

What role for Canada in the Americas?

Statement of the Americas Policy Group

April 15, 2009

The APG is a working group of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), Canada's coalition to end global poverty. The APG is comprised of forty organizations, including human rights groups, churches, labour unions, development organizations, and research institutions with decades of experience advocating social justice in collaboration with partners throughout the region.

From Ciudad Juarez to Santiago, from Belém and San Salvador to Port of Spain and from every corner of the Americas, people are clamouring for justice. Citizens are calling for new approaches to hemispheric cooperation and integration that will address the gross inequalities that remain their daily reality. These disparities are only exacerbated by the triple effects of the global economic crisis, growing hunger and food price volatility, and the ravages of climate change. It is a crucial moment for the region. And for Canada's Americas policy, it is a kind of crossroads.

It is a time to decide whether to continue the policies of the past or to adopt new policies more in tune with changes underway in the hemisphere. In considering how to re-engage with our neighbours, we should recognize the opportunity for Canadian action to support the efforts of women, trade unionists, indigenous peoples, campesinos, afro-descendants, and other civil sectors throughout the Americas to build economies that provide opportunities for all, and democracies that allow every voice to be heard.

In dialogue with counterparts in the region and among Canadians, the Americas Policy Group (APG) has heard widespread criticism of Canada's current role in the Americas. Civil society and governments in the region are developing new models and institutions for regional integration that reject the replication of colonial patterns of development and simply exclude Canada, the US and Europe. The APG has also heard proposals for a new role for Canada in the Americas.¹ The Americas Policy Group (APG) has a vision of an Americas strategy for Canada based on respect for the full spectrum of human rights for all citizens of the hemisphere and an economic order that leaves no one behind.

¹ In March 2009, in advance of the V Summit of the Americas, the APG organized a Roundtable *What role for Canada in the Americas?* A diverse range of voices from throughout the region spoke to this moment of great democratic and economic change in the hemisphere, what it means to people and movements in the region, and the challenges and opportunities for Canadian foreign policy. This APG Statement draws on those deliberations, including the boxed quotations found in this text.

The Americas Today

Progressive governments are considering new ways to stimulate the economy, deepen democracy, and use public policy to reduce social inequality.

*Victor Báez, Secretary General of the
Trade Union Confederation of the Americas*

Over the past decade, a different political landscape has emerged in the Americas. Today, much of the region is governed by presidents who have distanced themselves from the Washington Consensus and have begun to address the failed projects of their predecessors. Through a range of policies that includes the reversal of privatizations, programs to combat poverty, and the strengthening of constitutionally guaranteed labour rights, these leaders have started to reduce region-wide levels of poverty.

In December 2008, leaders of the hemisphere met in Brazil for a Latin American and Caribbean Summit, for the first time in the absence of the United States, Canada or Spain. New models for regional integration based on south-south agreements are under discussion, such as the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), the Bank of the South, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and its South American Defence Council (SADC), and even the creation of a hemispheric alternative to the OAS.

In March 2009, the SADC convened for the first time to designate South America as a zone of peace, a base for democratic stability and comprehensive development of its peoples. UNASUR's stated goals include eliminating socioeconomic inequality and achieving social inclusion and citizen participation in order to strengthen democracy. At the global level, UNASUR is calling for deep reforms to the global financial system.

This change in the landscape is born of civil society mobilization. Women, workers, indigenous peoples, small-scale farmers – in the millions – have raised their voices to end social arrangements based on exclusion and marginalization. People in every country of the region expect their governments to support social and economic changes that overcome the high levels of inequality and lack of opportunity, and, in some places, there has been a measure of success.

By increasing income of poorer households and by decreasing the share of total income of the highest-income households, nine countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Venezuela) have significantly narrowed the income distribution gap between 2002 and 2007, according to a study done for the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The most significant improvements were observed in Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil and Nicaragua.

Challenges in the Hemisphere

The ongoing challenges remain daunting. The region continues to have the highest level of socioeconomic inequality in the world, and full democratic participation too often remains an unrealized aspiration. The social exclusion of women remains widespread, supported by both legal and social forms of discrimination, a lack of political space, and gender-based economic disparities.

