

CANADA-KOREA RELATIONS: OVERVIEW

ISSUE

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

BACKGROUND

Canada's involvement in the Korean peninsula and with its people began in the late 19th century when Canadian missionaries played an important role in serving Koreans in the fields of education and health care. Official involvement commenced in 1947 when Canada was a member of the United Nations Commission supervising free elections in Korea. Formal recognition followed in 1949. Canada contributed 26,791 troops, the fourth largest contingent, to the UN Forces in the 1950-1953 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 ROK against the claims of North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-DPRK) to be the sole legitimate government on the peninsula.

The bilateral relationship has been strengthened over the last ten years by numerous high-level visits. President Roh visited Canada from July 3-6, 1991 accompanied by Korean Foreign Minister Lee Sang Ock and Minister of Trade and Industry Lee Bong Suh (who also visited Canada last April). The Secretary of State for External Affairs (Joe Clark) visited Seoul in September 1990. There have been previous head of government visits by Prime Minister Mulroney in 1985, former Prime Minister Trudeau (1981) and President Chun (1982). In 1986, President Chun made a technical stopover in Vancouver en route to European visits.

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 businessmen, families and increasingly, tourists (approximately 30-35,000 in 1990).

Political consultations at senior officials level, usually held annually, provide a useful opportunity to ascertain Korean views on current international and regional questions and also serve to demonstrate that Canada considers the ROK to be a valued interlocutor. Annual Trade Ministerial consultations have