

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Canada has embraced a dynamic relationship with the Western Hemisphere — we joined the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1990; signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 and the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement in 1997; and participated in the first two Summits of the Americas — in Miami (United States) in 1994 and Santiago (Chile) in 1998. As well, Prime Minister Chrétien led two major trade missions to Latin America in 1995 and 1998.

During 1999-2001, Canada has taken centre stage in the Hemisphere as host of a series of major events leading up to the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, in April 2001. The first event, which took place in the summer of 1999, was a celebration of youth, sport and culture at the Pan American Games held in Winnipeg. The second event in the series was the Ninth Conference of Spouses of Heads of State and Government of the Americas, held in the fall of 1999 in Ottawa. Canada played a lead role by helping to advance a number of priority issues, including childhood development, health and education. To reflect the contributions of civil society, a fair and exhibit hall focussing on non-governmental organizations was also made part of the official agenda.

As chair of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations for the first 18 months of the negotiations, Canada hosted the FTAA Trade Ministerial in Toronto in November 1999. Immediately preceding this event, the Canadian business community organized the Fifth Americas Business Forum (ABF), also held in Toronto. At the same time, Canada sponsored a forum organized by civil society, which ran parallel to the FTAA and ABF events. Civil society groups presented recommendations to the Minister for International Trade and to 22 of his hemispheric colleagues.

In June 2000, Canada hosted the 30th OAS General Assembly in Windsor; the meeting also marked Canada's 10th anniversary as a full member of the Organization. The OAS is the premier political body for multilateral dialogue and decision making in the Americas and provides a forum for high-level debates and decisions on the major issues affecting the well-being of the peoples of the Hemisphere. In Windsor, foreign ministers and national delegations from the Hemisphere's 34 democratically elected governments considered 70 resolutions and discussed hemispheric democracy and human security; they also approved the themes that will be discussed at the upcoming Summit of the Americas.

The 2001 Summit will therefore represent the culmination of several years of intense activity by Canada in the Hemisphere. The Summits of the Americas process is rooted in a commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law; the promotion of economic prosperity and free trade; and the development of a social agenda that aims to protect all citizens of the Hemisphere — women and men, children and youth, Indigenous peoples, people of African descent, persons with disabilities and other marginalized or vulnerable groups. This Report is intended to provide Canadians and others with a detailed overview of what Canada has done to respond to those needs and advance a shared commitment to improve the quality of life in the Hemisphere.