

LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN BUREAU

REGIONAL STRATEGY

OVERVIEW:

The Latin America/Caribbean region has been transformed in the past decade. All 33 governments - except Cuba's - are democratically elected; the human rights situation has improved dramatically; the military is no longer a key factor; orthodox economic policies are opening long-protected economies to the rigours of global competition and, as a result, Canadian trade and investment are growing in leaps and bounds. Canada has influence and can make a difference in this hemisphere, because we are part of it - a unique advantage that sets the Americas apart from other regions.

The Prime Minister has emphasized that the hemisphere is a high priority for the government and for him personally, and he has dedicated an unprecedented amount of his time to it. In January, 1998, he led the largest and most complex Team Canada mission ever to Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. In April he held a regional summit with his Caribbean counterparts in Nassau, followed by the 34-nation Summit of the Americas in Santiago. The Prime Minister then made a bilateral visit to Cuba, a useful reminder that Canada has an independent approach to hemispheric issues. He has forged close personal relationships with a number of hemispheric leaders, whom he consults regularly by telephone.

Other ministers have been very active; at the OAS General Assembly in June, Minister Axworthy underlined the influence that the region now wields globally as a result of its economic and political reforms; it now has an important voice on issues of world concern. Minister Marchi has been very active in the region and was instrumental in forging consensus on the Free Trade Area of the Americas at the trade ministerial meeting in Costa Rica in March 1998. Canada, as a result, was selected to chair the trade negotiations for the first 18 months. SSLA Kilgour has made frequent visits to the region, promoting Canada's trade and investment interests and human security issues. The hemisphere has become a solid supporter of Canadian values and Canadian initiatives such as the anti-landmine campaign, human security concerns and our bid for a seat on the Security Council (100 percent support).

The active schedule of 1998, outlined above, has set the stage for an unprecedented agenda over the next two years: In 1999, Canada will host the Pan American Games in Winnipeg; the First Spouses conference; the FTAA Trade Ministerial and the Americas Business Forum. In the year 2000, the General Assembly of the OAS will be held in Canada - the tenth anniversary of our joining - and, to close the millenium (or open the next), all the leaders of the hemisphere will come to Canada for the Third Summit of the Americas. Canada is providing leadership in the process of integration in the Americas - a process that is irreversible, opening the way to a new era in hemispheric relations, and new opportunities to promote Canadian economic, political and cultural interests.