

My sincere congratulations for this fantastic initiative, acknowledging the relationship between Foreign and National Policy and opening to ideas and initiatives from all national sectors.

In a globalised and highly interconnected world, together with Australia's leading contribution to Asia's peaceful strategic evolution, there are good reasons for a national strategy to support and accelerate greater engagement with Latin America and from that perspective, contemporary Australian Foreign Policy is challenged to adopt a high level strategy for Latin America to continue engaging in creative ways with the region as other major global economies are doing.

Latin America is not only growing and showcasing political stability, leaving left Governments behind and needless to say it represents a continent plenty of shared opportunities for investment, trade, education, culture, technology and research exchange with Peru, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Argentina regarded as major international partners in the region.

A high level Government led strategy to continue building systematically long term political, economic, education and cultural relations with each Latin American country can build on successful Australian business engagement with the Region and provide Australia with an outstanding opportunity to diversify and strengthen relations with an increasingly successful and influential region.

Bilateral Free trade agreements, direct flight connections, encouraging the opening of trade offices in Australia, high level bilateral dialogue mechanisms, that could be open to dialogue with academia and private sector; visits to the Region from Foreign Affairs, Trade, Resources, Agriculture, Tourism, Science and Technology accompanied by industry leaders of the respective sector; the promotion of businesses that in direct or indirect ways may contribute to strengthening bilateral relationships; the inclusion of the working holiday visa scheme to new countries. In the case of Peru, I'd like to emphasise the importance of opening a DIAC office in Lima, base of the Andean Community, to allow additional facilities and securities to visa seekers from the region.

Education is one of the most fascinating areas for collaboration. Latin America is one of the fastest growing sources of foreign students for Australia with more than 40,000 Latin American students. In that sense, a new Colombo Plan for Latin America will be a step forward lifting knowledge of Latin America in Australia by supporting Australian undergraduates to study and undertake internships in the region.

