

with our partners in the Western hemisphere, calling this region one of the new poles of political and economic power. The Government's active interest in the region was highlighted by the major political and trade mission which our Prime Minister led to six countries of the region in January of this year. This visit provided added impetus to an already vital and productive relationship with the region, opening up many new areas of political, economic and cultural co-operation.

Another key element of the Foreign Policy Statement is the emphasis on Canada's participation in regional institutions, particularly the OAS. The document calls, in particular, for Canada to support the OAS in its efforts to reform and to increase its capacity for dealing with issues such as human rights, democracy, security and trade. In fact, these are the issues on which Canada has concentrated during its first five years in the OAS.

#### **Canadian Priorities at the OAS**

Respect for human rights is not only a fundamental value for Canadians, but also a crucial element in the development of stable, democratic and prosperous societies. It is precisely for this reason that Canada has always been a staunch supporter of the invaluable work of the Inter-American Commission and Inter-American Court of Human Rights. These bodies have been instrumental in fostering greater respect for human rights throughout the hemisphere, and they deserve the full and unstinting support - moral and financial - of the Organization and all its members.

Canada's democratic tradition is a fundamental component of our value system and underpins our stability and prosperity as a nation. Similarly, the strengthening of democracy throughout the region is important to promote peace and stability, both within and among nations. At present, all but one country in the region has a democratically elected government. However, there is still much work to be done to strengthen and consolidate recent democratic gains.

The OAS has made a name for itself in electoral monitoring and assistance, and this is very important. But true, lasting democracy goes beyond elections. It encompasses, among other things, civic education and public participation; effective legislative and parliamentary systems; an independent judiciary and respect for the rule of law; responsible government at all levels; and civilian control of police and military forces.

The OAS's Unit for the Promotion of Democracy [UPD] has the mandate to promote long-term democratic development and must, in Canada's view, devote more of its attention and resources to these other elements. However, in order to fulfil this role, the