

Facilitating Input from Indigenous Peoples into Canadian Foreign Policy Continuing the Round Table Process

Participants evaluated the round table as a very successful first effort. For some, particularly the youth, it was their first opportunity to think about foreign policy issues and to be involved in such discussions. Given the limited time available and the newness for many participants of some of the topics (particularly APEC), the round table only scratched the surface of the subject. While participants were keen to see the recommendations of the round table seriously considered by the government, there was also a sense that further discussions could flesh out some of these ideas and develop other relevant recommendations. The participants also felt that the round table process, bringing together a wide range of people who did not normally have an opportunity to discuss issues together, had been a very worthwhile experience and should be continued.

As a result, participants recommended that the Canadian government provide other opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to have input into Canadian foreign policy. They also recommended that the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development provide further support to the South Pacific Peoples Foundation to continue this round table process. While it was felt that the short timelines somewhat limited the range of participation in this first round table, and that some widening of participation might be appropriate for future meetings, it was also felt that the first meeting had helped to foster a good working relationship and familiarity with the issues among participants. It was therefore recommended that the same group of people, with limited additions, be invited to participate in subsequent meetings of the round table.

The participants recommended that future meetings of the round table and other consultations on foreign policy continue to involve youth as full participants in the process.

Participants saw two way communications as important to this process and to building the confidence of Indigenous Peoples (and Canadians generally) in the value of committing time to the foreign policy dialogue. They therefore mandated SPPF to monitor the government's response to the round table recommendations and to report the results to participants. It is therefore suggested that the Department of Foreign Affairs & International Trade and the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development establish a process for monitoring the Department's consideration of the round table's recommendations and for reporting through SPPF and other organizations to the round table participants and others with an interest in Indigenous rights.

Given the limited meeting time, the round table was remarkably productive of ideas and recommendations. Also notable was the enthusiasm, energy and trust that developed among the participants. The response of the government to these recommendations and its willingness to support further consultations on foreign policy with Indigenous Peoples will largely determine whether this enthusiasm will be sustained.