa, who was one of the coordinators, for the National Diwali Celebration for many years, popularly known those days as "Parliament Diwali."

Another milestone was in 2011, when Canada Post issued a commemorative Diwali stamp, which the Prime Minister and myself inaugurated. In the audience we have Deepak Chopra, President & CEO of Canada Post, our thanks to you, Sir.

I am also thankful to the temples, organizations, banks for their continued support and financial support of this great event.

Prime Minister, the success of this event has been possible not only by the presence of the community members gathered here, but by the financial contributions of temples, community, and business organizations, institutions, and individuals.

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One person I am most thankful to is Prime Minister Harper, whose unwavering support has helped elevate this event in stature to be recognized as a truly Canadian national celebration.

This is the 7th time that Prime Minister Harper has attended this Diwali celebration as Prime Minister. Going further back, he has also attended this celebration as the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Prime Minister, on behalf of Indo Canadians and South Asians across Canada, and on behalf of the temples and the community organizations from coast to coast, I thank you for your participation and support to the National Diwali Celebration. And it is our wish that you will attend many more National Diwali Celebrations as our Prime Minister.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to invite the Prime Minister to light the traditional Diwali lamp, which symbolizes the light that banishes the dark and ushers in a new year.

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