



Hope floats: Fishermen on Lake Olomega near San Miguel in El Salvador were able to buy new boats such as this one called Fé y Esperanza (Faith and Hope) through Canadian assistance to their fishing cooperative.

According to the 2001 census, some 787,000 people from the region have made Canada their permanent home, from the waves of refugees fleeing political strife in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s and 1980s to the massive influx of immigrants from Caribbean countries such as Jamaica and the Dominican Republic who have settled in Canada's large urban areas.

Noteworthy for their cohesiveness and strong community organizations are Haitian immigrants to Montreal, comments Victor Armony of UQAM. Language and religious links with the dominant Catholic francophone culture have created strong connections between Haitians and Quebec society, he says, adding that other immigrants from the region are becoming more involved in other communities.

"You can already see more Latin Americans active in their local school boards, in municipal politics."

One thing that fascinates Andres Mendoza, the National Marketing Manager of EMI Music Canada in Toronto, is that Latin cultural expression takes on new flavours in Canada, as artists from different nations of the region come together here. "Latin music created in Canada has a distinct Canadian-Latin style because of the interaction between the cultures," explains Mendoza, who comes from Chile.

Artists from the Caribbean join the mix as well. Canadian saxophonist Jane Bunnett has forged a wide range of relationships with Cuban musicians, with whom she has created a dozen jazz recordings and toured extensively.

Doing it differently in Cuba

Canada and Cuba marked 60 years of formal diplomatic ties in 2005. Cuba commands respect in the developing world for its tenacity and independence. "Cuba sort of punches above its weight," says Cuban specialist John Kirk, a professor in the department of Spanish at Dalhousie University in Halifax.

Kirk supports the approach Canada has taken in retaining unbroken relations with Cuba, a contrast to the U.S. estrangement with the island nation. "Canadian NGOs and church organizations have done a strong job there," he says.

Today, Canada works hard on the relationship, he adds, strengthening the link that will grow in importance in a

Canada and the OAS

In the 15 years it has been a member of the Organization of American States (OAS), Canada has been successful in making its influence felt.

When the country moved from permanent observer status to full membership in the OAS in 1990, there were concerns that Canada's independence would be compromised by joining a body in which the United States was such a major player. Today, observers agree that despite the ups and downs of the organization, Canada has benefited by joining.

Yasmine Shamsie, an assistant professor in political science at Wilfrid Laurier University and a specialist in Latin American politics, was actively involved with the NGO community 15 years ago, and was against Canada taking out membership in the OAS. Now, however, she thinks it was a good thing.

"We've made a tremendous contribution," she says, though adding that Canada could do even more in the organization. "We have definitely increased our profile in the region, and we wouldn't have been able to do that without joining."

Canada's Ambassador to the OAS, Paul Durand, calls joining the organization "a very significant foreign policy decision" for Canada. "With it, we announced to the world that Canada is a nation of the Americas. We are recognized and appreciated in the OAS as a progressive, constructive

member, one that has made a major contribution to hemispheric affairs."

Mr. Durand says Canada has been successful in getting the OAS to respond to its priorities—"everything from the landmines campaign to human rights concerns, from democratic governance to the anti-corruption convention in the Americas"—which to a certain extent has transformed the body. OAS membership has also helped Canada's relationship with the U.S., he says, with the two countries realizing they don't have major hemispheric differences, except over relations with Cuba.

Edgar J. Dosman, a senior research fellow at York University's Centre for International Security Studies, says Canada joined the OAS at the right time. Latin America was democratizing and Canada—no longer as strategically important to Europe and the U.S. with the end of the Cold War—was searching for new horizons.

Canada is the second-largest contributor to the OAS, with an annual assessed contribution of some \$11 million, representing more than 12 percent of the organization's regular budget. Canada also provides significant voluntary contributions.

Canada is seen at the OAS as a balanced participant, a "reasonable player" not driven by the agenda of any country or region, Mr. Durand says, "though it's a daily challenge" not to be pulled in one direction or another.