

HONORARY CONSUL ROLE EXPANDING

By Paul André
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The ministerial decision to merge the honorary trade representatives group with the honorary consuls program abroad is continuing without any major problems. For a number of years Canada has had a few honorary trade representatives whose task was to support the promotion of Canadian trade interests over a small, distant territory.

The honorary trade representatives did not have consular status and did not enjoy privileges and immunities as with the honorary consuls. At times, special restrictive terms and conditions of operation were set out in the contracts of honorary trade representatives. Now, appointments will be made according to the same job descriptions as honorary consuls.

New honorary consuls will be appointed when an intra-departmental committee consisting of TOO, JPP and the geographical branches, is convinced that the actual or potential trade benefits anticipated in each case will be studied, understood and accepted by the incumbents-to-be.

The trade responsibilities of the honorary consuls will include:

- serving distant points in a vast territory;
- overcoming the difficulties arising from a poor communication network or difficult protocol and business practices in certain countries through monitoring custom and access changes;
- obtaining easier entrance into business and government circles in an especially closed territory including obtaining tender documents;
- benefiting from a contribution of a third person in interpreting events or information, and allowing an element of continuity;
- having a local representative to advise Canadian exporters passing through the territory by recommending local representatives and participation in

suitable local trade fairs; and

- assessing the present and future potential of the market concerned by collecting information on trade, technology transfer and investment opportunities through newspapers and press releases.

After looking at the best ways of promoting Canadian interests in the exchange of merchandise, capital and technology, it has been concluded that having a larger number of honorary consuls abroad would meet the growing needs of trade, economics and the consular service.

When trade work is the main prerogative of an honorary consul, an arrangement must be made to delegate a good portion of his or her administrative tasks (passports, requests from Canadians in distress, use of Canada's second official language, etc.) to local staff.

The program is administered by the heads of mission, in consultation with the trade development divisions in the regions involved and with other functional divisions. The reports and communications by the honorary consuls on trade and economic affairs are usually done through the trade promotion program managers for the missions to which they report. Except under circumstances previously agreed upon with the program managers, the honorary consuls do not deal directly with headquarters or with Canadian organizations.

The honorary consuls must be quite familiar with the economic and trade situation of the countries concerned, and should be able to settle current administrative issues. Honorary consuls are often the primary source for Canadian business people on the culture, commerce, financial climate and customs in a given region.

Note that the consular reference manual has been modified to comply with the requirements of this merger of the two programs.

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