

PM and President Ricardo Martinelli mark conclusion of Canada-Panama free trade negotiations

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Canadian businesses and exporters will have greater access to the Panamanian market thanks to a new free trade agreement between Canada and Panama. Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Panama's President Ricardo Martinelli today marked the conclusion of negotiations on a historic free trade deal, alongside new agreements on labour and environmental co-operation.

"There is no more powerful tool in our efforts to ensure a recovery from the global recession than encouraging free and open trade among nations," said the Prime Minister. "Workers and businesses at home and abroad can count on Canada to be a consistent and clear advocate against protectionism and for investment and trade."

The Canada-Panama free trade agreement will eliminate tariffs in a range of sectors, including for industrial, agricultural, forestry, fish and other seafood. It will expand market access for Canadian services providers in such areas as information and communication technology, energy and financial services.

"Reaching a free trade agreement with a key hemispheric partner like Panama is the logical next step in our policy of pursuing deeper integration and closer co-operation throughout the Americas," said the Prime Minister. "I am pleased that strong labour and environmental standards are included in this deal. This agreement will open up new opportunities for people and businesses on both sides of the Canada-Panama trading relationship."

The Prime Minister also expressed his pleasure with the Panamanian Government's decision to re-open their market to Canadian beef exports for the first time since 2003.

"I'm pleased to see that Panama recognizes that Canada produces safe, high quality beef and pork products and I encourage all countries in Latin America to open their doors," said the Prime Minister.

Panama was one of the fastest-growing economies in the Americas in 2008 with a real GDP growth of 9.2 percent.

Several infrastructure projects are expected to contribute to Panama's future growth, including the US \$5.3 billion expansion of the Panama Canal. Canadian merchandise exports to Panama totalled \$127.9 million in 2008, up 48.1 percent from 2007.

Since coming to office, the Harper Government has made deeper hemispheric integration and expanded free trade two of its key foreign policy priorities. The Canada-Panama free trade agreement follows similar free-trade deals signed with the governments of Peru and Colombia. Outside of the Americas, the Harper Government has signed new free trade agreements with Jordan as well as European Free Trade Association nations of Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. The Harper Government is also pursuing ambitious new free trade agreements with its partners in Caribbean Community and is negotiating a comprehensive free trade deal with the European Union.