

Xinhua. 2011. "Interview: Colombia and China ready to begin FTA process, Colombian economist, diplomat says". Xinhua, September 16

By Sylvia Zarate, Luisa Cuellar

BOGOTA, Sept. 15 (Xinhua) -- China and Colombia have taken significant steps toward strengthening their bilateral trade and are expected to soon start negotiations on a free trade agreement, a Colombian economist and diplomat said Thursday.

Enrique Posada, director of the think tank Asia-Pacific Virtual Observatory and vice president of the Colombia-China Friendship Association told Xinhua in an interview that "the intense dynamics" between the two countries have made it possible for trade talks to start at any time.

China's accession to the World Trade Organization and the visits of Chinese President Hu Jintao to a number of Latin American countries have all helped drive the development of China's economy in the region to levels beyond expectations, Posada said.

"Latin American trade with China is now close to 100 billion U.S. dollars ... and that shows everything grows just as the relations between China and Colombia have grown," said Posada, who lived 17 years in China, where he served as a senior diplomat at the Embassy of Colombia.

But Colombia still holds a major deficit in its trade balance with China and needs to improve its export basket to meet the demand of Chinese consumers, he said.

One of the strategies that needed to be pursued is creating a free trade agreement between Colombia and China, which would help Colombian business and trade sectors do more research on what products are required by the emerging Chinese middle class, he said.

"A free trade agreement is not just about an exchange of goods, tariffs and how to fix moratorium problems," Posada said, adding that it was also about combining investment and cooperation.

He said Colombia could learn from Chile, Costa Rica and Peru on how to establish free trade deals with China and use that knowledge to increase the competitiveness of its products.

While genuine cooperation would always be the key toward achieving better economic results with China, Posada also said that Colombia already has experience in a number of areas, and that that experience could prove useful to China.

"In the field of knowledge, there are other wonderful aspects that Colombia can share, for instance, in urban management, biodiversity and the administrative jurisdiction," he said, adding that in return, China could share "its high knowledge in science and technology."

Posada said China's keen interest in investing in Colombia's mining and hydrocarbon sectors has long been a fact, but China could also invest in Colombia's others sectors, such as tourism, in which Colombia "has great potential."

He said bilateral relations between China and Colombia have grown a lot stronger in recent years, and with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos already eyeing China as a key partner, ties could only improve.

"Things look pretty good. I see Colombia being serious about opening up to Asia as a strategic plan, which has happened because (President) Juan Manuel Santos has been studying the issue of Asia since he was foreign trade minister," Posada said. End item