The government fully shares the concerns of the Committee with respect to the need to protect Canadian citizens involved in trade and commercial disputes outside of Canada. This has been an important element in the consular services of the department and it is a matter that will continue to receive serious attention in the months ahead.

An important consideration in such disputes is distinguishing between those that might involve transgression of national laws and those which are pursued to obtain commercial advantage. All countries have a variety of laws, regulations, procedures and customs which surround commercial and trade activities. It is important that Canadians have a complete understanding of the legal environment in which they plan to do business and, where necessary, obtain knowledgeable professional advice and guidance.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has a wide variety of programs and activities to inform and assist Canadians involved in trade and commercial activities in other countries. At the same time and irrespective of the nature of the dispute, the Department provides Canadians with assistance, support and guidance in dealing with trade and commercial disputes. Depending on the complexity of the dispute, support can range from advice and guidance, intervention with local authorities, to representations to regulatory, judicial and political authorities.

In complex cases, the government considers all options, including the suspension of bilateral aid measures, in providing assistance to Canadians. In making decisions on what actions are appropriate, the Department is guided by (a) selecting measures that are likely to lead to a satisfactory resolution , (b) whether or not a measure is likely to make matters worse, (c) ensuring that actions are commensurate with the problem and (d) the degree to which a dispute represents a pattern of discriminatory behaviour towards Canadians or foreigners generally.

The government does not believe that there is a need for additional consular or other agreements to resolve such disputes. The existing Vienna Convention on Consular Relations along with burgeoning international trade and commercial regimes and mechanisms provide sufficient legal and political grounds on which action can be taken.

16. To redress this situation, the Committee recommends that the Canadian government should pursue actively the harmonization through international agreements of regulations and standards that have an impact on international trade. (page 44)

The government already does this through a variety of means, such as the following: a) NAFTA Chapter 9 on Standards-related measures creates intergovernmental subcommittees aiming at making compatible technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures in the following areas - textile labelling, automotive standards, land transportation and telecommunications equipment. In addition, a new NAFTA working group has been created to address pesticides registration. Also, established Canada-U.S. working groups on a range of agriculture and food regulations are being widened to include Mexico.

Regulatory departments also are actively involved in international activities to develop harmonized standards and conformity assessment procedures in the context of the Codex Alimentarius commission (food safety), the Organization Internationale des Epizooties (animal quarantine), the International Plant Protection Commission (plant quarantine), the OECD (chemicals), and the International Harmonization Group (Medical Devices).

There are a number of initiatives to facilitate trade in regulated products through the mutual recognition of conformity assessment procedures whereby importing countries would recognize testing, inspection and certification of products in selected exporting countries as meeting the standards of the importing country. Negotiations are underway with the European Union on telecommunications and information technology equipment, pharmaceutical, medical devices, electrical requirements as well as veterinary