

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy framework is to provide direction to the Latin America and Caribbean Bureau and missions in the region in light of the government's stated objectives and policy guidelines. It reflects the changing dynamic affecting Canada's place in the Americas, and offers a clear rationale for expanding Canada's presence in the hemisphere.

BACKGROUND:

Historically, Canada's record in the America's has been, at best, mixed. At times we exerted our influence, at others we came and went with little to show for our pains. Sometimes our exertions were nothing more than a counterbalance to the influence of the USA. There have been certain constants: we have always maintained a different policy toward Cuba; we have committed resources to peacekeeping efforts and peaceful resolution of disputes; we have maintained our historical relationship with the Commonwealth Caribbean and, of course, we have pursued our own developmental and trade interests. But what was lacking, despite our wide range of interests and activities, was coherence and consistency. In parts of Latin America, the incidence of dictatorship, debt crises and human rights abuses had been punctuated occasionally by promising developments during the past 40-50 years, but they were not sustained. Our brief forays into the region reflected this instable climate and our lack of deep commitment. It should be noted that our involvement in the Commonwealth Caribbean, because of its historical legacy, has been more sustained and consistent.

All of this has changed. As the 1980's progressed, it became clear that fundamental, irreversible change was underway. Experiments with radical economic, social and political models had failed and, after the collapse of communism, the liberal/democratic model was the only viable alternative. Orthodox economic policies replaced import-substitution models, democratization began to penetrate beyond holding elections, de-militarization progressed and genuine attempts were being made to improve the human rights record.

For the first time, both economic and political reforms were being introduced simultaneously, reinforcing one another and offering hope that at last change would be permanent. By the early 1990's it was evident that our hemispheric neighbours were, for the first time in their troubled history, emerging on the world scene as modern states. Canada possesses many of the tools and much of the expertise that they will need to assist them in effecting this transformation.