

The Canadian Government has been an active participant in the economic development of the Commonwealth Caribbean for a quarter of a century. In the autumn of 1956, in the heady days when a federation of the English-speaking island states of the region was in the air, the then Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester Bowles Pearson, convened a conference of Caribbean leaders in Ottawa during which a first significant pledge of Canadian official assistance was made to the then embryonic University of the West Indies, to begin the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation and to lay down the keels of the "Federal Maple" and the "Federal Palm", sturdy inter-island trading vessels which many in this room will remember. A decade later in 1966 when we had all become wiser in the difficulties of federal government and in the techniques of development assistance transfers, my predecessor in office, the Hon. Paul Martin, chaired a Second Commonwealth Caribbean Conference in Ottawa during the course of which Canada renewed its pledge to assist the states of the Commonwealth Caribbean on a continuing basis. Over the fifteen years since the Second Ottawa Conference on the Caribbean, the Canadian Development Assistance Programme to the region - bilateral, multilateral, non-government organizational, industrial cooperation, grant and loan, direct and indirect - has been put in place to quicken economic growth in the Caribbean, leading naturally and inevitably to redefinition of the Canada-Commonwealth Caribbean relationship.

Two years ago here in Kingston, Don Jamieson as Secretary of State for External Affairs, was proud to sign for Canada the agreement with CARICOM (Caribbean Common Market) on trade and economic cooperation. That was the first formal meeting at ministerial level between CARICOM and Canada. It gives me great personal pleasure to be here at the Second Ministerial Meeting, and once again to bask in the warmth of Caribbean hospitality.

Initial progress in providing substance to the trade, technical and financial and industrial cooperation provisions of the 1979 agreement has been modest, solid and real. Our first contacts were essentially exploratory in nature. These were followed by useful work by officials, at the November 1979 Joint Trade and Economic Committee (JTEC) Meeting in Ottawa and in the subsequent meeting of the ad hoc committee on industrial cooperation in Barbados. Our challenge today is to build on this foundation.

For our part, at the highest political levels, there is commitment to a new and dynamic thrust to the CARICOM relationship. In the past year, a comprehensive review of Canada's relations with the Commonwealth Caribbean has been commissioned, completed, considered and approved by the Canadian Cabinet.