

What were our priorities in joining? Why did we think the OAS and the region were important to Canada? What do we see as the primary areas of accomplishment over the last three and a half years? All these questions can be answered in terms of three broad themes: democratic development and human rights, economic development, and co-operative security.

Democratic Development

The most significant development that inspired Canada to join this organization was the wave of democracy sweeping across the Americas. Once a region of the world dominated by authoritarian rule, it was turning increasingly to civilian governments, holding regular elections and building a true culture of democracy.

Two years ago, when we met in Santiago, I was extremely gratified to find myself sitting among the representatives of 33 other democratically elected governments. Only Cuba remained outside.

But we have learned that the continuation of democracy in the hemisphere cannot be taken for granted. Last year, when we assembled in Nassau, we felt a shared pain at the blow that had been dealt to democracy by the events in Haiti and Peru. Over the past year, with the holding of elections, Peru appears to be back on track.

The situation in Haiti, I regret to say, has yet to be resolved. But lately there have been some very encouraging signs and I am convinced that the solution is within reach.

Just over a week ago, Canadians were extremely saddened and deeply disturbed to learn of another "self-coup" -- this time by President Serrano in Guatemala.

I was extremely pleased to see the OAS respond swiftly and effectively. In so doing, notice was served that such breaches of democracy will not be tolerated by the OAS.

And this proves just how much our hemisphere and this organization have changed. The day when a blind eye is turned to a coup d'état in a neighbouring country is long past. No longer can those who wrest power from the people expect to be welcomed with open arms into the councils of the Americas. The examples of Haiti, Peru and now Guatemala have strengthened the will of the OAS to take ownership of the issue and the ideal of democracy.

With the political commitment of its members and the new instruments adopted by the OAS in Asuncion, Santiago and