

years ahead. How should our relationship with the region be modified to reflect future global interests?

Mr. Speaker, there also has been significant progress in the area of economic renewal in Latin America and the Caribbean, which provides the foundation for sustainable growth and development. Many countries in this region are making considerable progress in implementing market-oriented economic reforms -- privatization, deregulation, emphasis on export-oriented production -- and are integrating into regional and global markets. Investor confidence is improving. As a result, this is a region that is expanding economically, and in which Canada has an increasingly important trade and investment stake that can contribute to economic recovery and renewal in Canada. We must seize these opportunities in the most effective manner possible.

The North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] among Canada, the United States and Mexico foreshadows the fuller partnerships that can be constructed throughout the region. I have just returned from Chile: one example of a country already seeking accession to the NAFTA. Other Latin American countries are expected to follow. However, in the foreseeable future, not all countries will be in a position to meet the requirements for joining. I am interested in how our government might deal with this reality because I believe that Canadians want to encourage the social and economic progress of all developing nations, regardless of their current stage of development. Economic and social inequities in nations and within regions are known to be causes of instability.

Canada's Official Development Assistance plays an important role in our partnerships throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. In this instance, there are certain similarities to our relationship to Africa. By supporting the economic reform process and encouraging governments to do more now to mitigate the associated social costs, Canada's aid program has:

- promoted sustainable development, particularly in the management of natural resources;
- contributed to a reduction in poverty; and
- promoted respect for human rights, democratic development and good economic governance.

Mr. Speaker, I know, from first-hand experience with grassroots projects throughout Central America, the good that can result from human-scale community development initiatives supported by Canadians. Our larger-scale official programs of development assistance have also had positive impact in vital areas ranging from food production to human rights, from the development of clean water sources to economic reform, and thus have contributed