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## Martin to co-chair U.N. commission

To help private-sector economies of developing countries

Appointment expected after meeting Kofi Annan this week

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Paul Martin will be named this week to serve as co-chairman of a United Nations commission, which is being set up to boost the private-sector economies of developing countries.

The appointment is expected to be made official when Martin goes to New York to meet U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Martin's spokespeople offered only "no comment" yesterday when asked to confirm the new title or this week's travel itinerary for the Liberal leadership frontrunner and MP.

But the news of Martin's imminent appointment can be found on the Web site of the Peru-based Institute for Liberty and Democracy, whose president, Hernando de Soto, will also be serving on the commission. Martin's fellow co-chair will be Ernesto Zedillo, former president of Mexico, sources say.

It is not immediately clear how Martin will juggle this new, part-time responsibility with his campaign for the Liberal leadership, which will be decided Nov. 15 at a convention in Toronto. However, his name has been bandied about for a U.N. position ever since his exit from Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's cabinet in 2002.

Recent reports have indicated that Chrétien is interested in a part-time U.N. appointment when he steps down from office.

De Soto is leading a campaign to use property rights and capitalism to fight poverty in the Third World, mainly through the establishment of land-registry systems.

The cause, outlined in his influential book *The Mystery of Capital*, has attracted worldwide attention, notably from Martin and former U.S. president Bill Clinton.

In an interview several months ago, de Soto said the U.N. secretary-general was interested in involving Martin in some of the newer international-development approaches now being pursued by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

"What I think is interesting about Paul Martin is he's going to try to do very untraditional things and that takes a lot of guts," de Soto. "Kofi Annan and myself, there's no doubt that we consider he's right up there."

Martin's new group, called the Commission on the Private Sector and Development, will report to the UNDP, sources say, and will probably be expected to report by the end of this year.

Chrétien has said he is not stepping down until February, 2004, so Martin, if he wins the leadership race, would still be prime-minister-in waiting by the end of this U.N. commission's work.

Martin and about a dozen other yet-to-be-named members are expected to focus on ways to build a homegrown private sector in underdeveloped nations, whose economies are usually dominated by the government or foreign multinationals — or a combination of both.

De Soto's work feeds into this effort through its emphasis on setting up land-registry systems within these nations. It works this way: once land is registered, it has value, and turns into an asset for people who may have been farming or occupying it for generations. The asset, in turn, can be used to borrow and build wealth.

Capitalism, de Soto said, "could do so much good, if properly used and not just for the benefit of a few selfish people."

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