

Report on The National Forum 2000 and National Forum Youth during and after the Conference on War-Affected Children

EVALUATION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizational Point of View

Planning for The National Forum itself was effective and efficient. Objectives were set early and clearly with the Centre for Foreign Policy and provided a clear path to plan towards, measure proposed activities against and evaluate results. It kept us on track, with the ability to focus on delivery of the results desired, particularly as we acquired new partners and players with the additional events.

Next time: we would like to do more training of facilitators, prior to the event, and more material for them, related to content for the event, so that less information is pushed at delegates from the front on the room.

Next time: we would advocate that there not be a division between Canadian and international delegates in a program such as this.

Next time: we would do some stronger training for delegates on "listening" skills, and non-verbal skills, and effective use of silence, when combining youth of different cultures.

Next time: as the music, dance, games, art worked very well, next time we would plan a stronger integration of these into the absorption, transfer, and processing of "content."

In terms of how The National Forum became part of a series of other events, it would have been less stressful for all involved and more seamless sequence for youth participants, if all parties at the table had brought to the planning process a set of objectives and desired outcomes, which could have been shared. Collective planning was not done early enough for the post National Forum events into which the Canadian delegates fed. It would also be our opinion that many of the decision-makers of the youth participation piece in Winnipeg did not have enough large-scale youth participation experience and this led to the creation of some problems for youth:

- a) a state of high anxiety among staff regarding security issues, particularly young, poorly trained, sometimes hysterical liaison officers (time restraints). This meant the entire group was always moving, even walking from one building to another, as a group of 60-70 people
- b) an exhausting lack of free time
- c) a lack of youth leadership at the front of the room in the running of the program and preparing delegates for their roles

There was difficulty bringing together so many partners (the Secretariat, CIDA, DFAIT, the ngo working group, UNICEF (Susan Fountain, facilitator), the Children as Peacebuilders project (Linda Dale, international youth) and The Students Commission. This was a tremendous pool of talent, expertise and commitment, but while we shared what we could during the two months of planning together that we had, what emerged was several different groups, each in charge of a discreet piece. What failed to emerge was a cohesive team with a collective vision and strong leadership. This meant the strength of the partners was not leveraged as well as it could have been during the event, and additional stress on staff during the event itself. As well, certain elements of the program, once started, didn't get carried forward through the program as well as they might. This lack of cohesiveness looks as if it will also affect how well youth are supported to carry on beyond the event.

