

To a growing extent, all units of the Department at home and abroad are involved in varying degrees in the increasingly comprehensive field of public affairs.

The concern of the Department with public affairs reflects the importance of public opinion, both at home and abroad, in the attainment of foreign policy objectives. In dealing with countries possessing representative governments, it is important to remember that the attitudes of particular segments of the population can decisively affect the course of governmental action. Even in closed societies, governments display some degree of sensitivity to public opinion, both domestic and international. In addition, attitudes formed abroad can have an impact at home. The object of the Department's public-affairs programs is to provide the means of communication between Canadians and their Government, on the one hand, and audiences abroad, on the other, to ensure understanding of Canadian goals and attitudes.

The environment in which Canadian foreign relations are conducted has changed markedly in recent years and, in the public arena, requires increasing sensitivity and ability on the part of Canadian representatives abroad. In 1977, considerable international attention was paid to Canada, largely because of its domestic political and economic affairs. It became a matter of daily concern at many posts to explain the democratic process as it operated in Canada, and to emphasize its distinctive attributes and national purpose.

In 1977, effort was focused on sharpening public-affairs programming through the systematic alignment of activities to post objectives, closer collaboration with federal and provincial departments and other interested entities, the introduction of public-affairs training for foreign service personnel and locally-engaged staff, and improvement in the despatch of policy and background information to posts. Canadian citizens and private organizations were kept as well informed as possible of the Department's activities in order to create greater understanding of foreign-policy questions.

During 1977, the Department continued to enhance the mutual understanding of Canada and a number of foreign countries through cultural- and academic-relations programs. It also sought to reflect internationally the creativity of Canadian culture and learning as achievements in their own right and as an essential contribution to the long-term promotion of foreign-policy objectives.