More people in the hemisphere are living in poverty today than ever before. There is also, particularly in the context of the current financial crisis, an increasing deficit of *decent work*, (defined by the International Labour Organization as including adequate pay, a healthy work environment, social security, and full access to the rights to organize and bargain collectively). In some Latin American countries, such as Mexico and Colombia, the right to unionize is severely constricted, making impossible any constructive social dialogue among government, business and workers.

The institution of free trade and investment agreements at the international level and in the region has not delivered on the promise of producing strong diversified economies. Rather, these agreements, in part due to the asymmetry of power between the negotiating governments, have reinforced colonial era weaknesses of many economies. Those weaknesses include commodity export dependence, and increased dependency on food imports, with attendant erosion of rural livelihoods and indigenous rights to territory and culture. For most countries in the region, the free trade model has promoted mainly “opportunistic investment” in enclave sectors or zones, and failed to generate long term dynamism in other parts of the economy or to ensure development impacts such as decent work.² Importantly, the type of employment generated for women by the free trade model, as in maquila zones, is usually part-time and precarious work without enjoyment of basic labour rights.

Trade and investment issues are strongly linked to the struggle for human rights and democracy. Not only do the legally-binding agreements lock in policy choices, limiting the scope for democratic debate on future economic directions, the process of negotiations is also closed and secretive.

In many countries, democratic space is further closing because of policies that criminalize the growing dissent and peaceful protest against the imposition of economic models that do not serve the majority. In 2007 alone, Mexico’s National Network of Human Rights Organizations registered 60 cases of the criminalization of social protest. More than half related to economic development projects, while most of the others were connected to public action demanding economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. In many cases, citizen dissent is met with state-sanctioned repression and violence.

Despite some democratic progress in parts of the region, patterns of impunity for rights violators remain widespread. The illicit drug trade has led to a spiral of violence in the hemisphere, while too often the official response seems limited to the further securitization and militarization of societies.

“Securitization”, the framing of a phenomenon as a security issue, thus casting political or academic debate of the subject as illegitimate and a threat to national survival, is on the rise. This is seen in the amassing of troops on the US-Mexico border to supposedly protect citizens from the drug wars and the “flood” of undocumented migrants. Then there are the new laws in many countries in the hemisphere that exploit the spectre of terrorism to silence civil society voices. Migration has also been criminalized, while investment moves about freely. What is worse, frameworks for addressing security issues, like the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), lack the necessary democratic oversight, excluding civil society, while favouring the interests of large corporations in policy development.

² Working Group on Development in the Americas (2008). *Foreign Investment and Sustainable development: Lessons from the Americas*

The Americas today present a complex mix of dangers and opportunities in the midst of a global crisis. In this context, there is an important opportunity for Canada to advance democracy and equality. The APG is concerned, however, that Canada's "re-engagement strategy" is based on false assumptions and ignores the complex realities and changes taking place in the region. As a result, Canada's new foreign policy focus on the Americas risks being marginalized or simply ignored.

Canada's Role

Canada is committed to playing a bigger role in the Americas and to doing so for the long term... While most nations are turning toward economic reform and political openness, too often some in the hemisphere are led to believe that their only choices are... to return to the syndrome of economic nationalism, political authoritarianism and class warfare or to become "just like the United States."

Prime Minister Steven Harper, Santiago, July 2007

If the US turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin American dictator could hope to achieve.

Prime Minister Steven Harper, New York, September 2007

There ought to be on the agenda a return to the acceptance of ideological and political pluralism, rather than who's not with us is against us.

David Abdulah, Lead Spokesperson for the Fourth Peoples' Summit of the Americas and President of the Caribbean's Federation of Independent Trade Unions and NGOs

Canada has a long and rich connection with the countries of the Americas. The government has recently identified re-engagement with the hemisphere as one of Canada's top foreign policy priorities, stressing a "whole of government" approach to foster our interests in the region. The government identifies three key pillars for Canada's relationship with the Americas: enhancing prosperity, promoting democracy and the rule of law, and building a safe and secure hemisphere.

The APG has welcomed Canada's renewed interest in the Americas and believes that it represents an important opportunity to define a distinctly Canadian vision for participation in the hemisphere. Canada has made important contributions to democratic development in the region through CIDA support to civil society organizations, participation in regional institutions, and commitments to long term accompaniment of embattled transitions as in Haiti. However, there are serious problems with much of the current Canadian strategy.

