



News Release

January 9, 2001 (1:30 p.m. EST) No. 4

CANADA TO BEGIN CONSULTATIONS ON FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH FOUR CENTRAL AMERICAN NATIONS

The Government of Canada will begin public consultations to obtain Canadians' views on a free trade agreement with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, International Trade Minister Pierre Pettigrew announced today.

"Consulting Canadians is an ongoing and important part of developing Canada's trade policy," said Minister Pettigrew. "Negotiations will take into account vital Canadian interests such as labour and environmental standards."

The Government will seek input from the Canadian public, businesses, and citizen-based organizations, as well as the provinces and territories during the initial consultation process. Canadian and Central American officials are scheduled to meet at the end of February.

Canadians have also been consulted on ongoing World Trade Organization services negotiations (GATS), Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) talks, and on bilateral initiatives such as free trade negotiations with Costa Rica and exploratory free trade talks with Singapore.

In 1999, Canada exported goods worth \$212 million to El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua and imported goods worth about \$251 million. There is significant potential for Canadian companies in several priority export sectors, including telecommunications equipment, environmental equipment and services, foodstuffs, automotive parts, and construction materials.

Free trade negotiations with Central America signal Canada's continued engagement in the region, and will provide momentum to the negotiation of the FTAA.

Prime Minister Chrétien and the presidents of the four countries agreed to pursue a free trade agreement last September at the Canada-Central America Summit.

For more information on consultations on the Canada-Central America Four free trade negotiations, please visit: <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/tna-nac/ca4-e.asp>

For further information, media representatives may contact:

Sylvie Bussi eres

Office of the Minister for International Trade

(613) 992-7332

Media Relations Office

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

(613) 995-1874