

Under these pillars fall a vast array of Government initiatives which aim to further Canada's interests in virtually all policy areas, including trade, agriculture, innovation, defence and security, public safety, environment, education, labour, governance, cultural relations, information and communications technologies, energy, and transportation. Some initiatives are well known to the public, such as the ambitious Canada-US Smart Border Action Plan; others tend to operate 'out of the public spotlight', like the Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education. Their implementation requires input and participation from a diverse range of actors, including provincial, territorial and municipal governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of public reflection on Canada's place in an increasingly interdependent global society. Globalization continues to change the way Canadians interact with the world – the North American dimension is one of the largest pieces of the puzzle. The Standing Committee's Report reaffirms that we can and must exercise sovereignty in taking important decisions about our country's future, and is an important contribution to the ongoing discussion on Canada's role and relations in North America.

Recommendation 1

The Government of Canada should explicitly make Canada's relations with its North American partners an overall policy priority. In that regard, and particularly in terms of defining the North American dimension of Canadian foreign policy, the Government should elaborate a coherent public strategy for advancing Canadian interests and values in the context of North America, including Mexico, beginning with its comprehensive response to the recommendations in this report.

The Government agrees that relations with our North American Partners should be a top policy priority for Canada. The Government's overall strategy on North America has been, and continues to be, to work bilaterally with the United States and Mexico and to complement these separate, proactive agendas through the exploration of possible trilateral initiatives in areas of mutual interest.

On a number of occasions over the last three years, the Government has underscored the importance it attaches to Canada's North American relationships. In 2000, the Government identified North American Linkages as a priority area for research in partnership with the academic community, and created a North America Bureau in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) to better coordinate Canada's relations with the US and Mexico. Other departments have also created North America and Canada-US units. DFAIT's 2003 *Strategic Planning and Priorities*

