

## **Canada-Central America: Strengthening the Relationship**

Canada has enjoyed good relations with the countries of Central America and has worked to deepen this relationship over the last quarter-century. During this period, diplomatic relations, trade, immigration and travel have all increased significantly. In addition, Canada has become a full, active member of the Organization of American States. Its closest Latin American neighbours, the countries of Central America, are of great importance to Canada as it expands its role in the hemisphere.

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's trip to Latin America in January 1995 marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of more extensive relations with the region. While meeting with the Central American leaders in San José, Costa Rica, Prime Minister Chrétien invited them to visit Canada. As a result, six of the seven leaders will visit Ottawa and Toronto on May 15-17, 1996.

The six leaders are: the Prime Minister of Belize, Manuel Esquivel; the President of Costa Rica, José María Figueres Olsen; the President of El Salvador, Armando Calderón Sol; the President of Guatemala, Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen; the President of Honduras, Carlos Roberto Reina, and the President of Nicaragua, Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro.

Significant changes have taken place in Central America with the end of most internal conflicts. Progress has been made in the implementation of peace accords and in human rights, demilitarization and economic reform. The Canadian government is now able to work more directly with the Central American governments and to develop relations focused on strengthening democracy by reforming democratic institutions, building a regional trade regime and addressing the structural sources of poverty.

Canada seeks to expand commercial relations with the region and to support the Central American countries in their efforts to reform and modernize their economies. In addition, Canada is assisting Central American efforts to achieve economic integration in preparation for the Free Trade Area of the Americas and possible links with NAFTA.

Canada remains committed to support for sustainable development in the region, equitable economic growth, respect for human rights and the development of a vibrant and active civil society. This commitment is reflected in the many significant projects being implemented in conjunction with the Canadian International Development Agency.