

The NAFTA has proved a powerful catalyst to pursue the environmental and labour agendas. Before the NAFTA negotiations, Canada had a number of bilateral agreements with Mexico on these subjects. The trade talks led to a more concentrated program of trilateral discussions.

Without the NAFTA, it is unlikely that today we would be preparing for the establishment of a North American Commission on the Environment. The functions of the Commission may well include harmonizing environmental standards at higher levels, developing limits for specific pollutants, promoting environmental science and technology, and increasing public awareness of environmental issues.

In the labour discussions, we will be pressing for the establishment of a trinational body to focus on the improvement of working conditions and living standards in all three countries. Such a commission would help give effect to the NAFTA's commitment to "protect, enhance and enforce basic workers' rights."

Throughout the negotiations of the NAFTA and now as we negotiate the additional agreements, we have been able to call on the knowledge and expertise of the provinces, labour organizations and environmental groups. They have played an extremely important role in helping the Government develop and refine its agenda, and they will continue to do so as labour and environmental talks proceed in the weeks ahead.

We are clear on this. The NAFTA is part of this Government's commitment to the quality of working life and to sustainable development. The NAFTA will contribute to economic growth in a way that takes into account the health and well-being of the population, and the protection and preservation of the environment on which we depend.

The world of nations has been rapidly transformed into an increasingly interdependent global economy in a matter of decades.

The dawn of the twenty-first century rises over an interconnected marketplace that includes, at the same time, mass production for truly world markets and specialized production for highly individualized niche markets.

The way business is conducted today would have been inconceivable to our counterparts of less than a generation ago. Fibre optics, lap top computers, fax transmissions, interactive video -- the quick transformation of research into technology to create new products and services has ceased to amaze and now is routine.

This Government has worked hard to prepare our economy for the global marketplace, and with the framework we have put in place, Canadians will exploit it to their advantage.