

EYES ON THE AMERICAS

Canada's symbolic, political, business, personal and cultural connections within Latin America and the Caribbean are growing.

A local troupe performing Latin dances had a surprise for Canadian visitors to Cajamarca, Peru, one evening last May. When the show ended, the dancers came to the edge of the stage to unfurl what appeared to be a Canadian flag—but wasn't. In the middle of Peru's vertical-striped, red-and-white flag, where the country's coat of arms should have been, had been painted a Canadian maple leaf, making it a perfect amalgam of the two flags.

It was a gesture not lost on Denise Brown, who led the visiting group of students and faculty from the University of Calgary in her role as director of Latin American Studies there. "It was truly a bonding experience," says Brown, whose field-school students make annual trips to Latin America.

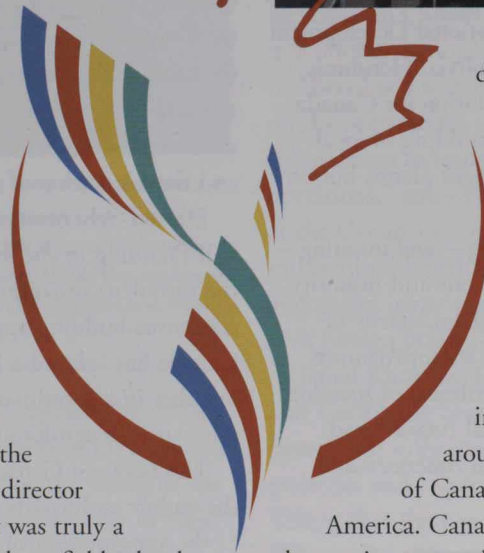
Many such experiences flow from Canada's growing connections with the dynamic cultures of the Americas region, which has more than 500 million people, comprises Central and South America and the Caribbean, and offers new vistas of opportunity for constructive partnership.

Long a champion of human rights, democratic process and poverty alleviation in this politically complex region, Canada today helps drive the effort to restore stability to Haiti, fosters a growing partnership with the regional powerhouse of Brazil and promotes the strengthening of governance throughout the Americas.

"This is our neighbourhood," says Peter Boehm, an assistant deputy minister at Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) and former Canadian ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS). For Boehm, who was the Prime Minister's personal representative to the Fourth Summit of the Americas held last November in Mar del Plata, Argentina, "it is in our interest to have a strong and



Photo: CP (Fred Charrand)



democratic hemisphere and we are doing our part in a committed and focused way."

Ties that bind

Canadians have a number of historical, political, symbolic, business, cultural, faith-based and personal links with the region. Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson's initiative to expand Canadian aid around the world supported a great deal of Canadian-led development work in Latin

America. Canada became a permanent observer to the OAS in 1972 and a full member of the organization in 1990. At that time, the end of a number of dictatorships and the stabilization of economies in the region were allowing for new relationships with the affluent North America, which had previously been oriented more toward European and Asian alliances. In 2001, the Third Summit of the Americas was held in Quebec City.

Commerce with the region has expanded significantly. In 2004, Canada had \$7.2 billion in exports to Latin America and the Caribbean, a 26 percent increase from the previous year, while more than 19 percent of the country's direct foreign investment, some \$85-billion, was in the region.

"Canadian governments should always be closely watching events in our own hemisphere, for all sorts of reasons, including self-interest," remarks Oakland Ross, a Latin American correspondent for *The Globe and Mail* in the 1980s.

Neal De Florio, president of Monarca Property Corp. in Toronto, believes there is enormous untapped economic potential in Latin America. There are political and social

Leaders of the Fourth Summit of the Americas gather for a plenary session in Mar Del Plata, Argentina, on November 5, 2005.