

importance this region has come to assume in Canada's external relations. With its large population and rich resource base it has become one of the fastest growing regions in the world. Projections are that real gross national product will average 6 to 9 per cent annually over the years ahead. For Canada, a country which earns almost one-third of its gross national product through trade, ASEAN is an area of vital interest.

More bilateral exchanges

A solid pattern of bilateral relationships between Canada and the individual member countries of ASEAN has developed. It is the country-to-country relationship which nourishes and enhances the over-all relationships with ASEAN as a whole. The number of senior level and ministerial visits between Canada and the countries of ASEAN has grown dramatically in the last few years. The visits have facilitated bilateral exchanges and consultation on political issues and in many diverse fields — energy, resources, trade, education, science and technology, North-South issues. This list of shared interests is an impressive indicator of the convergence of Canadian and Southeast Asian interests on a number of fronts.

Development co-operation is an important element in our bilateral relationships. Indonesia is among the largest recipients of Canadian development assistance. In the past year we have launched a development assistance program in Thailand. In the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore development co-operation is conducted through CIDA's Special Programs Branch with particular emphasis on industrial and institutional co-operation. Indeed, our industrial co-operation program has brought to ASEAN more projects than in any other region in the world.

The Canadian presence in Southeast Asia is also manifested through the activities of non-governmental organizations, universities, and other institutions through the region. The locating of the Asia Regional Office of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Singapore, the IDRC's support for many projects in the ASEAN countries, and its important role in this conference demonstrate Canada's strong commitment to working with the Southeast Asian research community in tackling the great challenges of development.

Perhaps the one dimension of Southeast Asia that has had the most direct impact on Canadians at large, and has so greatly heightened the profile of Southeast Asia in Canada, is the massive exodus of Indochinese refugees. We can take pride and feel some satisfaction in Canada's response to a crisis which threatened the social fabric and stability of several ASEAN countries. Canada's humanitarian concern and our commitment to maintaining peace and stability in Southeast Asia resulted in our accepting over 70 000 refugees from Indochina since the Communist victories in South Vietnam and Cambodia in 1975.

Greater cultural awareness

Canada's strong cultural ties across the Atlantic are rooted in the early patterns of settlement in our country. The growing presence of a Southeast Asian community in Canada — Indochinese, Filipino, Malaysian — has in a few short years altered and