

Such considerations led Canada to join the OAS in January 1990, finally moving from observer status to membership. Canada is one of the last states in the Americas to join the OAS. In the post-World War II period, Canadian foreign relations were effectively concentrated on European relations and the East-West nature of the international area. However, in the last two decades, Canadian interest in its own hemisphere has increased substantially. In announcing Canada's decision to join the OAS, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney noted that Canadian interests were directly engaged in the Americas and that Canada would no longer "stand apart."<sup>1</sup>

In February 1990, Canada put forward a number of proposals for changes at the OAS. These included the strengthening of the Secretariat, regular summit meetings of Heads of Government, expanding links between parliaments, creating a Unit for Democratic Development, creating a unit to conduct impartial investigations of electoral or judicial irregularities, and a Commission for Sustainable Development. Canada also announced that it would seek to bring Cuba back into the hemispheric family.

The proposal for a Unit for the Promotion of Democracy was adopted unanimously by the OAS General Assembly in June 1990. On 27 March 1991, then Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark issued a report on Canada's first year in the OAS. The report pointed to the agreement on the Unit as an important achievement for Canada. It also noted that Canada had been elected to the Inter-American Against Drug Abuse, had joined the Inter-American Commission on Women and had created the Canada-Latin America Forum which would address mutual interests.<sup>2</sup>

Clark's successor as Secretary of State for External Affairs, Barbara McDougall, continued this activist approach to the OAS. In addressing the OAS General Assembly, meeting in June 1991 in Santiago, Chile, McDougall spoke of the tremendous change occurring throughout the world and noted that it was essential for the OAS to use the opportunity to consolidate democracy in the region. She added that Canada would do whatever was necessary to assist in getting the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy established as soon as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Prime Minister. "Notes for an Address by the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, Meeting of Hemispheric Leaders, San Jose, Costa Rica," 27 October 1989: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Department of External Affairs. "Clark Reports on Canada's First Year in the OAS," *News Release*. No. 79, 27 March 1991.