



Canadian Foreign Policy and International Communications Toronto Report

Overview

The National Forum on Canada's International Relations was held on November 16 in Toronto and was one of five components to the third annual National Forum on Canada's International Relations. This Forum is also an important consultative process in its own right, which has brought together representatives of government, academia, industry, and non-government organizations (NGOs), and which has generated numerous insights and policy recommendations.

This year, the Forum in Toronto was assigned the theme of "Canadian Foreign Policy and International Communications." A Steering Committee, comprised of officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), academics, executives from communications firms, and NGO representatives, was formed in the spring of 1996 and met on several occasions through the summer and autumn to develop an agenda and list of participants. The Steering Committee also prepared and distributed a briefing book, which included a number of articles on issues to be discussed at the Forum. This book also included a brief discussion paper prepared by DFAIT, entitled "A Canadian International Information Strategy."

The Forum opened with a panel discussion, featuring two presentations on contemporary communications issues. It then broke into three independent working groups, each of which pursued its own set of inter-related themes:

Working Group # 1: Canadian Content, Sovereignty and Competitiveness

Working Group #2: Universal Access & the Global Communication Infrastructure

Working Group #3: Trade Liberalization and Communication Regulation

Within the loose parameters suggested by these thematic titles, each working group set out its own agenda and guidelines for discussion. Though "instructions" to the participants were limited to a general request for concerns and recommendations, each of the three groups attempted to arrive at some degree of consensus on basic concepts, important issues and priorities, and some concrete policy recommendations.

Nevertheless, there were significant disagreements within the groups, and it soon became clear that there is still a great deal of room for further discussion and debate on these questions. The Forum closed informally with each of the three Chairs presenting the findings of their respective working groups, and a series of remarks by the Forum's organizers and sponsors.

Opening Plenary

What's happening in International Communications, and why does it matter to Canadians.

The opening plenary session was designed to set out a number of issues and arguments that would stimulate and inform discussion in each of the