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WILSON OUTLINES CANADA'S OBJECTIVES IN TALKS WITH U.S. AND MEXICO ON ENVIRONMENT, LABOUR

The Honourable Michael Wilson, Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade, said Canada will pursue specific objectives and play a leading role in talks aimed at producing additional agreements on the environment and labour among Canada, the United States and Mexico as partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The talks begin March 17 and 18 in Washington.

"Canada played a leading role in negotiating strong environmental provisions in the NAFTA, and we will continue to do so in these discussions," Mr. Wilson said. "During the NAFTA negotiations, we also advocated establishing a trilateral forum to explore labour issues. We are pleased the United States and Mexico are now prepared to discuss a trilateral agreement in this area."

The Minister said Canada will pursue four basic objectives in talks leading to an additional agreement on the environment.

1. Canada will support the creation of -- and propose specific functions for -- a North American Commission on the Environment (NACE).
2. Canada will seek to strengthen environmental co-operation among Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.
3. Canada will promote sustainable development based on mutually supporting environmental and economic policies and practices.
4. Canada will favour increased co-operation on the development and enforcement of environmental regulations.

"We see a wide-ranging role for a North American Commission on the Environment," the Minister said. "Its functions might include harmonizing toward higher environmental standards, developing limits for specific pollutants, promoting

environmental science and technology, collecting data and reporting on the state of the environment, and increasing public awareness on environmental issues. As well, the NACE would co-operate with the free trade commission to achieve the environmental goals of the NAFTA."

Canada's position on the environmental negotiations is being developed in close co-operation with the provinces and non-government representatives, including environmentalists and the private sector.

In the negotiations for an additional agreement on labour, Mr. Wilson said Canada will seek to give effect to the commitments in the NAFTA preamble to "improve working conditions and living standards" in all three countries, and to "protect, enhance and enforce basic workers' rights."

Canada will advocate setting up a trinational body to carry out these objectives over time, Mr. Wilson added.

"We still believe that a trilateral working group or commission to review the issues and make recommendations to governments could be an important element of such an agreement," he said. "But we want to look carefully at other possible elements, such as the development of a set of common principles."

Noting that most of the labour force in Canada is under provincial jurisdiction, Mr. Wilson said: "The Government has already opened discussions with the provinces concerning the possible agreement on labour, and we expect to work closely with them as the negotiations proceed. We will also pursue consultations with labour and business representatives throughout these talks."

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