

CENTRAL AMERICAN PEACE PROCESS

The Search for Peace

The search for peace in Central America has been long and difficult. Several years of talks among members of the Contadora Group (Panama, Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela) helped set the stage for an August 1987 summit meeting of Central American presidents in Guatemala. By the end of this landmark session, the presidents had seized the initiative and agreed to a regional peace plan, put forward by President Arias.

In its preamble, the Guatemala agreement said that "guarantees must be established to allow popular participation in authentic and democratic political processes that are based on justice, liberty and democracy.... The governments will commit themselves to initiate an authentic, pluralistic, participatory democratic process that implies promotion of social justice, respect for human rights, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the rights of all countries to determine freely and without outside influence of any kind, their economic, political and social model...."

Canada was encouraged by the emergence of a broad, regional consensus on the need to declare ceasefires in the countries where conflicts existed, extend amnesty to armed insurgents, and initiate dialogue with unarmed opposition groups. The Guatemala plan established an ambitious timetable for the development of a lasting peace settlement. While implementation of the peace plan has been difficult, real progress has been made. Canadians are encouraged to see the Central American nations themselves taking an active role in finding appropriate, regional solutions to regional difficulties.

Canada's Support for the Peace Process

Support for the peace process and for regional autonomy in determining the dimensions of a lasting peace agreement have long been cornerstones of Canadian policy in Central America. This has been expressed in numerous public statements, as well as in private discussions with the parties involved.

As early as 1985, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, in meetings with the President and Foreign Minister of Mexico, stated Canada's willingness to help design appropriate peacekeeping mechanisms, drawing on three decades of Canadian peacekeeping experience. On three subsequent occasions, Canada prepared detailed written comments on key provisions of the Contadora Draft Act, at the request of participating governments.