

On July 15, 2007, a team of thirty weary but enthusiastic Canadian trade negotiators gathered in a dimly lit conference room in Lima, Peru. It would mark the beginning of Canada's intensive, challenging and ultimately successful negotiation of a free trade agreement with Peru.

When the Stars Align

BY MEGAN CLIFFORD

We were in Lima awaiting the arrival of Canada's energetic and engaging ambassador to Peru, Geneviève des Rivières, who would brief us on what to anticipate over the coming months. It was important to understand the expectations that our negotiations would inevitably raise among Canadian investors operating in Peru and those exporters anxious to maintain market access in the face of an increasingly competitive environment.

The long flight to Lima came after several weeks of preparation, and followed Prime Minister Harper's visit to the region. The local papers were still heralding the much-welcomed announcement that re-engagement with the Americas would be a key priority for Canada. A

rules of origin, Dean Beyea and Sylvie Larose respectively, hailed from Finance Canada. It was also further indication that Canada's ambitious trade agenda had placed tremendous demands on the existing DFAIT talent pool.

Carol's hands-on leadership style motivated our delegation and when issues threatened to bog down the process, she proved to be a creative and effective problem solver. From early on, she and her Colombian and Peruvian counterparts established a relationship based on trust, respect and an agreement that the negotiations should move at an accelerated pace. From the outset, the negotiations proved to be challenging, since most of the Canadian delegates were negotiating simultaneously with both Peru and Colombia. This dynamic was at

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tangible component of that commitment was the launch of negotiations of free trade agreements with Peru and with Colombia.

Our small Canadian delegation would be responsible for the content of the 23 chapters and two annexes that would make up each of the two separate agreements. We were a balanced mix of people with ample negotiating experience and those who had yet to face a foreign delegation. The unpredictable world of trade talks—complete with national flags, headsets and interpreters—would hold our attention for the next five months.

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times advantageous, since neither country wanted to see the other make faster progress. But at other times it was decidedly difficult when the discussions put Canada in a defensive position against two aligned countries.

On the bumpy ride back to our hotel following a particularly long day of negotiations, I remember feeling considerable sympathy for a colleague who found herself outnumbered at her negotiating table by roughly 39 to 1. She was the target of numerous questions and had the unenviable task of defending a policy position that did not accord with the positions held by Peru and Colombia.

The FTA negotiations with Peru concluded after four complete rounds. Each round lasted roughly a week, and was hosted in each capital—Lima, Ottawa, Bogota—with the final round in Lima in November 2007. The speed and scale of this undertaking was unprecedented. I have spent the last six years of my career participating in free trade negotiations, including the ambitious Free Trade Area of the Americas, the Central American Four FTA and



Megan Clifford and legal counsel!
Michael Owen at the negotiating table.