

Although Canada's ties with Latin America were founded on trade and investment links, we know that commercial relationships do not grow in a vacuum and can in fact flounder without a strong political relationship. Indeed, positive political relations can be indispensable in creating the receptive environment that is so vital in today's highly competitive world. We place significant importance on supporting and promoting political stability, peace and security in the region. It is through economic growth, investment and trade that we can achieve this objective.

We have also placed special emphasis in recent years on developing and expanding our bilateral political relations, ensuring that we have regular exchanges at all levels. We are currently consulting with our colleagues in the region on vital issues such as debt, the new MTN round, the world crisis in the agricultural trade sector and on global trade issues.

Indicative of the importance we assign to the region is the number of visits to Latin America by senior Canadian ministers. These have included the visit by the Right Honourable Joe Clark to Venezuela, Argentina and Uruguay in September 1986; the visit by the Honourable John Wise to Mexico in the fall of 1986; the Honourable Marcel Masse's visit to Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico in April of 1987; and the recent visit to Bolivia by the Honourable Jake Epp. Finally, the Right Honourable Joe Clark visited the five countries of Central America in late November of last year.

It is not my intention to inundate you with facts and figures. Suffice it to say that Latin America and the Caribbean region represents a major long term market for Canada and through events such as this conference and efforts of business persons such as yourselves we can strengthen our commercial links with the region and realize a larger share of this market.

I am particularly pleased with the progress achieved by the Council for the Americas since its recent inception. The Council can serve as an important voice for the views and concerns of a broad and expanding segment of the Canadian business community. It is our hope that you can establish a dialogue and a close working relationship with your members and your colleagues in the private sector. We ask you to inform us of their specific interests and concerns with respect to their business activities in your region. We also plan to consult with you on the broader policy issues affecting our trading relationship.