The approach does not embrace the complex diversity and plurality of political ideologies in the region, creating a false dichotomy between "authoritarian socialist" paths and that of "free markets and democracy." Rather than seeing the opportunity to learn from and engage actors from diverse traditions, Canada's rhetoric conjures up threats to our geo-political security in this diversity. This approach stigmatizes Canada with the politics of the Bush era, roundly detested in the region, and risks our further marginalization.

Above all, Canada's Americas strategy to date has fixated on the promotion of NAFTA-style trade and investment agreements, without recognizing the controversy over their impacts or the widespread call in the Americas for a new approach. Canada's security agenda lacks a human rights orientation, and our corporate reputation precedes us, particularly given our dominance in the extractive sectors. This reputation is badly marred because of widely experienced negative effects of the operations of Canadian mining companies on local communities and the environment and the lack of any enforced accountability for those impacts.

Going Back to First Principles

Through dialogue and public debate we can engage to ensure all our efforts -- those of governments, civil society, parliamentarians and academics -- are as good as they can possibly be. When debate is shut down, and policies remain undiscussed, the approach is naturally more narrow and, at the end of the day, unsustainable.

Gerry Barr, President-CEO, Canadian Council for International Co-operation

The struggle for human rights and democracy is about power, whether about the relative power of men and women within organizations, in society or in the home, or about the relative power between capital and labour.

David Abdulah, Lead Spokesperson for the Fourth Peoples' Summit of the Americas and President of the Caribbean's Federation of Independent Trade Unions and NGOs

Canada's Americas strategy is inconsistent and out of step with regional realities. There is a disconnect between our stated commitment to universal human rights on the one hand, and our promotion of unfettered trade and investment abroad combined with our disregard for transparency and consultation at home on the other.

If we are to take the government's stated objectives in the Americas - enhancing prosperity, promoting democracy and the rule of law, and building a safe and secure hemisphere - at face value, what principles are essential to their achievement?

First and foremost, Canada's foreign policy towards the Americas must be centered on the promotion of universal human rights and participatory democracy. The exercise of human rights and democracy are prerequisites of broadly based prosperity and not the other way around. There is no "trickle-down" relationship that links increased investment, for example, with greater recognition and protection of human rights or the growth of democracy. The world is full of examples of regimes that suppress their citizenry while opening the door wide to investment. In fact, the lesson of history suggests that investment in a context of denial of human rights and democracy only serves to further entrench relationships of inequality.

Secondly, determining the public interest, whether at home or abroad, is dependent on **broad-based democratic participation in public decision-making. Only such a process can set priorities** that reflect the needs of the citizenry or ensure that political decisions result in socio-economic justice. A trade agreement between Canada and a country where democratic rights are

systematically denied, like Colombia, cannot be justified in the name of the people of that country, since the terms of the deal will disregard their interests. Canada must also address its own democratic deficit. To date there has been no public debate or deliberation among Canadians on the Americas Strategy.

Third, socio-economic justice depends on a level of institutional parity within a country. Civil society organizations – trade unions, women’s organizations, farm workers groups, Indigenous peoples’ organizations – must be strong enough to contend in the political arena with the strongest private interests – domestic and multinational corporations, professional groups, landowners, developers. In the absence of such CSO vitality, a just distribution of the fruits of development cannot be assured. Special attention must be given to support the voice of those most marginalized – indigenous peoples, afro-descendents, small-scale farmers – and to recognize the different experience of women and men in development processes.

Fourth, the exercise of human rights and democracy are essential to establishing the terms of development, such as the criteria investors must meet to ensure development is in the public interest – labour standards, like the right to organize trade unions and to bargain collectively, environmental standards, regulations that ensure respect for the rights of all citizens, and effective legal sanctions for those who break the law. Prosperity cannot be built on the denial of such criteria.

Finally, a safe and secure hemisphere is a mirage in a context that denies human rights, democracy, redistributive equity, and equality before the law for all citizens.

It is possible. We can build economic relationships based on the principles of fair trade, equality and consent. By remembering the prerequisites of the world we envision, we can construct a different model—and there is much to learn on this from our neighbours in the region.

What do these principles tell us about Canada’s Americas strategy?

Trade and Investment

We do not need more of the policies that have brought (the crisis) to us, in particular this one string banjo of free trade and investment agreements that increase the relative power of transnational corporations and investors, and have increased social and economic inequities in the countries that have experienced them.

