

# LATIN SENSIBILITY, CANADIAN CREDIBILITY

**Roots in Latin America give Canadian diplomats José Herran-Lima and Guillermo Rishchynski a different perspective on the region.**

A career in the far-flung world of the Canadian foreign service can sometimes lead back home.

Two new Canadian heads of mission in Latin America—José Herran-Lima, Canada’s Ambassador to Panama, and Guillermo Rishchynski, Canada’s Ambassador to Brazil—have deep roots in the region.

With their innate understanding of the history, politics, culture and language there, the two diplomats have hit the ground running in their assignments. And both are keen to draw on their Latin backgrounds to help forge stronger ties between Canada and its hemispheric neighbours.

Mr. Herran-Lima grew up in Bogota, Colombia, the son of a Brazilian mother and a Colombian father working in his country’s

foreign service. When he was 16, the family moved to New York City. The bits of news that Mr. Herran-Lima read about Canada in the newspapers there intrigued him and he decided to move to Toronto in 1974, becoming a citizen three years later.

Attending Osgoode Hall Law School in 1980, Mr. Herran-Lima became interested in the Canadian foreign service when he saw an ad in the school paper asking people to apply. “That year there wasn’t a lot of hiring and I was put on the waiting list. A year later, I was accepted.”

Mr. Herran-Lima asked not to be sent to Latin America, because “I wanted to see other parts of the world first.” Nonetheless, with his legal training and Spanish, his first assignment was a three-month stint

in 1981 helping consular officers in Lima, Peru, deal with a large number of cases of Canadians charged with drug offences. At the embassy in Lima, he met a Canadian secretary, Susan Magee, who would, upon her return to Canada, become his wife. Mr. Herran-Lima has since been posted to Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Guatemala and Brazil.

In Panama, his first assignment as ambassador,



photo: FAC

Canadian Ambassador to Panama José Herran-Lima stands at the side of the Panama Canal with a transiting ship in the background. Canada is the seventh most frequent user of the Canal.

Mr. Herran-Lima is working to build on existing ties. “Canada’s historic links with Europe and the United States take up a lot of space,” he says. “There are many more linkages that can be made with Latin America.”

The key is person-to-person contact, Mr. Herran-Lima says. And that is on the rise. The number of Canadian tourists visiting Panama’s tropical resorts and of Panamanian students choosing to study in Canada is rapidly growing, and Canada is the seventh most frequent user of the Panama Canal. During the 1980s, when their country was under a dictatorship, many Panamanians left for Canada, but they have kept their ties after their return to Panama.

Guillermo Rishchynski, while Canadian-born, spent his early years in Panama, his mother’s homeland.



Presenting credentials: Ambassador José Herran-Lima presents his letters of appointment to His Excellency Martin Torrijos Espina, President of Panama, at the Palacio de las Garzas in Panama City.

photo: courtesy of the Office of the President of the Republic of Panama