

group.²⁷ The next ministerial session will occur in March 1996 to "determine... the next steps", including timetables for further work. It is agreed that a third ministerial meeting will follow, likely in early 1997.

The next challenge is to build on the positive but still tentative Denver results and the subsequent preparatory work by developing a concrete timetable leading to the launch of formal negotiations with a view to achieving a credible mid term harvest of binding commitments by the year 2000. In their next meeting in Cartagena, Colombia in March 1996 and in the third session that will follow, participants will have to focus more sharply on the how and when of initiating negotiations, if they are to maintain current momentum and expectations.

What might provide such momentum? First, the detailed work programme launched in Denver should help to keep all regional players focused on the free trade objective. A different country chairs each of the seven working groups created in Denver and the venue of the ministerial meetings will also likely vary. This is positive, as it reinforces the process among the more than 30 countries of "buying" into the 2005 vision. Nonetheless, participants with the resources to help drive the preparatory activity, and this includes Canada in the first ranks, will have to work hard to ensure that the momentum in the current preparatory phase does not become beached on the twin shoals of technical minutia and the lesser commitment of some countries to a comprehensive 2005 package. The Denver/Cartagena work programme is, therefore, necessary to achieve the FTAA, but not likely close to being sufficient to provide adequate momentum.

Second, countries that are in a position to negotiate must move forward forcefully over the next two or three years in order to create a concrete free trade dynamic that will echo back positively into the broader FTAA process. For Canada and the U.S., this includes working for deeper economic relations with countries that are solid candidates for NAFTA accession over the medium term (i.e., before the year 2000). North America must position itself to begin substantive negotiations sooner rather than later. For its part, the Canadian government is a strong, public advocate

²⁷ The working groups include: market access (tariffs and non-tariff barriers on goods); customs procedures and rules of origin; investment; standards and technical barriers to trade; sanitary and phytosanitary measures; subsidies, antidumping and countervailing duties; and the factors affecting smaller economies. The four groups that will begin work in March 1996 cover: government procurement; intellectual property rights; services; and competition policy. See "Joint Declaration", Summit of the Americas Trade Ministerial, Denver, Colorado, June 30, 1995. Conspicuously absent is a group on dispute settlement, an issue central to an effective FTAA.