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Canada in the United Nations

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Canada in the United Nations

Support for a Homegrown Solution in Central America



Central America is the second-largest per capita recipient of Canadian aid.

(CIDA: Ron Poling)

Over the past decade, the Canadian government has become increasingly concerned about the escalation of tensions in Central America. Canadian policy in the region is based on the view that its difficulties are fundamentally economic and social in nature. Widespread poverty, disease, hunger and illiteracy have given rise to a series of intractable problems including serious human rights abuses in several of the countries.

Superpower rivalries have served to inflame an already tense situation, at the expense of regional development and stability. Canada's position is that ideological conflicts in Central America are symptoms of larger problems and it is strongly opposed to third-party military intervention in the internal conflicts of the region no matter who the third party might be.

Canada has demonstrated its willingness to help resolve the region's problems by tripling its bilateral aid to Central American countries over a five year period and by offering technical advice on the design of suitable peacekeeping mechanisms for the region. Canada would also consider participating in a peace supervisory mission, if asked, subject to the establishment of an effective framework.

The Search for Peace

The search for peace has been long and difficult. Several years of talks among members of the Contadora Group (Panama, Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela) helped set the stage for an August 1987 summit meeting of Central American presidents in Guatemala. By the end of this landmark session, the presidents had seized the initiative and agreed to a regional peace plan put forward by President Oscar Arias Sanchez of Costa Rica.

In its preamble, the Guatemala agreement said that "guarantees must be established to allow popular participation in authentic and democratic political processes that are based on justice, liberty and democracy The governments will commit themselves to initiate an authentic, pluralistic, participatory democratic process that implies promotion of social justice, respect for human rights, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right of all countries

to determine freely and without outside influence of any kind, their economic, political and social model" These goals and the commitments to democratization are fully supported by the Canadian government.

Canada was encouraged by the emergence of a broad, regional consensus on the need to declare ceasefires in the countries where conflicts existed, extend amnesty to armed insurgents, and initiate dialogue with unarmed opposition groups. The Guatemala plan established an ambitious timetable for the development of a lasting peace settlement. While implementation of the peace plan has been difficult, real progress has been made and Canadians are heartened to see the Central American nations themselves taking an active role in finding appropriate, regional solutions to regional difficulties.

Canada's Support for the Peace Process

Support for the peace process and for regional autonomy in determining the dimensions of a lasting peace agreement have long been cornerstones of Canadian policy in Central America. This has been expressed in numerous public statements, as well as in private discussions with the parties involved.

As early as 1985, Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, in meetings with the president and foreign minister of Mexico, stated Canada's willingness to help design appropriate peacekeeping mechanisms drawing on three decades of Canadian peacekeeping experience. On three subsequent occasions, Canada prepared detailed written comments on key provisions of the Contadora Draft Act, at the request of participating governments.