

The consultative process now under way will create a multilateral framework which will help us to mitigate the possibility of trade disputes of the sort which now distract us so much.

In concrete terms, APEC enables trade-dependent countries like Canada and Singapore — along with all their partners — to pursue a range of broad objectives, principally trade creation and trade facilitation. APEC also allows us to make progress on more specific issues, such as investment promotion, understanding competition policy — particularly on antidumping issues — promoting mutual recognition of product standards and equipment testing and monitoring procedures in key sectors such as aviation and telecommunications, promoting environmental protection and reaching an understanding on important issues such as rules of origin.

What all of this activity is intended to do is to establish a balanced policy framework within which industry can thrive. The goals may be long-term, and the challenges daunting, but the importance of this work and the dialogue underpinning it should not be underestimated. For its part, Canada sees APEC, and organizations like the Pacific Economic Co-operation Council [PECC] and the Pacific Basin Economic Council [PBEC], as essential planks in the construction of an Asia-Pacific trade regime which is balanced, effective and rules-based, which contributes to the global goals of the World Trade Organization [WTO], and which prevents the possibility of a transpacific divide.

Finally, I believe it important that I conclude with some remarks on NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement], in part to dispel some recurring myths. What I have to say is relatively straightforward but bears repeating.

Canada is not turning its back on international trade. We are, in part through the NAFTA, in part through APEC, and in part through the WTO, trying to stay in the forefront of the process.

The NAFTA is not an inward-looking bloc. It is fully compatible with the GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] and with the results of the Uruguay Round. The GATT itself accepts that regional trading relations can be liberalized at a faster pace than might be possible on a broad, multilateral basis. So the GATT — now the WTO — accommodates agreements like the NAFTA.

All NAFTA partners have emphasized the priority they place on implementing the results of the Uruguay Round and putting in place an effective new World Trade Organization. NAFTA is not a higher priority nor is it a replacement for an effective global trading order.

The NAFTA contains a provision for new members. If all criteria for membership are met, the terms of the NAFTA can be extended to other partners. The only necessary qualification is the ability