

In addition, in conjunction with the provinces, Industry Canada and a number of federal agencies, we are undertaking a new initiative called "Trade Team Canada." We are looking to optimize services to clients by co-ordinating the delivery of international business development activities among various levels of government. We intend to move ahead promptly by setting up pilot projects in co-operation with those provinces that have already shown an interest in the idea.

The third broad set of initiatives we are undertaking is in the area of support for small- and medium-sized enterprises. From the federal government's point of view, SMEs are a vital national resource, the fastest growing component of the economy, the most knowledge-intensive, the most responsive to rapid change, and the largest creator of new jobs. However, SMEs need to become much more involved in international business if we are to increase our presence in new markets.

To that end, we are increasing our focus and adapting our programs toward the needs of SMEs. We are also developing new products. For instance, a promising new concept is under development by the Export Development Corporation, in partnership with Canadian financial institutions. It involves increased operating lines of credit for smaller exporters. This concept is being designed to provide them with more credit — from their local bank — for their short-term foreign sales.

As Minister for International Trade, I am conscious that we must balance domestic initiatives with new projects to help Canadian exporters in emerging markets. As such, I'm very pleased to announce today an undertaking with this goal in mind. It's located in Mexico City. It is called the Canadian Business Centre. I have no doubt that those of you who have an eye for emerging business opportunities in Mexico will want to take full advantage of it. Let me tell you about this initiative.

The Canadian Business Centre in Mexico City is designed to be a "home away from home" for Canadians doing business in Mexico. It will help you make the right impression with business partners in a key market. It has fully equipped temporary offices, corporate meeting and conference rooms, and up to 30 individual booth spaces for trade shows and other exhibitions. The services of the Business Centre are available at competitive rates, and cover everything from telephone, fax and computer support to secretarial, clerical and even translation and interpretation services.

We know that Canadian business is looking to government to take a leadership role in trade development efforts in Mexico. Certainly the business community itself is getting on with the job. Exports to Mexico increased by more than one third through the first seven months of this year, and there have been more than 7000 Canadian commercial inquiries to our Embassy and consulates in Mexico.

With this sort of enthusiasm in the Mexican market, I have no doubt that the Business Centre will help individual Canadian companies