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CARICOM/CANADA WORKING GROUP BEGINS TRADE TALKS

The first meeting of the Joint Caribbean Community (CARICOM)/Canada Working Group to prepare for the negotiations on enhanced trade arrangements was held on 15 March 2001 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Kingston, Jamaica. This follows the decision of the Heads of Government of CARICOM and Canada at their Summit in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in January 2001, to begin exploratory work on a more mature trade relationship between CARICOM and Canada.

In welcoming delegates to the meeting, Jamaica's Foreign Trade Minister, Anthony Hylton, emphasised that CARICOM and Canada were approaching these discussions against the background of long and positive relations. He encouraged both sides to seek to build on those relations and to construct an agreement which preserves and goes beyond the existing trade arrangements.

The Head of the Canadian delegation, Mr. Duane Van Beselaere, Chief Negotiator and Special Advisor, Trade Policy, in replying, reiterated that the depth and diversity of relations between Canada and CARICOM provided an excellent basis on which to proceed in the negotiations. Even more important for Canada was the fact that CARICOM was Canada's fourth largest trading partner in the hemisphere, excluding the USA.

During the discussions the two sides identified the principles which would guide the negotiations and govern eventual enhanced trade arrangements between them. Both sides identified a number of issues which could be pursued in future negotiations, once the respective Governments have given approval following completion of their relevant national consultations.

CARICOM was represented by Sir Shridath Ramphal and Sir Alister McIntyre of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery, Ambassador Richard Bernal, Lead Negotiator for CARICOM in the CARICOM/Canada discussions, representatives from Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and the CARICOM Secretariat. Other members of the Canadian delegation were Ms. Jackie Snyder of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Mr. Robert Richard of the Canadian High Commission in Kingston, Jamaica.
