

benefits of a comprehensive hemispheric agreement and will make specific proposals to help move the process forward.

It is Canada's goal to extend deeper free trade throughout the hemisphere and beyond, regionally if possible, bilaterally if necessary. We are already engaged in the negotiation of bilateral investment agreements with some international partners, and we will have to consider the negotiation of bilateral free trade agreements if other avenues forward should become blocked.

While negotiation and implementation of the NAFTA has focused Canada's attention in recent years southward to the rest of the hemisphere, we must also begin to build on the results of the Uruguay Round and explore new means of expanding our trade relations eastward, across the Atlantic, to Europe, and westward, across the Pacific, to Asia.

The momentum for trade liberalization both in the hemisphere and around the world, is strong. Canada seeks to maintain that momentum and, accordingly, I shall convene a meeting of the Trade Ministers of Japan, the United States and the European Union this spring. We hope to develop a consensus for new trade initiatives that will be considered at the Halifax G-7 [Group of Seven leading industrialized countries] Summit next June.

Canada's goal is to eliminate trade barriers wherever possible and to provide greater market access for our firms. But more also needs to be done to enable Canadian companies to take advantage of our market access initiatives and to participate more fully in key markets.

For 100 years, the cornerstone of Canada's trade development efforts has been the Trade Commissioner Service. The Service has been recognized by Canadians and by our competitors alike as one of the best official trade representation services in the world.

However, during its centenary year, we are looking to the future to ensure that the Trade Commissioner Service provides the support that exporters need.

With this in mind, our government undertook to conduct a thorough review of our trade development programs, including the Trade Commissioner Service.

We have already had input from many sources. We have received suggestions from a number of industry associations and I have personally met with many small and medium-sized enterprises across Canada to hear what they have to say.