

Secretary of State Kilgour

David Kilgour talks to **Canada World View**

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A recent Canadian initiative in this hemisphere has been the Dialogue on drugs, which Foreign Affairs Minister Axworthy launched last January and for which you have special responsibility. Please explain that for our readers.

Mr. Kilgour

We all recognize the problem of illicit drugs as a scourge that could undermine all other gains in the Americas. The basic goal of the Dialogue is to place the drug issue in the context of the other ongoing initiatives to strengthen democracy and improve the quality of life and the well-being—that is, the human security—of the peoples of the Americas. We hope to stimulate and sustain a hemisphere-wide discussion of the drug problem at the level of foreign ministers, to bring not just one but all of the many facets of this complex problem into focus.

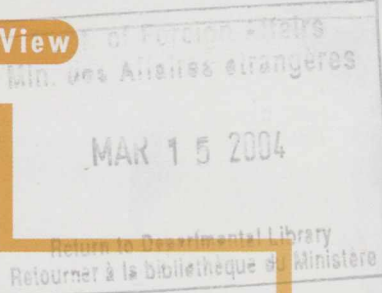
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What facets, for instance?

Mr. Kilgour

One good example is the relationship of the problem of illicit traffic in drugs to governance—for instance, to the enforcement of drug laws, to small arms control and to the need to get the public involved at the grass-roots level. There are also links to economic issues—such as, measures to farmers to replace drug-related crops, on which they now depend for their livelihood, with other marketable crops. There are the health aspects of the problem, and there is a link to education. As you can see, the drug issue is just one of many threats to human security in the region.

We live in an age of globalization, where the problems of illegal drugs, environmental degradation, human rights abuses and weapons proliferation respect no borders. It's absolutely essential to look at these various aspects of the problem not in isolation but in context. Measures in one field have to complement those in another.



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Can you give us an example of that?

Mr. Kilgour

Crop substitution is an example. Countries that have introduced programs of this kind have learned that these measures work only to the extent that they are accompanied by effective enforcement of drug laws.

Another benefit we hope to derive from the Dialogue is the sharing of information, ideas and experience. I recently attended a meeting of experts under Canadian auspices in Costa Rica that contributed to that process.

As for ideas and experience, there is plenty we can usefully share, and not just at the governmental level. There's an example in my own home province of Alberta—a program called DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education), which specially trained community police officers deliver to sixth-grade school kids. The program started in the United States in the 1980s, took root in Edmonton, and has since spread to other parts of Canada and also to certain countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Quite recently there was a DARE conference in Brazil on its application in the hemisphere.

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There are other hemispheric organizations looking at the drug problem—for instance, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) in the Americas. How is this process different?

Mr. Kilgour

First of all, the Dialogue on Drugs isn't intended to displace these other forums but to complement them. What's unique about it is that the Dialogue is one of foreign ministers looking at the problem

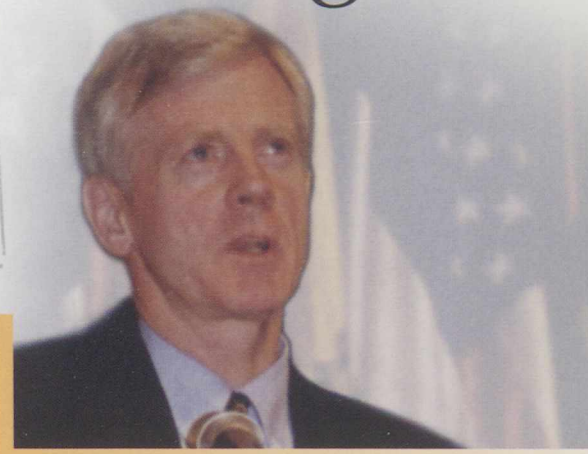


photo: DFAIT

of illicit drugs in a hemispheric context and in relation to all these issues I've mentioned. As foreign ministers, they are well positioned to bring them to the attention of the appropriate cabinet colleagues. One point I want to stress about this initiative is that it's non-prescriptive. This is not Canada setting itself up as an example to the world or suggesting that other countries do what we do. This is Canada trying to get the various aspects of this common problem out on to the table, where we can look at them and talk about them in context.

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The Drug Dialogue is about six months old now. How is it going?

Mr. Kilgour

So far I've visited 10 countries in connection with the Dialogue and the response in every case has been extremely positive.

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What about the other aspects of our hemispheric relationship?

Mr. Kilgour

The future looks extremely good for Canada. I'm delighted wherever I've been to see just how highly regarded Canada and Canadians are. As a G-8 member we're perceived as an important partner—a partner of weight—by all of these countries. And our values are those of the vast majority of people in the hemisphere. We are becoming, as Prime Minister Chrétien put it, part of one big family in the hemispheric neighbourhood. ●