



The Québec Summit

Ushering in the century of the Americas

The Third Summit of the Americas dominated headlines this past April. Now participants, protesters and media have left Québec City, but the Summit's achievements promise to have a lasting impact.



At the Citadel in Québec City, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien (centre) poses with the 33 other national leaders attending the Summit of the Americas.

Democracy

While outside calls were heard for greater democracy, inside the Summit room Canada pressed for very similar goals—and won its case. In the Summit Declaration, a “democracy clause” sets an essential condition for participation in the Summit process and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA): respect for and maintenance of democratic institutions. This was the most significant outcome of the Summit. By making the clause applicable to the FTAA, leaders indicated that democracy is fundamental to all aspects of hemispheric integration. The Declaration also calls for an Inter-American Democratic Charter to reinforce existing instruments of the Organization of American States for defending representative democracy.

Free trade

A second major Summit outcome was the leaders' renewed commitment to conclude the FTAA negotiations by January 2005 so that the agreement enters into force in December 2005. Equally important, they committed themselves to transparency and greater communication with civil society throughout the negotiations.



During the Summit, workers march for Hemisphere-wide labour solidarity.

Development of human potential

Leaders called for strong social initiatives, particularly in the areas of education and health, co-operative action to combat HIV/AIDS, and poverty reduction.

At Canada's urging, they endorsed gender equality as an objective for the Hemisphere, as well as initiatives to enhance protection of children's rights and action to assist youth.

Canada can also claim credit for the strong section on Indigenous peoples in the Plan of Action; the very acceptance of this term in Summit documents was a breakthrough. The Declaration recognized the importance of input from the Indigenous Conclave and the Indigenous Peoples Summit of the Americas.

Canada worked hard as well for inclusion of concrete initiatives to promote and protect linguistic and cultural diversity in the Plan of Action, and for recognition of the value of cultural diversity in the Declaration.

Connectivity

Leaders endorsed a statement on connectivity, with the aim of promoting the use of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) to build people-to-people connections, strengthen democracy, encourage understanding of our diverse cultures and expand economic opportunities. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced that Canada would provide \$20 million to establish an Institute for Connectivity in the Americas. The Ottawa-based Institute will promote the use of ICTs and develop programs to enhance connectivity throughout the Hemisphere.

Civil society

A priority for Canada was to expand the Summit's engagement with civil society. Leaders considered useful contributions from non-governmental experts in developing the Declaration and the Plan of Action, and they showed interest in meaningful and constructive engagement throughout the Summit.

Looking ahead

An outstanding success, the Summit marks the deepening of Canada's relations with the Hemisphere. Now that the meetings are over, the real work starts. As noted in the Declaration, the overall aim is “making this the century of the Americas.” ●

photos: CANAPRESS

The Summit's final documents are posted on the Web:

<http://www.americascanada.org>

<http://www.summit-americas.org>