

PART B

Chapter 2: LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In 1981 Canada pursued its policy of closer contacts with Latin America and the Caribbean and of concentrating its efforts in Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela, as well as the countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean. A number of official visits took place including some at the head-of-government level - such as the first visit of a Canadian prime minister to Brazil - which were very significant in both political and economic terms.

There was increasing public and parliamentary interest in Latin America and the Caribbean as evidenced by two full days of debate in the House of Commons on El Salvador and Central America in March and June and the establishment of a House of Commons sub-committee on Canada's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, which submitted an interim report in December 1981.

In January 1981 the inaugural meeting of the Canada-CARICOM Joint Trade and Economic Committee at ministerial level in Jamaica was attended by Secretary of State for External Affairs Mark MacGuigan, who also made official visits to Barbados and St. Kitts-Nevis. On this occasion, Dr. MacGuigan announced in Kingston that, following a major review by Cabinet of Canada's relations with the Commonwealth Caribbean, that region would henceforth be considered a priority in Canada's external relations. He also announced that Canadian official development assistance (ODA) to the region would be doubled over the next five years. In addition, Canada undertook to extend more assistance to the Commonwealth Caribbean countries in crime prevention, coastal environment, fisheries and rescue capabilities and to cope more effectively with natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanoes and hurricanes. In May, Canada was instrumental in organizing a special meeting, held in Antigua, to discuss the special development problems of the Leeward and Windward Islands, small states in the eastern Caribbean.

In July, the foreign ministers of Canada, the United States, Mexico and Venezuela meeting in Nassau, agreed to the Caribbean Basin Initiative to promote social and economic development in the Caribbean area without considerations or political preconditions.

The North-South dialogue was continued at the Summit Meeting in Cancun, Mexico in September.

In September Belize (formerly British Honduras) became independent and was accepted into the Commonwealth and the United Nations.

Trade

There was a decrease of 15.8 per cent in exports from Canada to South America from 1980 to 1981 and an increase of 8 per cent in imports from that area. In Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean, there was an