



Offering support: Captain Shawn Courty, with the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment, helps a young boy shoot the first basket on a net that soldiers installed at a local orphanage in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince in June 2004. The regiment was part of Canada's contribution to the UN Stabilization Mission in the country.

Canada feels that these issues are especially important to the region because democracy is the base for economic growth. That link was made explicit by the theme of the recent Summit of the Americas—Creating Jobs to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance.

## Trading places

Canada's role as a forger of consensus in the region is gaining prominence, especially given the impasse at the Summit on the issue of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Canada has made an unequivocal commitment to the success of the FTAA, with the premise that freer and fairer trade would lift people out of poverty and enable Canada to leverage its size to compete globally, generating jobs at home. With its differences resolved, the hemisphere could represent the largest economic alliance in the world.

At the Summit, however, while 29 nations agreed to renew the FTAA negotiations, four felt that the conditions for free trade were not propitious at this time and one rejected the FTAA altogether. Venezuela has argued for a counter-strategy to focus the cooperation effort within South America.

"Latin America requires approaches that focus on human development, domestic markets and domestic capacities," explains Ricardo Grinspun, a Chilean-born

professor of economics at the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean at York University in Toronto. "International finance and markets play a role in that, but are not an end in themselves."

Influential *Miami Herald* columnist Andres Oppenheimer, however, strongly endorses the FTAA premise. "China, India and eastern European countries are carrying out what may be the biggest reduction in poverty in world history," he says, "and it is mostly due to their commercial opening to the world."

## Brazil: An emerging priority

While multilateral cooperation in the hemisphere is critical, Canada's relations with individual countries of the region are also vital. A key tie is with Brazil, an emerging giant comprising half of South America's population and GDP, identified in Canada's recent International Policy Statement as a priority nation.

"Brazil is a major, sophisticated and influential player on the multilateral scene, whether it is in world trade negotiations as leader of the G20 or in UN peacekeeping operations," notes Florencia Jubany, a senior policy analyst at the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) in Ottawa. "Brazil is also a central actor in the Americas, and shares many points of convergence with Canada's own foreign policy."

Jamal Khokhar, Director General of the Latin America and Caribbean Bureau at FAC, says that Canada and Brazil "not only share a hemisphere, they share goals, priorities and—perhaps most important of all—values." This makes the two countries natural partners, he says. "We are living in a world of rising powers and Brazil is one of those powers. Canada appreciates Brazil's leadership and believes it can make a difference in the hemisphere."

Brazil is a force behind South American integration and has played a moderating role, which is critical given the economic hardships in neighbouring Andean nations such as Bolivia and Ecuador and the potential for political unrest there.

## The Latin quarter

Brazilians also appreciate the quality of education in Canadian schools. Canada is the largest international destination for Brazil's students, who are joined by ever-greater numbers of young people from countries like Colombia, Venezuela and Argentina.

"In my classes I'm seeing increasing numbers of students from the region," says Andy Hira, a Latin America specialist at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. "For the Latin American student, having a degree from Canada is definitely a leg up in the job market [back home]."