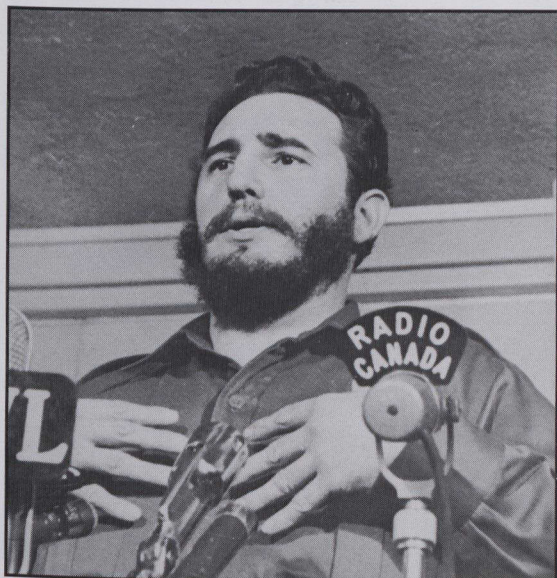


the island. Canada initiated a development co-operation program with Cuba, bringing Canadian academics and technical experts together with their Cuban counterparts for the first time. Cultural links were established as Canadians found their own distinctive cultural voice in the world. Sports became an important theme in the relationship as Cuba's achievements were highlighted for Canadians at the 1976 Montreal Olympics. In January of that year, Pierre Elliot Trudeau became the first Canadian Prime Minister to make an official visit to Cuba. Although there was some contraction in the diplomatic relationship by the end of the decade due to geo-political differences, Canada remained a major partner for Cuba in key sectors such as livestock production and fisheries.



Fidel Castro speaking before Radio Canada microphone, 1961

In the early 1990s, the relationship changed again. With the end of the socialist bloc, Cuba was obliged to find new economic partners. Canada in the early 1990s began to place more emphasis in its foreign policy on Latin America, including Cuba. The result was a rapid expansion in bilateral relations on all fronts. New Canadian investments in Cuba were made in mining, energy, food and tourism sectors. Cultural exchanges grew dramatically as Canadians discovered Cuba's vibrant cultural life and reached out to invite Cuban artists to Canada. A bilateral co-operation program was renewed, expanding significantly the range of Canadian academic

and non-governmental organizations engaged with the island. The spirit of the times was well captured in Prime Minister Chrétien's remarks during his April 1998 official visit to Cuba:

"Through good times and bad, our two countries have always chosen dialogue over confrontation, engagement over isolation, exchange over estrangement. And we have always done this in an atmosphere of mutual respect for each other's independence and sovereignty."

As our two countries enter a new century, the relationships between Canadians and Cubans are destined to increase. More than 400,000 Canadians will visit Cuba in 2003, making them Cuba's most important source of tourism by far. Also this year, 260,000 Cubans saluted a Canadian hero by participating in the first island-wide Terry Fox Run to combat cancer. This broad foundation of friendship between our two peoples is a firm basis on which to build a better future, together.

Michael Small
Ambassador of Canada