

*eventually establishing an overarching North American parliamentary group drawn from members of the continuing bilateral groups.*

- *Further to the creation of such a trilateral parliamentary association, the Canadian Parliament should propose to its two congressional counterparts that an inaugural North American parliamentary forum be held on the future of North American partnership. Such a forum could include participation by elected non-federal officials as well as incorporate an opportunity for dialogue with both government and civil-society representatives from the three countries. Based on that experience, the trilateral forum could be continued at agreed intervals with the venue rotating among the three countries.*
- *Parliament and Government should ensure that the development of trilateral inter-parliamentary cooperation is adequately prepared, and supported with the additional resources that will be required for this purpose. Future consideration should also be given to exchanges of parliamentary and congressional staff and to establishing a North American congressional and parliamentary internship program.*

The Government is a strong advocate of strengthened parliamentary linkages, which are a key component to advancing Canada's foreign policy interests in general, including the development of the North American partnership. In a letter of July 15, 2002, the Minister for International Trade and Minister of Foreign Affairs encouraged the Parliament of Canada to support greater allocation of funding for parliamentary travel and stressed the importance of such activity for Canadian foreign and trade policy interests.

The Government believes that the question of the formation of a North American parliamentary group would best be pursued through engaging allies within the US and Mexican congresses through existing bilateral parliamentary groups and other inter-parliamentary fora. The Government encourages the exchange of parliamentary staff and believes that in this specific case, the exchange of staff involved in policy research on the North American dynamic would be useful.

Officials from DFAIT and other departments provide oral and written briefings and resource persons in support for the annual conferences of the Canada-US Inter-Parliamentary Group and the Canada-Mexico Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group. DFAIT also provides support for regular parliamentary exchanges outside of these events. For example, in 2001 Canada welcomed five Mexican delegations consisting of Parliamentarians or government officials interested in parliamentary issues. Thus far in 2003, three Canadian parliamentary delegations have travelled to the United States to meeting with their congressional counterparts, as well as federal and state representatives