



working groups. It featured provocative presentations by two speakers, Ann Medina and Jesse Hirsh, each of whom attempted to go beyond a shallow focus on technical trends or immediate policy options to thinking about deeper political currents.

Ms. Medina's presentation stressed the central place that Canadian culture must play in the formulation and implementation of Canada's international communications policies. Drawing attention to the difference between the hardware and software of communications technology and the content of communications, she argued that both policy-makers and citizens must renew their attention to messages that are sent abroad about Canada's international values and purposes.

As demonstrated in the organization of the ongoing humanitarian relief efforts in Zaire, Canada has both the technical expertise and the diplomatic ingenuity to make our values known, and to play a leadership role in coordinated international action. Forward-thinking use of this "soft power" is the key to enhancing Canada's position within relevant international fora and reinvigorating Canadians' sense of their own collective purposes and values.

As Ms. Medina put rather forcefully, "Canada must flex its soft power muscles now, because that is what will give us... a seat at the G7 equivalent in the age of convergence." She went on to explain that promoting "Canadian content" involves more than distributing Canadian cultural productions; it also involves sending clear and persuasive messages about who Canadians are and what they hope to achieve in the international system. Canada is challenged in this regard by other states, some of which have technical capabilities far more extensive than our own.

However, the essence of this challenge is not in which countries develop the most sophisticated technical infrastructure, but rather which

countries learn to make effective use of technical systems in the pursuit of its important national and international purposes. As Ms. Medina stressed, this is not to say that the development of various technological means is not important--of course it is--but rather to say that our decisions about which kinds of technologies to develop and to make use of must always be guided by an informed sense of what purposes we hope to achieve and what values we hope to uphold.

Mr. Hirsh also picked up on the question of content, drawing Forum participants' attention to the question of who or what creates content, and how. His presentation described the tension between new communications technologies (and the Internet in particular) as mechanisms for genuinely open communication within and among communities, and as commodities under the control of a few corporate giants, designed and distributed according to the play of the market.

Sceptical of the excitement that has surrounded common understandings of the "communications revolution," Mr. Hirsh questioned the widespread expectation that market mechanisms and increasingly sophisticated technologies will resolve our many social problems, and emphasized the way that the commodification of communications has supplanted citizens' democratic rights to information and participation with consumer rights to whatever access they can afford.

In the question and answer period that followed the two presentations, Forum participants agreed these were important themes that would undoubtedly come up in each of the working groups, but expressed uncertainty about how they might resolve apparent tensions between market-driven development and democratic access, between open exchange and government controls, and between budgetary restraint and international activism.