

# Joint Mexico-Canada Ministerial Committee

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**T**he ever broader and more complex bilateral agenda between Mexico and Canada has required important joint efforts, resulting in the creation of different institutional mechanisms in which all the actors participate actively in the relationship. To that end, the two governments signed a "Declaration of Objectives for the Canada-Mexico Relationship" which includes an action plan. This very concrete and specific document

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was developed with the participation of representatives of the governments, business communities and academia of both countries.<sup>1</sup>

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Before delving into the Ministerial Committee meetings, the main point of this article, I will briefly review the other two mechanisms.

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The twelfth Ministerial Committee session held in Mexico City brought together three Mexican and three Canadian ministers.





Prime Minister Chrétien and President Zedillo during the latter's state visit to Canada in June 1996.

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Meetings between heads of state or chief executives, so-called "diplomacy at the top," has become a central mechanism of modern foreign policy and has increasingly been used in Mexican-Canadian relations. During the 54 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries, their chief executives have had 24 meetings, 7 under the current administration of President Ernesto Zedillo. The most recent meeting took place last April 17 in the framework of the Second Summit of the Americas in Santiago, Chile.

The Mexico-Canada Interparliamentary Meetings, which began in 1975, are a pivotal forum given the active participation of the two countries' congresses around topics of mutual interest. To date, there have been 10 meetings of this kind, the last of which was held from May 14 to 16, 1996, in Ottawa.

Lastly, the Ministerial Committee meetings, instituted in November 1968, have become the main institutional mechanism between the two countries since their creation. Their aim is to examine the different issues, instruments and cooperative actions involved in our bilateral relations. After the meetings of heads of government, these ministerial meetings are the highest level mechanism for consultation between Mexico and Canada.

The first meeting of the Canada-Mexico Ministerial Committee was held in Ottawa, October 21, 1971. Since then, 12 meetings have taken place, alternating host countries. As of 1992 and even more so since the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect, the Ministerial Committee has acquired a new profile as the privileged forum for reviewing cooperation issues, making it possible to carry out an overall evaluation of the state

### Meetings of the Mexico-Canada Ministerial Committee

Meeting Location	Dates
1 Ottawa, Canada	October 21 and 22, 1971.
2 Mexico City, Mexico	January 28 and 29, 1974.
3 Ottawa, Canada	November 21 and 22, 1977.
4 Mexico City, Mexico	January 8 and 9, 1981.
5 Ottawa, Canada	November 1 and 2, 1983.
6 Mexico City, Mexico	March 3 and 4, 1986.
7 Ottawa, Canada	January 22, 1990.
8 Mexico City, Mexico	November 25, 1991.
9 Ottawa, Canada	February 15, 1993.
10 Mexico City, Mexico	March 1, 1994.
11 Ottawa, Canada	April 27, 1995.
12 Mexico City, Mexico	December 19 and 20, 1996.



Ministerial Committee meetings have become an important mechanism in Mexico-Canada relations.



of relations between the two countries, mainly to foster new projects.

As a result, the number of cabinet ministers who participate and the number of working groups that meet have increased. Thus, from being a mechanism for analyzing diplomatic and trade cooperation during its first sessions, it has grown to include such important areas as investment; financial cooperation; transportation and telecommunications; environment and natural resources; tourism; labor issues; legal and drug trafficking questions; agriculture; fishing; and educational and cultural issues. The ministerial meetings have also been the framework in which a great many legal instruments for the two countries have been signed.

In the recent past, the last four meetings stand out. At the Committee's ninth session, in Ottawa, February 15, 1993, eight Mexican and 10 Canadian ministers took part. On that occasion, 11 topics were discussed in 11 working groups: political issues; fiscal questions; environment; mining; trade and investment; tourism; agriculture; educational, cultural and communications issues; labor matters; fishing; and housing.

At that meeting, three accords were signed on technology for extra-classroom education, cooperation in the mining sector and housing and human settlements.

The Committee's tenth meeting, which brought together five ministers from each country, took place in Mexico City, March 1, 1994. The Canadian delegation was the highest level delegation that its government had ever sent to a meeting abroad. The 1994 session reviewed the bilateral agenda in five working groups dealing with political issues, environment, trade, transportation and agricultural questions.

Mexico-Canada Ministerial Committee activities demonstrate the growing importance of the issues on the agenda shared by the two countries in the current situation, in which regionalization and globalization affect both our nations vis-à-vis our proximity to the United States.

This tenth meeting finalized with the signing of three instruments on the question of transportation: a) technical cooperation in transportation; b) the use of terminals and facilities of Mexican and Canadian transport companies; and c) an instrument that establishes the validity of federal and commercial driver's licenses for both countries.

The eleventh meeting, held in Ottawa, April 27, 1995, formed six working groups on political issues, energy, trade, agriculture, transportation and legal and drug trafficking questions. The Mexican delegation included three cabinet ministers, the attorney general and two vice ministers, while Canada sent four ministers, the attorney general and one vice minister.

Three legal instruments were signed: an agreement on social security, a memorandum of understanding regarding the Program of Temporary Mexican Agricultural Workers and an appendix to said memorandum, signed by Mexico's Communications and Transportation Ministry and Canada's Department of Transport with regard to programs of technical cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

At the twelfth Ministerial Committee session held in Mexico City December 19 and 20, 1996, working groups on polit-

ical issues, trade and transportation met. Given the importance of activities in other areas, the three Mexican and three Canadian ministers present also heard reports on questions of natural resources, environment, agriculture and energy.<sup>3</sup>

This brief review of Mexico-Canada Ministerial Committee activities gives an idea of this extremely important mechanism in our bilateral relations which, up to now, has been studied very little. It also demonstrates the growing importance of the issues on the agenda shared by the two countries in the current situation, in which regionalization and globalization affect both our nations equally vis-à-vis our proximity to the United States. ■■

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The document was signed by Prime Minister Chrétien of Canada and President Zedillo of Mexico June 12, 1996, during the latter's state visit to Canada.

<sup>2</sup> It is worthwhile mentioning that, although the signing of the memorandum on the Program of Temporary Mexican Agricultural Workers is included in this list, what was actually signed was merely the renovation of the memorandum in effect since 1974 and which has been very fruitful.

<sup>3</sup> This meeting did not result in any legal instruments given that all those instruments that were ready were signed by the two country's chief executives during President Zedillo's state visit to Canada in June of that year.