

No development better exemplifies the trend towards greater self-assertiveness and confidence in the Pacific region than the notion of an evolving tangible Pacific community. It has been given many names, including Pacific "Economic" Community, but while economic activities remain at the core of any eventual mandate, in the broadest sense it is a profoundly political phenomenon.

This was clear from the discussion held at Australian National University from September 15 to 18 in the seminar set up with the blessing of the Japanese and Australian governments to discuss the concept. It was attended by persons from the academic world and the private sector, as well as officials from governments acting in a private capacity, including a senior official from my Department.

In his conclusions the Chairman -- Sir John Crawford -- noted that while considerable regional interchanges had already developed and were expanding, there was still some distance to go to strengthen this process and to involve governments. He recommended the formation of an official and informal committee to co-ordinate information exchanges and to set up task forces to investigate possibilities for co-operation in specific areas. He thought that further seminars and discussions were necessary before the eventual emergence of any official organization.

The Australian National University seminar confirmed that a Pacific community, in any developed sense, is still some distance away, and that considerable community-building is still required. This is where cultural and educational aspects of foreign policy come particularly into play before the core economic activities can be developed. Expanded tourism, transportation and communication facilities are also a prerequisite.

While much remains to be done politically, especially vis-à-vis some ASEAN countries, considerable will and momentum has developed behind the concept since it was revived by late Prime Minister Ohira almost two years ago. No one has yet any clear notion of what shape the community will eventually take, but it is likely to be unique in human experience -- possibly more a multi-layered and informal mix of associations and linkages, than a formal inter-governmental organization, with different groupings of countries participating in different activities.

Whatever happens, Canada intends to participate in the evolution of the concept from the outset. We are approaching the issues of membership, organization and the eventual economic and other responsibilities of a Pacific community cautiously, but with open minds and in a positive fashion. In doing so, we will bring to bear the general foreign policy approaches in the political, cultural and economic spheres that I mentioned above.