

**CANADA'S FIRST YEAR IN THE ORGANIZATION
OF AMERICAN STATES:**

Implementing the Strategy for Latin America

I. OVERVIEW

On October 27, 1989 the Prime Minister addressed a meeting of hemispheric leaders at San Jose, Costa Rica and announced a new departure in our relations with Latin America. Canada would join the OAS in a move reflecting our determination to be full and constructive citizens of the Americas. Accordingly, he had instructed Canada's Permanent Observer to the OAS to notify the Secretary General that Canada was prepared to sign and ratify the Charter.

Less than three weeks later, on November 13, the Secretary of State for External Affairs addressed the OAS Permanent Council in Washington and signed the Charter of the OAS. In so doing, he pointed out to the Secretary General and Permanent Representatives in attendance that Canada's move to join the organization at long last was not an isolated decision but rather a key element of Canada's new strategy for Latin America. That strategy, he said, was based on a very straightforward proposition: that the nations of North and South America exerted a major influence on issues of global importance - and importance for Canada - whether the issue was human rights, trade, debt, the environment, drugs or the new political dialogue emerging between developed and developing countries. Faced with these issues, Canada recognized that it needed new policies to address the challenges and opportunities they presented, with a view to securing Canadian and hemispheric interests. The new Long Term Strategy for Latin America, approved by Cabinet in October 1989, had been developed to meet that need.

Canada's decision to join the OAS was welcomed by all members, many of whom expressed the view that Canada's strong commitment to multilateralism and good standing with countries of the region would enable it to act as a catalyst for OAS revitalization. They hoped that Canada's reputation as the voice of moderation, the contributor of practical solutions, the bridge-builder and the peacekeeper would lend new profile and legitimacy to the organization as the prime political forum of the Western Hemisphere. More particularly, while Canada's decision to join raised some domestic concern that Canadian positions might become too closely aligned with those of the USA, many OAS members welcomed Canada precisely because they regarded our active and independent foreign policy as a possible counterbalance to the strong USA role in the organization.