

This Agreement is being phased in over ten years, and while it is too early to deliver a report card on its results, the indicators are good. For example, since January 1989, over 250,000 new jobs have been created. The unemployment rate fell in 1989 to 7.5%, the lowest level since 1980. And before the agreement was a year old, both parties agreed, at the request of our business communities, to accelerate tariff reductions on products worth 6 billion dollars in trade, with another round of negotiations planned.

The government of Canada is also committed to forging stronger, political and economic ties with all our partners in this hemisphere. The signal for our renewed commitment lay in our joining the OAS.

And foremost in our minds was an expansion of our bilateral relations with Mexico, which happily coincides with the priority given by president Salinas to improve relations with Canada. I am pleased to say that solid progress has already been made this year in building a bigger and better relationship.

In January of this year, the two governments held joint ministerial meetings in Ottawa, with the participation of seven Mexican and ten Canadian cabinet ministers. This unprecedented level of participation has laid the groundwork for expanded relations across a wide spectrum of sectors.

The recent visit to Mexico by Prime Minister Mulroney, his first official visit to any Latin American country, was a further important step in the strengthening of this relationship. The Prime Minister has mentioned to me that his meetings with President Salinas were both enjoyable and very productive.

The ten agreements signed during his visit will provide the basis for the further expansion of economic, commercial and other important links between us. In particular, the new memorandum of understanding establishes a framework for consultations on trade and investment, which should facilitate the expansion of trade and investment flows between our countries in key sectors of interest to our exporters.

Export financing facilities under the Canadian Export Development Corporation have also been expanded this year to support potential commercial transactions. An additional 100 million dollars is now available to provide additional support for Mexican buyers of Canada goods and services.