

Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific was to attend the APEC summit in November in Seattle with the Prime Minister and the Minister for International Trade. APEC, like the region's explosive growth, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Since its creation five years ago, it has become the region's main forum for discussions on regional growth, economic interdependence, strengthening the multilateral trading system and reducing barriers to trade in goods, services and investment. It has also become a major vehicle for co-operation on sectoral issues, such as environmental problems.

During my first overseas trip in January to Hong Kong, south China, Thailand and Japan, I was able to discuss many of these issues in more detail. These are the fastest-growing and among the most important markets for Canada. As I have already mentioned, their needs correspond with many of our skills and expertise.

We need to devise ways to target government programs and resources effectively, to assist Canadian companies to be even more successful international players. Of particular concern to this government is the role of small and medium-sized businesses. They have the potential to be the growth engines of the future but often lack the critical mass, the financial resources or the technical expertise to penetrate foreign markets.

The Government must help to facilitate Canadian businesses to access the market in the Asia-Pacific region. We do have some excellent examples of practical initiatives business and government are undertaking together. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong is planning Canada-Hong Kong Trade and Investment Week. This event is appropriately being titled Profiting from Partnership, and will take place both in Hong Kong and Guangzhou in early May. This initiative, which has the full backing of government and industry, has been designed to create networks between business people in Canada, Hong Kong and China. Moreover, it will educate Canadians about business opportunities in Asia.

As the Minister for International Trade outlined recently, in co-operation with the Minister of Industry, he has instituted a full review of this matter. The aim is to ensure that our small and medium-sized firms have access to the tools and the environment needed to compete. Export and venture financing, delivery of market information, co-ordination of government programs and the pooling of private-sector resources -- all of these issues are now on the table. By adopting a more market-driven approach to trade development -- one that sees government as an export facilitator rather than an export leader -- we can use market signals to help set our real trade priorities. We need to develop a national strategy to tap into the Asia-Pacific