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Area of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005. But leaders know that people expect national economic growth to lead directly to enhanced quality of life.

The challenge is to match moves toward economic integration with measures that address the social dimensions of closer trade relations. To do that, leaders are taking action on a number of fronts. A top item for consideration at the Summit will be the extensive work now under way to deal with labour and environmental issues in parallel with the FTAA.

Labour ministers now co-operate on labour standards, working conditions and more. All governments in the Americas are committed to meeting many international labour standards. They are laying the foundation for still more joint action in the future.

Hemispheric co-operation on the environment has also grown. At earlier meetings, leaders have supported shared action on the many environmental challenges with international impact. They know that they can reduce and end trade barriers while at the same time controlling pollution.

In the Plan of Action expected to be endorsed at the Summit, the agenda for creating prosperity complements the agenda for strengthening democracy. That complementarity will be evident in discussions on how to translate the benefits of economic growth into improvements in the lives of all citizens. Much thought is going into possible initiatives to help bring more prosperity to poor people—especially Indigenous peoples, rural workers and other groups that are often economically disadvantaged.

Another issue with both political and economic ramifications is corporate social responsibility—something OAS members agreed to encourage at the Windsor General Assembly in 2000. The Summit could build on that start by promoting discussions on the topic between representatives of business, international financial institutions and civil society.

## Realizing human potential

The Santiago Summit was notable for making progress on issues such as health and education. The Québec Summit will go further, putting the spotlight on a hemispheric social agenda promoting inclusion.

The social agenda must address two important factors. First, it must ensure attention to the needs of a wide range of groups throughout the Hemisphere. Too often women, Indigenous peoples, children, youth and other groups are not fully included in the life of their societies, and cannot benefit significantly from freer trade. The social agenda must seek to open doors for them.

Second, sound social investments reinforce democracy and the economy. Evidence from many countries shows that individuals, societies and economies can best realize their potential when people enjoy good health and have the skills to make the most of political freedom and economic opportunities. Healthy, highly skilled populations tend to be more economically productive and better able to exercise and protect democratic freedoms and human rights.



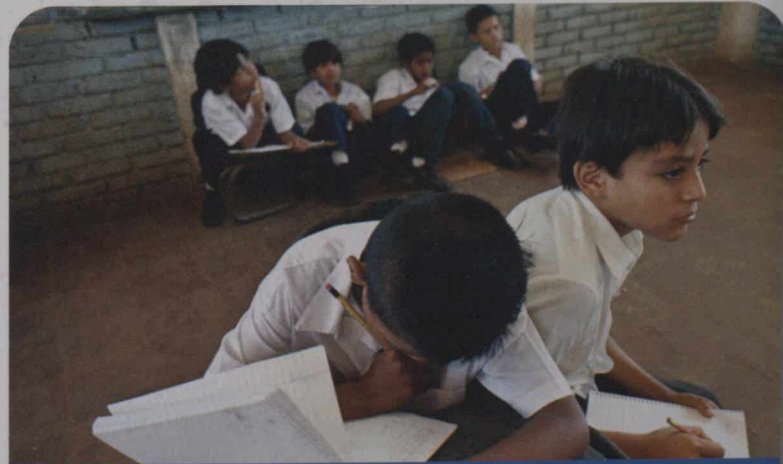
Rigoberta Menchu of Guatemala answers questions at a press conference in New York in 1999. A Mayan Indian, Menchu won the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize for her work on behalf of Indigenous people.



A pelican tries to remove diesel fuel from its wings after a spill from an oil tanker in the Galápagos Islands of Ecuador.



A boy carries a bag of gleanings from trash near his home in Cité Soleil, the poorest neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Beside the tin shacks of the neighbourhood are piles of human and animal waste and garbage.



William Cabrera, age 12, and Roger Palacio, age 10, sit together in their Grade 3 classroom at a public school in Managua, Nicaragua. An acute shortage of desks forces tens of thousands of children to attend class standing up, sitting on the floor or sharing a desk with a schoolmate.