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social and economic injustice, coupled with persistent frustration over failure to institute the necessary economic and social reforms to meet even the most basic popular expectations. We realize that external interference and a tendency to view matters in an East-West context have exacerbated and aggravated an already complex situation. Based on our perspective, reflecting the growing concern of Canadians for the region in the recent years, our response, beyond strong support of Contadora, has been to focus our main efforts on bilateral development assistance. Thus, in 1981, we announced a tripling of our aid to Central America. Since then Canada's policy towards Central America has evolved and been refined taking into account both our humanitarian concerns and the geopolitical realities of the area. I must stress, however, that Canadian development assistance in Central America is not given on the basis of politics or held back to reward or penalize governments. Indeed, such a generalized practice would contradict our fundamental policy which aims at promoting the economic and social development of disadvantaged people so that they and their children may look forward to an improved quality of life. Regrettably, however, internal situations do arise which have led us to suspend individual bilateral aid programs, as has been the case in certain countries. We are pleased, however, that at least in one case, we have been able to resume our development assistance programs in light of positive developments. Canada continues to believe that the respect for human dignity and basic human rights in each of the countries of Central America constitutes a fundamental element of the return to peace and stability in the region. Such respect remains a transcendent concern of Canada and a visceral preoccupation of Canadians.

Briefly stated, Canada's concerns in Central America are, in large measure, the same as those which motivate the countries of the Contadora Group themselves. There are honourable exceptions, but we are appalled by the disregard for basic human rights. We are troubled by poverty, the declining quality of life, the displacement from their homes of over two million people or about one-tenth of the population of the entire Central American region and foreign military interference. We fervently hope that all the parties involved in the various Central American conflicts will refrain from increasing the already alarming level of militarization of the area. In the broader context, as a fellow Commonwealth country, we cannot fail to note the severe socioeconomic problems caused for Belize, a small nation, not a party to any conflict, but host to thousands of refugees from those states that are. Our policy towards the region reflects both our compassion for those who are suffering and our pursuit of good neighbourliness in the Western hemisphere.

This is one reason why we have expressed our support for Contadora since its inception and why we have provided practical forms of diplomatic assistance. At the request of the Contadora countries, Canada prepared detailed comments on the control and verification mechanism at the various stages of the draft Contadora Acts, based upon our long experience in the field of UN peacekeeping activities. We have also been assisting the reconciliation efforts in Nicaragua by witnessing in Bogota and Mexico the talks between representatives of the Sandinistas and the indigenous opposition group Misurasata.

We believe that the creation of the Support Group composed of Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and Peru as well as the recent conference held in Luxembourg between the European Community, Spain and Portugal, the Contadora Group and the Central American countries constitute valuable efforts to strengthen the peace process in the region. These efforts have our full support, as do the complementary

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