

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

Current formulations of the department's mission, as they appear in such documents as the annual Report on Plans and Priorities (RPP) and the Departmental Performance Report (DPR), offer few hints that the department represents Canada's frontline in an historic contest to manage the revolutionary changes wrought by globalization, or that its success or failure can profoundly affect the future security and prosperity of Canadians. Nor do the RPP and DPR provide a succinct articulation of what the department is trying to achieve and how. Rather, they rely on traditional language: "On behalf of the Government of Canada, the Department conducts all diplomatic and consular relations with foreign governments, and represents Canada in international organizations. It participates in relevant international negotiations ...". One could also conclude that the department's "objectives" have not changed since 1995.

In certain other Western foreign ministries, conscious efforts have been made to articulate and communicate a mission which reflects the times and resonates with employees and the public alike:

- In Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) publishes a Corporate Plan every two years which sets out both general departmental objectives and quite specific objectives for the period ahead.
- In New Zealand, legislation requires governments to declare what they intend to accomplish over a three to five year time horizon, in particular to identify specific outcomes in the form of Strategic Result Areas (SRAs). The foreign policy SRA provides a succinct one-sentence formulation of the mission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and identifies the two main strategies to be pursued.
- In the UK, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has articulated a mission statement which specifies two objectives, identifies the four benefits to be secured, and lists five strategies for securing these benefits.

PROPOSAL: The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should prepare an annual report separate from the RPP and DPR designed to serve as guidance for employees on the department's mission and priority objectives for the year ahead. Such a report could discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Canadian foreign policy and trade policy, establish an agenda of priority activity, and help to position "political" work in both a global and departmental context.