

At the recent OAS meeting in Belém, I suggested that, as an organization, the OAS needs to look to a day when Cuba can once again play its full role, with all the privileges and responsibilities involved. Isolation is unhealthy, while close contact with an increasingly vibrant organization, doing important work to promote economic and political liberalization, can have a positive, practical impact.

What are Canadian objectives in Cuba? First, we are here to promote several concrete Canadian interests, especially in terms of commercial activities. Second, we wish to support positive, peaceful change in Cuba, both political and economic. We may disagree on some aspects of change, in particular in the areas of human rights and democratic development, but we will pursue the discussion at appropriate levels. Third, we wish to encourage Cuba's full, constructive participation in international affairs. Finally, we want The Canadian government not to be an impediment, standing in the way of Canadian organizations and individuals pursuing their own activities and dialogues with Cubans because of historic restrictions on official development assistance.

To achieve these objectives more effectively, the Government has decided on a number of adjustments to its Cuba policy. None of these represents a major turn-around, since we already have the basis of what I consider to be a sound policy. Taken together, however, these steps point to a somewhat more activist approach to our relationship, and a desire on our part to be more engaged at a senior level. I have discussed these ideas today in my meetings with members of the Cuban government and have also had an opportunity to consult with several Canadian organizations and business representatives.

First, we want to have more exchanges such as I have just had. Thus, the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, André Ouellet, has indicated to Foreign Minister Robaina that he would welcome a meeting with him at some convenient time.

Second, I have asked senior officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to begin again the regular series of formal consultations with their Cuban counterparts that have not taken place for several years. We will aim to have a substantive agenda that will get into the full range of bilateral and international issues.

Third, as indicated at the recent meeting of the OAS General Assembly, the Government intends to examine, with other countries, what would be required for Cuba to re-establish its full membership in the OAS. I fully recognize that there are some difficult issues which will have to be addressed by OAS members as well as by Cuba. It is not something that can be resolved overnight. However, we believe it is a process that we must begin to think about.