

give priority to actively expanding relations with the region. Indeed, this was one of the components of our Party's election platform.

Since coming to power, our government has also initiated a major foreign policy review. In the course of these deliberations and in other fora, we have outlined a number of priorities for the Western Hemisphere — chief among these are sustainable development, democratic development and good governance, trade and economic integration, and security issues.

Promoting sustainable development in the region is a key issue for the Government of Canada. We must tackle the problems of poverty and under-development in the hemisphere in ways that are environmentally sound and sustainable. Sustainable development, democratic development and good governance, in combination with economic integration and trade, and security issues, must all be central to hemispheric community development. However, if we do not work together to reduce social and economic inequalities and develop economic benefits in a sustainable way, all other policy areas become irrelevant. There will be no environment to build upon.

Canada has been seeking, within the OAS Environment Committee, to encourage a more active role for the OAS in promoting the implementation of Agenda 21 at the regional level. We have before us at this General Assembly a resolution which proposes closer links with the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development, a body created by the 1992 Earth Conference — also held here in Brazil. We will also have a resolution calling for the holding of an OAS meeting of experts, with the aim of complementing the Commission's ongoing work on Agenda 21.

In this spirit, I am pleased to announce the offer of the Government of Canada to host such a meeting of experts on the topic of environmentally sound technologies. This is a cross-cutting theme of the Commission's work program and was the focus of significant debate at its most recent meeting. The OAS will be the first regional body to respond to the Commission's invitation for organizations outside the UN system to contribute to its work. It is our hope that this initiative will serve as a shining example to the rest of the world of what can be achieved in terms of regional environmental co-operation.

Another priority for the Government of Canada in our relations with the region is encouraging democracy and the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes. Virtually all of the governments in this hemisphere are democratically elected and that is a feat of which we should all be very proud. However, this does not mean we can afford to be complacent. Democracy is absolutely fundamental to the well-being of our nations in terms of peace and stability, social and economic growth and human