

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

- At DFAIT, the Consular Bureau has broad contingency plans for the management of crises affecting large numbers of Canadians abroad, such as natural disasters, civil unrest, and airline crashes. Included in these plans are cooperative arrangements with the United States, the UK, Australia and New Zealand to coordinate emergency evacuations. In addition, the bureau has drawn up individual contingency plans for 176 missions, which missions are required to update annually. These plans identify emergency response triggers; provide complete data on mission personnel and assets; assess the local Canadian community; inventory support, transportation and communications facilities; and outline policies and procedures for managing a crisis.

PROPOSAL: The department should establish a small team of officers and support staff experienced in the management of crises to review lessons learned and propose standard operating procedures for future handling of crises. The team should look in particular at the recent experience of geographic bureaux and missions and recommend ways of supplementing their resources during a crisis stretching beyond a few days.

Visits and conferences

- At UN headquarters, the British delegation employs a professional visits coordinator to handle most visits to New York.
- The US delegation in New York has full-time speech-writers to prepare the texts of major interventions at UN meetings.
- The Canadian embassy in Washington has a locally-engaged “events manager”.
- Canada’s mission to the UN has developed detailed “Guidelines for Ministerial Visits” and an 18-page checklist to assist officers in the preparation and management of visits.
- In Australia, efforts are being made to limit the workload associated with visits to posts by Australian ministers, parliamentarians and other senior figures, through developing standards for visits and categorizing posts according to size and level of service to be offered. In the meantime, posts have been advised to “exercise judgement” about the level of assistance to be provided certain groups of visitors e.g. state (provincial) ministers. The Parliamentary and Media Branch at DFAT has prepared a booklet advising MPs on the services they can and cannot expect from the department while traveling abroad.

PROPOSAL: The department should take immediate steps to relieve the burden on political officers of managing logistical arrangements for visits. Missions should be instructed to review current procedures with a view to divesting political officers of administrative functions.