John Foster, The North-South Institute

We do not need more of the policies that have brought (the crisis) to us, in particular this one. It’s wrong to talk about a free trade model with a safety net underneath... Any economic model that pushes so many people over the edge that they need to be caught in a net... is completely unacceptable.

*Laura Carlsen, Director of the Americas Policy Program,
Center for International Policy*

The Canadian government maintains that liberalized trade and investment are important tools to alleviate poverty and improve development. At the same time, it argues that ultimately governments are responsible for addressing poverty and promoting development on their own soil. The APG is concerned however that these trade agreements are specifically designed to limit the ability of governments to address these very issues. Thus, the impact of these trade initiatives is often incompatible with achieving other societal goals, from stimulating local economies, or constructing a universal health care system, to protecting human rights and the environment. A recent analysis of the Canada-Colombia trade agreement highlights how the terms of that deal will actually aggravate an already bad human rights crisis, while offering ineffectual measures to mitigate environmental and human rights damage.³

While these treaties are called “free trade agreements,” in reality there are few barriers to international trade and investment mobility in the region. The agreements are mostly about opening and safeguarding access for Canadian companies to cheap labour and natural resources in a context of weak labour and environmental standards, and secured by the imposition of legal restraints on the exercise of public authority. This approach, which produces greater inequality and then relies on the construction of safety nets to catch the marginalized, is irresponsible. At its core, this is an agenda to promote further privatization and deregulation, precisely the policies that have led to the current economic and financial crisis.

Canada’s continued promotion of bilateral trade deals that undermine the capacity of smaller countries to address the expressed needs of their citizens is to place Canada on the wrong side of a crucial hemispheric divide.

As long as the promotion and enforcement of investor rights is central to FTAs, side deals for environment and labour rights will lack the teeth to prevent the FTA from restricting a government’s capacity to fulfill its obligations to citizens. NAFTA is the prototype for these trade arrangements, which empower corporations to challenge government actions that they claim interfere with profit-making. What is more, the quasi-private tribunals that hear their cases often award them substantial monetary compensation.

Investor-state dispute procedures are used to challenge the regulations, programs, and funding arrangements for public and social services on the grounds that such measures restrict, impair, or discriminate against private sector service providers. This ensures the privatization of the benefits of investment projects is accompanied not only by socialization of the risks and costs, but by the disempowerment of the citizenry’s ability to use their government to address their own priorities. A lop-sided exchange at best.

New economic approaches abound in the region, from social policy innovations, to new trade arrangements, to calls for domestic resource mobilization, restrictions on capital flight, and policies for fair taxation (in country and regionally) to address offshore tax havens. Canada needs to learn from these and be open to dialogue.

³ CCIC (2009). *Making a Bad Situation Worse: An Analysis of the Text of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement*. Available at <http://www.ccic.ca/e/002/trade.shtml>.

The APG recommends:

- 1. That Canada institute a moratorium on the negotiation and ratification of all NAFTA style bilateral free trade agreements – most notably those with Colombia, Peru, and the four Central American nations.**
- 2. That Canada commit to a transparent and thorough renegotiation of NAFTA, particularly Chapter 11, to ensure that it prioritizes policy tools that ensure local development benefits. The renegotiation must be based on a thorough evaluation of the social, environmental and human rights impacts of the agreement.**
- 3. That Canada stop incorporating investor-state dispute mechanisms into treaty law and dismantle existing mechanisms.**
- 4. That future trade agreements be negotiated in a transparent, democratic manner, based on international human rights standards, and include fixed time periods for review and renewal.**
- 5. That Canada ensure independent Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIA) are conducted prior to the ratification of all trade or investment agreements, including a serious examination of issues of asymmetry and the capacity of counterparts to protect human rights in the context of the proposed agreement.**
- 6. That trade and investment regimes include adequate support for ongoing democratic and participatory monitoring.**
- 7. That Canada actively support fair taxation of the wealth created by globalization, including global taxes on currency and other transactions, and the reform and transparency of tax havens in the region.**

Corporate Accountability

When it talks about human rights, it is time that the government of Canada begins by defending the rights of those affected by Canadian companies.

Michel Maza, National Network of Human Rights Organizations (Mexico)

The Canadian government subscribes to two central narratives around Canadian mining in the Americas: One is that large-scale mining equals development... The other is that conflict is created not by the imposition of unwanted and destructive development projects but by anti-development NGOs.

