

Mexico Parliamentary Association and the fifth meeting of the Canada-Mexico Joint Ministerial Committee were held in Ottawa in 1983. The Minister of Agriculture visited Colombia, Venezuela, Jamaica, Cuba and Mexico to promote bilateral co-operation in the agri-food sector and to consult with his opposite numbers as president of the World Food Council. The inaugural session of the newly-established Canada-Venezuela Joint Consultative Committee was held in Caracas in May 1983. The first meeting of the Canada-Brazil Political Affairs Consultative Committee was inaugurated in Brasilia in November 1983 by the Minister of External Relations and the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The External Relations Minister also visited Colombia for political consultations, and the Colombian Foreign Minister came to Ottawa in February 1984. At the end of the fiscal year, the Secretary of State for External Affairs was preparing to make a tour of three countries of Central America and Colombia to review the situation in Central America and to continue his consultations with a member of the Contadora Group.

Caribbean and Central America

Most countries of the Caribbean continued to face economic difficulties wrought by the international recession. Stabilization of world market prices of key exports, such as bauxite, bananas and sugar, was offset by weak demand for these commodities, which thus limited export earnings. The revenue from tourism declined and significant price cutting had to be undertaken to maintain tourist industries. Although the world economy appeared to have improved slightly in 1983, this was reflected very unevenly in the various Caribbean economies and, for many, 1983 may have been even worse than 1982. The stability of most Caribbean governments, and the preparations for adjusting to changed economic conditions on which many of them embarked several years ago, mitigated the worst effects of the international economic situation. Unlike several Latin American economies, most nations of the Caribbean did not have heavy burdens of commercial bank indebtedness. Nonetheless, significant problems of international liquidity continued to affect some of them.

The Commonwealth Caribbean community faced serious political strains during 1983 when Barbados, Jamaica and some of the members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) joined the United States in a military invasion of fellow OECS member Grenada. This action followed the overthrow and subsequent murder of the former Grenadian leader.

Canada joined many other countries in questioning the legality and necessity of the military intervention. However, Canada also endeavoured to assist the states of the region to overcome the divisive effects of the Grenada events and to get on with the urgent tasks of social and economic development.

In January the Minister for External Relations visited St. Lucia, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago to gather firsthand impressions of the impact of the Grenada intervention and to ascertain the views of Caribbean leaders on the role Canada might most effectively play in Grenada and in the region generally. A follow-up visit to Grenada and Barbados by an interdepartmental team of officials resulted in decisions for new aid initiatives to assist Grenada's economic reconstruction, as well as proposals for police assistance to help rebuild

Grenadian law and order capabilities and to facilitate the complete withdrawal of US and Caribbean troops.

A number of countries faced elections during 1983-84 and on September 19, 1983, the former Associated State of St. Kitts-Nevis lowered the Union Jack for the last time as the new federation of St. Kitts and Nevis progressed to full independence. The Minister for Supply and Services led the Canadian delegation to the independence ceremonies. In Jamaica, the refusal of the opposition party to contest the general election resulted in government by virtual acclamation for the Jamaica Labour Party and the shifting of the focus of opposition outside parliament. Elections in Antigua and Barbuda confirmed the government for another term. However, in Anguilla, the former Chief Minister was displaced by the voters. An official Canadian observer team witnessed the initial phase of the El Salvador election in March. The government of Nicaragua announced in February 1984, that elections for president and for a legislative assembly would take place in November.

Tensions within Central America remained high. However, the Contadora Group — Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and Panama — and the five Central American countries made a number of procedural advances in the search for a peaceful solution to the problems of Central America. The broad outlines of a regional peace plan were produced at the September 1983 meeting of the Contadora Group, at which a 21-point series of objectives was formulated and accepted. Further impetus was added to the process in January 1984, when three working commissions, each made up of representatives of the Contadora four and the five Central American countries, were established in the areas of security, political and socio-economic affairs.

The Canadian government fully supported the work of the Contadora countries. In February 1984, the government instructed officials to consult with the three commissions of the Contadora Group with a view to assessing the economic requirements of the region and the peacekeeping and verification tasks that may be required.

Public affairs and cultural promotion received increased emphasis, particularly in Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela. This was in keeping with the increasingly visible role being played by Canada throughout the whole region.

In response to the growing strife in Latin America, Canada doubled its admission of refugees from this region and instituted special immigration programs accordingly. During 1984 alone some 2 500 persons will be processed as part of the Central and South American refugee program. Immigration offices have been opened in Lima, Peru, Guatemala City, Guatemala and San José, Costa Rica.

In an effort to reduce illegal immigration from the region, a visitor visa requirement was introduced for citizens of Jamaica, Guyana, Guatemala and Peru.