

- If Canada does continue to engage with the countries of the Americas, and current demographic patterns continue, a deepened regional coverage can be expected to follow over the long term.

The symposium agenda was divided into three main panels:

Panel 1 - Colombia: A case study of (under?) coverage.

Panel 2 - The Quebec City Summit of the Americas 2001: What's to cover?

Panel 3 - Latin America and the Caribbean as reflected in the Canadian media: How far have we come?

### **Colombia: A case study of (under?) coverage**

In the opening presentation, Ricardo Ávila of *Cambio* (a Colombian news weekly) provided an overview of Colombia's internal conflict and its regional significance. As Ávila explained, Colombia faces a host of critical problems related to the war between the government and guerrilla forces supported by the drug trade. As a result of the political and social struggles, 35,000 people were killed in the past 10 years in Colombia and more than 3,000 were kidnapped last year alone. The rise in guerrilla membership is mirrored by the 81 per-cent increase in violent paramilitary members since 1992; a deadly cycle which has perpetuated the violence. Colombia's per capita income has now stagnated at 1994 levels and it faces mass emigration from the country.

Ávila pointed out that while escalating civil conflict in Colombia is attracting increasing international interest and concern, the complex relationships between drug trafficking, political violence, and the many actors involved in the social conflict in Colombia are often absent from foreign reporting and policy debate. For example, Ávila claims that few understand that there is no 'civil war' in Colombia, since the term insinuates a struggle between two groups in one country that have substantial popular support. Indeed, based on polling data, the vast majority of Colombians clearly support their government in this struggle, suggesting that it is not a civil war but a battle between government and rebel troops.

The National Post's Marina Jiménez agreed that Colombia deserves more attention in Canada, especially news coverage that goes beyond the stereotypical reporting of the country's drug and guerrilla-war problems. She noted that very little is known about Colombia's cultural sophistication and high education rate, or that it is the longest running democracy on the continent, and, despite all its internal turmoil, that it is the only country in the region never to have defaulted on its debt. Cristina Rojas, Professor of International Affairs at Carleton University, confirmed that stories and voices are silenced by one overwhelming stereotype: Colombia equals cocaine. Meanwhile, little is known of a growing women's movement, especially in the labour force, or that peace communities have been set up at the grassroots level