Jamie Kneen, Mining Watch Canada

Canada is a major player in mining oil and gas extraction in the Americas, holding almost 40% of the mineral exploration market in the region. However, it has not been a good news story for Canada's image abroad. All too often – from Colombia and Peru, to Guyana and the Caribbean – Canadian firms are associated with projects that damage the environment and fuel human rights violations.

In 2007, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) made the following declaration: “The Committee notes with concern the reports of adverse effects of economic activities connected with the exploitation of natural resources in countries outside Canada by transnational corporations registered in Canada on the right to land, health, living environment and the way of life of indigenous peoples living in these regions.”

The Canadian government is also known as a great supporter and advocate for the extractive industries, and has attempted to influence local laws and mining codes in the Americas to ensure they are investor friendly.

The Canadian government argues that most Canadian companies are good corporate citizens and that Canada is committed to “encouraging” corporate social responsibility (CSR) and to measures aimed at improvement practices. A recently announced Canadian government CSR strategy for the Extractive Sector called *Building the Canadian Advantage*, falls far short of a recent consensus report by industry and civil society that recommended accountability mechanisms that could lead to sanctions for companies that do not comply with CSR and human rights standards.

The APG believes that corporate accountability for meeting human rights and environmental standards should be mandatory, and pursued through regulation and law, not left to voluntary “best efforts.” It is also disingenuous to present Canada as a model for resource-driven development while ignoring the historical, legal and political differences between Canada and other countries. Moreover, such a claim ignores the true costs of mining in this country, in terms of abuse of Indigenous peoples, poisoned air and water, and dead and disabled workers.

Canadians value the democratic system that is the foundation of their confederation and believe that no one is exempt from the responsibility to take all measures necessary – at home and abroad – to ensure that international human rights and environmental standards are not violated, especially where local governance systems are weak. Canadians expect their government to require Canadian companies to respect human rights and the environment in their overseas operations, and ensure Canadian political and financial support to firms is linked to compliance with such standards.

The APG recommends:

- 1. That Canada establish mechanisms and regulations that will ensure that Canadian companies operating outside of our borders are held to account for their activities, even in contexts of weak local governance systems.**
- 2. That the Canadian Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Framework set out in the Final Report of the Advisory Group to the National Roundtables on CSR in the Extractive Sector be fully implemented.**
- 3. That Canada recognize the right of Indigenous communities to “free, prior and informed consent” by ratifying the International Labour Organization’s Convention 169 and by signing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.**

4. That Canada actively support human rights defenders throughout the region, including those individuals and communities with human rights concerns related to Canadian companies' activities.
5. That Canada provide support for democratic institution-building and broad-based technical capacity building to help address mining and development issues in the region, including identification and protection for “no go” zones of great ecological, cultural and social sensitivity.
6. That Canada ensure that independent human rights and environmental impact assessments be required before Canada support mining operations in the hemisphere.

Security

The militarization of civilian life has brought terrible consequences, including extrajudicial executions, torture and arbitrary detention.

Michel Maza, National Network of Human Rights Organizations (Mexico)

While NAFTA-SPP (Security Prosperity Partnership) steadfastly refuses to deal with increased immigration as an issue of regional integration, 'the security' section criminalizes the victims of 'the prosperity' section. In other words, migrants driven from their livelihoods by the loss of their own local and national markets (due) to imports are defined as international threats...

*Laura Carlsen, Director of the Americas Policy Program,
Center for International Policy*

The Canadian government worries that as the economic situation deteriorates, migrants return home, and remittance flows dry up, there will be greater insecurity in Latin America and the Caribbean, with further proliferation of gangs and drug trafficking. The APG is heartened to see that the Canadian government is aware of the deep link between poverty and security, and hopes that solutions will seriously consider these root causes.

However, the APG proposes that neither the securitization of what is certainly a complex social reality, nor limiting solutions to further militarization (including the placement of soldiers, training of police personnel or increasing intelligence gathering) address the fundamental issues: weakness of democratic institutions, widespread poverty and the lack of economic opportunities for millions of people in the hemisphere, combined with strong demand for drugs in Canada, the US and Europe.

