

Initiation of Canada's Relationship with ASEAN

Our support for the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its relations with its members' countries ... is an important element in Canada's goal of seeking closer relations with the countries of the Pacific region.

This 1974 statement by former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau provided the initial impetus for Canada's pursuit of relations with the member nations of ASEAN. Beginning in 1975 when the Secretary of State for External Affairs initiated formal contacts with the association, Canada was welcomed as an official "dialogue partner" with ASEAN, a relationship that has evolved to include many valuable elements.

As a dialogue partner, Canada joins Australia, the European Community (EC), Japan, New Zealand, and the United States to be among those countries with which ASEAN has developed particularly close relations. ASEAN designates a co-ordinating member country on a rotating basis to be the main contact point on behalf of the association for each partner. For the period 1988 to 1991, Canada's dialogue co-ordinator is Brunei, which was preceded by Thailand.

Canada-ASEAN Political Relations

Canada shares Commonwealth membership with Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei. Along with Canada, ASEAN nations also participate in the GATT and at the Uruguay Round, in the Cairns Group on agricultural trade reform, and in the North-South Dialogue. ASEAN nations also are important, moderate, and westward-looking members of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), the Islamic Conference, and the Group of 77.

Canada and ASEAN also share several political concerns. Since 1980, the Secretary of State for External Affairs has attended the annual ASEAN Foreign Ministers Post Ministerial Conference. This conference discusses regional and international economic and political issues of interest to ASEAN and dialogue partners. Canada has consistently supported ASEAN's demand that the Vietnamese troops leave Cambodia. Likewise, Canada and ASEAN pressed for early withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Both actions were seen as making marked contributions to prospects for peace and prosperity in Southeast and West Asia.

Canada-ASEAN Commercial and Economic Relations

Canada's economic relations with ASEAN are strong and growing. Canada is a major importer of natural resources from ASEAN, and the steady growth of the economies of the ASEAN members' countries offers excellent opportunities for Canadian suppliers.

Total two-way trade between Canada and ASEAN equalled C\$1.8 billion in 1987, a 33.5 per cent increase over 1986. Canadian exports to the region increased by 39.9 per cent to \$908 million, while imports increased 27.8 per cent to \$925 million, leaving a balance in favour of ASEAN of \$16 million. There is little doubt that in 1988 Canada-ASEAN trade will exceed the \$2 billion figure. While two-way trade between Canada and ASEAN has tripled over the last decade, there remains tremendous potential for future growth as ASEAN and Canadian exports account for only approximately 1 per cent of each other's markets.

Canada and ASEAN have agreed that one of their fundamental objectives is to expand trade to a level more commensurate with their respective economic strengths. To this end, the