

disparities as well as polarities among the leadership of the region, concedes De Florio, whose firm brokers real estate development in Latin America, but no more so than in “other large, emerging markets.”

The region presents a tapestry of urgent as well as much more long-term needs.

Disasters such as the devastation wreaked by hurricanes Stan and Wilma last fall in Central America and Mexico have been met by Canadian assistance. Private sector and non-governmental organizations from Canada collaborated in efforts in the wake of the destruction, including an airdrop to Guatemala of donated baby supplies and tents for temporary shelter, while the federal government provided immediate aid funding.

Decades of development work led by Canadian church groups, human rights organizations and NGOs, many in cooperation with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), in countries such as Bolivia, Honduras and Haiti have created a positive reputation for Canada, based not only on appreciation of its building of local schools, health clinics and water treatment plants, but on deeply held social values.

“Canada is often seen as an interesting—and inspiring—case in regard to issues such as Indigenous and minority rights, bilingualism and multiculturalism, status of women and social policy,” comments Victor Armony, an Argentinean immigrant who is a professor of sociology at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and editor of the *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*.

Help for Haiti

Political upheavals in the region have drawn Canadian assistance at key junctures. Canada’s whole-of-government effort in Haiti, for example, has put Canada at the forefront in offering security assistance, development aid and diplomatic support there, most recently playing a critical role in assisting with preparations for the national elections, with \$29.5 million in support as well as plans to send up to 300 election observers.

Haiti is the largest recipient of Canadian assistance in the hemisphere, particularly in the areas of health, education and agriculture.

A historical role in international peacekeeping has also seen Canada leading the security effort in Haiti, a country that has suffered years of debilitating upheaval. Canadian police forces, including the RCMP, as part of the United Nations mission in the country, are helping to train Haitian police and rebuild damaged police stations and prisons, while Canadian advisers work with the Haitian Ministry of Justice on judicial reform and the restoration of the rule of law.

Darren Schemmer, Director General of Policy and Planning in the Americas branch at CIDA, says the turbulent situation in Haiti has required a careful, consensus-building approach. Schemmer says that Canada has “played a leadership role in bringing donors together in a coordinated, cooperative framework,” in areas such as agroforestry and school programs.

Ties between Canada and Haiti were highlighted by the widely enthusiastic reception given in both countries to the appointment of Canada’s new Governor General, Haitian-born Michaëlle Jean, a descendant of slaves and daughter of exiles from the country.

Madame Jean became an immediate standard-bearer for Canadian values and her appointment served as evidence of Canada’s mature relationship with the region. “The Governor General’s appointment symbolizes some of our links, linguistic and otherwise,” observes John Foster, a principal researcher at The North-South Institute in Ottawa.

Democracy on the move

The example of Haiti underlines that truly alleviating poverty requires democratic stability. In a region still marked by great inequities, Canada focuses much effort on governance.

While free elections are now more or less a regional norm, Canada continues to encourage respect for the rule of law, greater transparency and the inclusion of Indigenous people and women in the political process. “It’s a natural role for us,” notes Boehm.



Photo: CP (Jose Luis Magana)

Hurricane Stan devastation: People are pulled over rails to cross the destroyed international bridge on the Mexico-Guatemala border at Ciudad Hidalgo, Mexico. Canadian assistance helped communities affected by raging flood waters and mudslides in the wake of the storm in October 2005.