

Canada-Korea Relations

Canadian interest in the Republic of Korea stems from the Canadian desire to ensure continued stability on the Korean peninsula and to develop and protect our growing commercial and other interests.

Canada's involvement in the Korean peninsula and with its people began in the late 19th century when Canadian missionaries worked there in the fields of education and health care. Official involvement came in 1947 when Canada was a member of the United Nations Commission supervising free elections in Korea. Formal recognition followed in 1948.

Canada contributed 26,791 troops, the fourth-largest contingent, to the UN Forces in the 1950-53 Korean War, and suffered 516 fatalities.

The most fundamental element in the relationship rests in Canadian support for the political and territorial integrity of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) against the claims of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) to be the sole legitimate government on the peninsula.

During the 1980s, the bilateral relationship has been strengthened by numerous high-level visits. Most recent was the visit of Canada's external affairs minister to Seoul in September 1990 and the Korean trade and industry minister's visit to Canada in April 1991.

These high-level exchanges are reinforced by the presence in Canada of over 80,000 residents of Korean origin; a constant influx of Korean immigrants, particularly in the entrepreneurial class; and travel by people in business, families and, increasingly, tourists.

Annual political consultations at the senior official level provide a useful opportunity to ascertain Korean views on international and regional questions and demonstrate that Canada considers Korea to be a valued partner in dialogue.

In 1989, the trade ministers of each country agreed that consultations should occur regularly. A joint economic and commercial memorandum of understanding has been negotiated and will be signed during the July 1991 visit of President Roh. Annual meetings of the Canada-Korea Business Council also provide a forum for strengthening business contacts and pursuing commercial opportunities.

Trade relations between Canada and Korea are governed by a 1966 bilateral trade agreement and by mutual membership in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Canada and Korea give each other most-favoured-nation treatment. In addition, Korea is accorded general preferential tariff treatment.

Trade relations have grown considerably since Canada opened its embassy in Seoul in 1973. Korea and Canada were each other's sixth-largest trading partners in 1990; and Canada is the third most important destination for Korean investment. In the Asia and Pacific region in 1990, Korea was Canada's second-largest trading partner after Japan; and third-largest market, after Japan and China.

Coal remains Canada's single largest export to Korea. Canada imports cars, textiles, clothing, footwear, iron and steel products and consumer electronic products.

In December 1990, negotiations were completed on the sale of a second CANDU nuclear reactor to Korea. An air services agreement was signed in September 1989. Cooperation in sports and cultural relations has been growing substantially in past years.