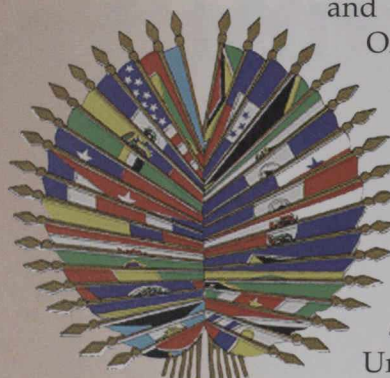




Removing landmines in Nicaragua, January 29. The OAS is assisting in the operation.

Canada and the Organization of American States

The OAS is the world's oldest regional organization, founded in 1890 as the International Union of American Republics. In 1910, this organization became the Pan American Union. In April 1948, nearly 40 years later, 21 countries joined together to establish the OAS. Canada became a Permanent Observer in 1972, and it joined as the Organization's 33rd member on January 8, 1990.



Since then Canada has become an active and respected leader within the OAS in several areas, including landmine removal, institutional renewal, the promotion of human rights and combating the trade in illicit drugs. Canada has been influential in generating reforms in the Organization. One notable advance was the creation of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, which has overseen elections and managed hemispheric demining programs; currently heading the Unit is Canadian Elizabeth Spehar. Other innovations included promotion of dialogue among hemispheric parliamentarians, development of guidelines for the participation of civil society and adoption of greater fiscal responsibility. Canada continues to promote wider institutional renewal as it strives to make the OAS more relevant, more dynamic and better able to respond to the changing realities of the region.

The premier political forum for hemispheric policy discussions and decision making, the OAS plays a key part in implementing many Summit of the Americas commitments. It is also a leading regional force for strengthening democracy and encouraging sustainable development. Particularly important for Canada, the OAS is assisting in the regional eradication of anti-personnel mines.



Canada hosts the Americas

In 1999, Canada moved firmly to the centre of the hemispheric stage as we hosted a series of major inter-American events. First was last summer's celebration of youth, sport and culture at the Pan American Games in Winnipeg, from July 23 to August 8. During the Games, the Canada Place exhibition showcased our country's role in the Hemisphere, and this was where Foreign Affairs Minister Axworthy launched the **AmericasCanada.org** Web site, focussing on activities leading up to the 2001 Summit of the Americas.

Next came the Ninth Conference of Spouses of Heads of State and Government of the Americas, held in Ottawa from September 29 to October 1. Canada's successful organization of the Conference helped advance our priorities on numerous issues, including child development, health and education.

As Chair of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations for the first 18 months of the process, Canada hosted the FTAA Trade Ministers' Meeting in Toronto on November 3 and 4. Immediately preceding it, from November 1 to 3, was the Fifth Americas Business Forum, organized by Canadian business associations with assistance from the federal government. At the Forum, the Americas' business community generated concrete, practical proposals for facilitating hemispheric commerce. Participants also had the opportunity to talk with Trade Ministers and hence to contribute to the FTAA process. At the same time, Americas' corporate leaders took advantage of the Forum to promote their companies and develop strategic international business contacts.

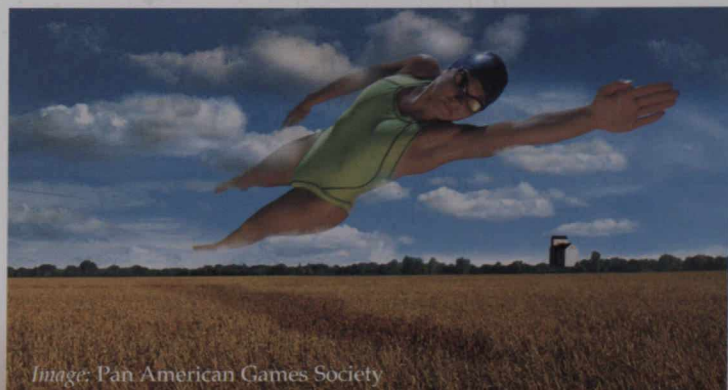


Image: Pan American Games Society