

business. In the past year, Canada has had the pleasure of receiving visits from the Foreign Ministers of Jamaica, Barbados and Grenada, as well as the Premier of Belize and the Chief Ministers of the British Virgin Islands and Montserrat. Canadian ministers in turn have just completed visits to Barbados, St. Vincent and Jamaica. I myself am coming from Barbados and St. Kitts-Nevis and am combining my participation at the Canada/CARICOM Joint Trade and Economic Committee (JTEC) with an official visit to Jamaica.

We recognized that the area is not trouble free in political terms, and that our close and easy ties could therefore never be taken for granted. We looked at security considerations, and the important geopolitical place of this area in the Western Hemisphere. We came to conclusions that were both sobering and heartening. We are resolved to play a responsible and responsive role.

Finally, we recognized that intangibles lie at the heart of our relationship: common language, a sharing of institutional structures, affection for and loyalty to the Commonwealth, similar traditions of democracy. A commitment to civil liberties, and widespread and diverse people-to-people contacts have led to the development of a "special relationship" which is unlike that which Canada has with any other part of the developing world. It is in fact, unlike our relationships with all but a few countries anywhere.

Our review took eight months of preparation involving extensive consultations in Ottawa, and the full and active participation of the Canadian High Commissioners in the field.

We built on a foundation established by wise men from your countries and mine. Several of my predecessors in their time commissioned or undertook special reviews of the relationship. Many of you will understand my own regard for the contribution of Paul Martin whose concern and affection for the Caribbean persists to this day.

Our review confirmed as official policy that the Commonwealth Caribbean is and will continue to be a region of major interest to Canada. In fact we went beyond the mere provision of an assessment; Cabinet approved an action plan for a regional policy approach which directed that the Commonwealth Caribbean should be accorded priority. There are two novel aspects to this action plan: it marks the first time Canada formulated such a comprehensive policy toward the Commonwealth Caribbean; and, as I have noted already, we accorded priority to the Commonwealth Caribbean in the overall external policy of Canada.