

Canada Hosts the Americas

Canada's future is directly linked — geographically, economically and politically — to that of its hemispheric partners.

In 1999, Canada began hosting major inter-American events leading to the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001. The first event was a celebration of youth, sport, and culture at the Pan American Games, held in July and August 1999 in Winnipeg.

The second event was the ninth Conference of Spouses of Heads of State and Government of the Americas, which Canada hosted in the fall of 1999 in Ottawa. This helped to advance Canada's 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 — from early 1998 to late 1999 — Canada hosted the FTAA Trade Ministers' Meeting in Toronto in November 1999.

The government also helped Canadian business associations to organize the fifth Americas Business Forum, which was held in Toronto immediately preceding the trade ministers' meeting. At the forum, business leaders from the Americas generated concrete proposals for encouraging trade and provided input into the FTAA process through dialogue with trade ministers. They also had the opportunity to promote their own businesses and develop strategic international contacts.

As the FTAA's first chair, Canada provided impetus for achieving concrete progress by 2000. As a result, the November 1999 trade ministers' meeting announced that advances had been made in improving access to hemispheric markets, better investment protection, and more reliable procedures for settling disputes.

Canada is one of the major industrialized nations that depend heavily on trade. One in three Canadian jobs is linked to it. Canada has been a strong advocate of the FTAA as an historic opportunity to promote regional prosperity and increase Canadian business activity and employment. Excluding exports to the United States, Canadian exports to FTAA countries totalled more than \$7 billion in 1997. Canadian direct investment in this group quadrupled between 1992 and 1997 to \$25 billion.