

# THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE STATUTE OF WESTMINSTER

On December 11, 1931, the Parliament of Great Britain enacted the Statute of Westminster to clarify and extend Canada's legal freedoms and to lay the basis for a truly independent Canadian foreign policy. The development of autonomy and then independence in Canada's foreign relations was a gradual process, occurring over many years and marked by a number of milestones.

The immediate origins of the Statute of Westminster lie in developments during the 1920s, when Canada and two of its sister dominions within the British Empire — South

Africa and the Irish Free State — pushed for greater autonomy and for the freedom to represent their own interests internationally. The Empire, they believed, must become a commonwealth of equal nations. In response to these pressures, the Imperial Conferences of 1923 and 1926 expanded the powers of the dominions, making them constitutionally "equal in status" and paving the way for the Statute of Westminster and the removal of the last vestiges of colonial status.

In the words of eminent Canadian historian C.P. Stacey, the Statute of Westminster is the closest proximation to Canada's

Declaration of Independence. Its 60th anniversary provides an occasion to reflect on Canada's foreign policy tradition and to look ahead to its foreign relations in decades to come.

To mark this occasion, External Affairs and International Trade Canada co-sponsored a conference entitled "Canadian Foreign Policy: Has Canada Made a Difference?" The conference was held at the Inn on the Park in Toronto, Ontario, in December.

- vigorously promote trade and investment in knowledge-based and service industries; and
- maintain Canada's competitiveness in areas where the country is already successful.

The quality of life of Canadians can be sustained only through effective national and international measures to protect the environment. Therefore, Canada will seek to:

- establish an effective legal foundation for international environmental standards, to which all countries are committed;
- integrate environmental considerations in decision-making by international financial and other institutions; and
- help developing countries to carry out their international environmental obligations.

"We must turn our minds instead to the future, to find the right mix of policies to ensure stability and prosperity at home, and over time to help create a more predictable, more stable, and safer world," said Mrs. McDougall.

## Strengthening Co-operative Security

The Gulf War, the conflict in Yugoslavia and recent developments in the former U.S.S.R. have shown how fragile international peace and stability are and how suddenly they can give way to instability and confrontation. Security remains a vital priority for Canadian foreign policy, particularly the establishment of a more co-operative world order based on the rule of law. Specifically, Canada's foreign policy will seek to:

- improve controls on the spread of instruments of war and weapons of mass destruction;

- expand national and multi-national capabilities to deal with non-military threats to security, including environmental degradation, drug trafficking, terrorism and irregular migration;
- improve the United Nations' ability to maintain peace and security, and expand peace-keeping operations to include functions such as electoral supervision, democratic development and refugee protection; and
- offer official development assistance to reduce poverty, enhance human rights and, in turn, build stable political entities.

## Sustaining a High Standard of Living

Canada is a high-wage and high-cost country. The country can sustain its high standard of living only if it continues to improve its productivity and the skills of its labour force, if it can offer an

attractive environment for industries of the future, and if it can secure access to major international markets for its exporters. As a medium-sized country with limited fiscal resources, it is vital that Canada operate in a stable international economic system that is based on rules. Specifically, Canada's economic and trade policy will try to:

- advance Canadian interests through multilateral, regional and bilateral trade negotiations and consultations;
- contribute to the development of more effective approaches to the international debt problem;
- encourage the integration of economies in transition (Central and Eastern Europe) into the international trade and payments system, and the participation of newly industrialized economies in multilateral negotiations and organizations;

## Securing Democracy and Human Rights

During the past few years, there have been democratic revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as solid democratic progress in Latin America and parts of Asia and Africa. The international movement toward democracy and greater respect for human rights has never been greater. To help sustain that momentum, Canada's foreign policy will focus on securing democracy and human rights through initiatives designed to:

- encourage respect for human rights, the rule of law and fundamental democratic principles;
- encourage good governance and sound economic policies;
- maintain a strong commitment to reducing poverty and providing humanitarian assistance;