3.6   External relations

3.6.1   Canada's international status

The growth of Canada's international status is reflected in the development of the Department of External Affairs. Until the 20th century Canadian negotiations with foreign countries were conducted through the British Foreign Office and dealings with other parts of the Empire through the Colonial Office; Canadian interests abroad were handled by British diplomatic and consular authorities and all Canadian communications to other governments went through the Governor General. The gradual recognition of Canadian autonomy in international affairs and increased Canadian responsibilities abroad made expansion of services and representation after 1920 not only inevitable but imperative. British diplomatic and consular authorities could no longer conveniently look after all Canadian interests. An important step in the evolution of the Department of External Affairs as the foreign service arm of the Canadian government resulted from an agreement reached at the 1926 Imperial Conference which changed the Governor General's role from that of representative of the British government to that of personal representative of the Sovereign. Britain, no longer officially represented, appointed a High Commissioner to Canada in 1928; after July 1, 1927 correspondence from foreign governments, including that from the Dominions Office in London, was directed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (a portfolio held by the Prime Minister until 1946) instead of to the Governor General.

In the 1920s and 1930s Canada established diplomatic relations with Australia, Belgium, France, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States and during the 1940s, with the wartime governments of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Yugoslavia functioning in London or Cairo; and with the Argentine Republic, Brazil, Chile, China, Cuba, Denmark, Mexico, Newfoundland, Peru, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Uruguay and the USSR. High Commissioners were accredited to India, Pakistan, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea and Seychelles as they became independent and joined the Commonwealth.

Similarly in the 1960s, Canada developed its diplomatic relations in the French-speaking world, particularly with the newly independent francophone states of Africa. Relying on a system of multiple accreditation, Canada now has ambassadorial links with all of the 21 francophone African countries. Diplomatic relations were established with the Holy See in 1969 and with the People's Republic of China in 1970. Since then Canada has added new missions in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Today, Canada maintains formal diplomatic relations with all countries in Latin America and the Middle East and has diplomatic, consular or trade representation in some 140 countries.

Membership in international organizations has entailed establishment of a Permanent Canadian Delegation to the United Nations in New York in 1948 and a Canadian office at the organization's European headquarters in Geneva in 1949. These Permanent Missions have since been expanded to include UN agencies in Paris and Vienna. Canada was one of the founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 and when the NATO Permanent Council was established in 1952 a Canadian Permanent Delegation was set up in Paris (transferred to Brussels in 1967). Canada maintains a permanent delegation to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris, and the Mission of Canada to the European Communities in Brussels is responsible for Canada's relations with the European Economic Community, the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Coal and Steel Community. Canada also maintains a permanent observer mission to the Organization of American States in Washington, DC. In addition, officials of the Department of External Affairs represent Canada at many international conferences.