

Some of the key priorities include:

- strengthening the bilateral dialogue with key markets, including through visits by the Prime Minister and Minister for International Trade to China and India;
- negotiating foreign investment promotion and protection agreements with China and India;
- working with partner departments and provinces/territories as part of a whole-of-Canada approach to the opportunities and challenges presented by emerging markets;
- increasing the focus on market intelligence that goes beyond identifying export opportunities to analyse how global and regional value chains operate and to assess the opportunities for Canadian strategic placement within those chains—whether through an expanded service presence, investment and joint venture activities, or knowledge partnerships;
- establishing a policy agenda that facilitates business, not only through enhanced market access but also through a new focus on regulatory questions;
- reviewing the suite of business services offered to Canadian firms to ensure they respond to the needs of the business community; and
- targeting outreach in Canada to draw more SMEs into beneficial activity or partnering in emerging markets.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH ON CANADA'S TRADE AGENDA

Openness and transparency are key to an informed dialogue between Canadians and their government. The International Trade component of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT [IT]) manages a range of permanent and ad hoc consultative mechanisms to ensure that the views, priorities and interests of Canadians at large, other levels of government, industry, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public interest groups are taken into account in the development of Canada's trade agenda.

In response to evolving needs, and as part of the government's continuing efforts to enhance transparency, the Department has conducted an assessment of the effectiveness and adequacy of its consultations and outreach mechanisms. The evaluation was undertaken by the Office of the Inspector General between February and September 2004, and a final report with a departmental response will be made available to the public in 2005. A new approach to consultations will balance and distinguish between outreach and consultation sessions; provide for timely input from the people across areas of interest and with up-to-date knowledge; include real-time briefings during critical phases of negotiation; incorporate complex and cutting-edge issues in the trade agenda that are reflected in the tools, services and agreements currently being negotiated; reflect the ability of organizations to be represented during consultations; and where applicable, establish a feedback system to reflect the government's accountability to Canadians. Implementation of redesigned trade consultation mechanisms is expected in 2005.

Parliamentarians are an integral part of DFAIT (IT)'s consultations. By encouraging public awareness and understanding of international trade, as well as citizen participation in public consultations, parliamentarians play a critical role in developing trade strategies and policies that reflect the priorities and interests of Canadians. The work of parliamentary committees serves as a key instrument in helping parliamentarians increase their knowledge and understanding of Canada's trade strategy, as well as contribute to the development and refinement of this strategy. Government responses to many of the committee reports, coupled with testimonies and briefings from ministers and senior government officials during committee hearings, provide another opportunity for the government to keep citizens and parliamentarians fully informed about the strategic orientation and policy direction of Canada's trade agenda.