In Mexico, military involvement in the “drug war” has increased corruption and human rights violations without any discernible advance in combating the narcotics trade. It is doubtful that Canada’s participation in Operation Caribbe, a multi-national drug interdiction operation led by the U.S. Joint Interagency Task Force South attempting to stem the flow of illegal drugs from South America, addresses these root causes.

The evidence suggests that efforts to date to control the flow of illegal drugs and related violence are at best ineffectual, producing no reduction in production or consumption. The APG, like others, advocates new strategies to address the illegal drug trade. These issues are fundamentally issues of public health and economic justice, rather than simply security matters, and the APG supports approaches that address the root causes and calls on Canada to explore these alternatives.

The APG recommends:

- 1. That Canada’s response to issues such as migration, drug-trafficking and organized crime avoid solutions rooted in further securitization of these issues, and instead addresses the root socioeconomic causes.**
- 2. That Canada oppose militarization as a way to address security issues.**

Democracy and Human Rights

The key vacancy in Canada’s current human rights posture in this hemisphere is our opposition and attempts to undermine the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

John Foster, The North-South Institute

In Colombia, it is easier to organize a criminal gang than a trade union.

Senator Jorge Robledo, Polo Democrático Alternativo (Colombia)

The Canadian government provides some important support for strengthening democratic structures at both the national and multilateral level in the Americas. Yet its courting of Colombian government – one of the region’s worst human rights violators – for a trade deal, and its dismissal of Indigenous peoples’ rights by refusing to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, seriously endangers Canada’s reputation of being a leader in protecting human rights.

In light of Australia’s recent decision to align itself with the international community’s commitment to universal human rights by becoming the latest signator to the UN Declaration, Canadians look now to their own government for decisive positive action that ensures the prioritizing of the universality of all human rights.

The Official Development Assistance Accountability Act provides a measure for evaluating Canada’s aid engagements with the hemisphere. At the same time, Minister Oda’s statement that the choice of priority countries for Canadian development assistance has been partly based on foreign policy priorities is cause for concern. The new countries of concentration in the Americas including Colombia, Peru and the Caribbean region, appears heavily influenced by political interests, particularly trade priorities.

Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIA) are increasingly used to assess the impact of policies, programs, projects and interventions in order to prevent or otherwise address violations of human rights that these generate or are likely to generate. While HRIA has previously been considered as a part of Social Impact Assessment (SIA), more recently a number of actors have begun to utilize it independent of other measures of social impact as an important step of due diligence in order to examine the actual or potential impact of development projects, foreign investment ventures, as well as new or altered trade relationships and related treaties. It is critical that Canada incorporate vigorous HRIAs into its foreign and domestic policy.

The APG recommends:

- 1. That Canada, in its policies and priorities, demonstrate that it puts human rights and democracy first – for trade deals, investment, development assistance and diplomatic policy – and send a strong message that it expects other governments in the hemisphere to do the same.**
- 2. That addressing impunity for rights violators be a priority issue for Canada’s foreign policy in the hemisphere. This includes a focus on reform of justice systems and policing, and support of truth, justice and reparation processes that include a women’s rights approach.**
- 3. That Canada strengthen its commitment to democratic process at home and abroad through policies that support consultation, participation, and the right to protest taking special account of gender and ethnic diversity.**
- 4. That the right to decent work and the right to organize trade unions become central priorities for Canada’s foreign policy in our hemisphere.**
- 5. That Canada ensure that the promotion of human rights and the eradication of poverty are at the heart of Canadian international cooperation, consistent with the ODA Accountability Act.**

Conclusion

Key to Canada’s role in the hemisphere is the recognition that how we conduct our economic affairs in our neighbourhood deeply affects the lives of our neighbours. The promotion of unregulated open markets without mechanisms for participation and decision making by affected communities, leads to human rights violations, environmental degradation and poverty. The repeated re-treading of the NAFTA model must be reconsidered to address development aspirations and the challenges of climate change and environmental justice.

How will Canada chart its course in an increasingly plural, diverse and dynamic region? Canada’s foreign policy towards the Americas must signal a new openness to political inclusion, participatory democracy and public debate over development priorities. Support for robust social movements and civil society actors will be key to ensuring a more democratic and sustainable future for all in the Americas.

Canada must send a strong message in the Americas that it puts human rights first – for trade deals, Canadian investment, development assistance and diplomatic policy.