

And I also want to ensure that we increase the number of women participants on Team Canada trade missions - most notably, on our upcoming Latin American trip in January.

These initiatives in support of businesswomen are part of our overall effort to help all small and medium-sized businesses increase their exports through what I call Team Canada Inc.

The SME division that I have recently created within my department will focus on meeting the special needs of new exporter constituencies, particularly the needs of small and medium-sized businesses led and owned by women.

Having people "on the ground" in diverse marketplaces around the world is another essential ingredient for the success of our exporting efforts. We have made a commitment to increase by 30 percent the number of Canadian Trade Commissioners working at posts around the world.

I believe that these and other initiatives will make a real difference for Canada's current and potential exporters.

In closing, I want to salute the Canadian and American businesswomen here today. Yours has not always been an easy road to travel - not only in moving from domestic markets into international trade, but also in that long and sometimes daunting struggle just to start up a business and make it grow.

But I would like to leave you with a comment - and a compliment - from one of Canada's most colourful and outspoken politicians, the late Charlotte Whitton, who was the Mayor of Ottawa back in the 1950s.

She once said: "For a woman to get half as much credit as a man, she has to work twice as hard, and be twice as smart."

To which she then added in her own unique way: "Fortunately, that isn't difficult."

Well, maybe the "credit" she was referring to was not the kind that is usually on the mind of a small businesswoman sitting in a bank manager's office looking for start-up capital!

But whether you agree or disagree with all or part of her statement, I think all of us can agree that not only do women have the right and the ability to be full economic participants - it is in all our best interests to help ensure that more businesswomen take the plunge into international markets.

And when you do, it means increased economic opportunities for all business people, increased growth for our economy, and more jobs.