

REPORT FROM THE ROUNDTABLE ON GOVERNANCE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE AMERICAS

January 28, 2000

Victoria, British Columbia

Organized by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, on January 28, 2000, academics, community and church leaders, federal government officials, parliamentarians, leaders of NGO initiatives and specialists in local and international governance met for a day in Victoria to discuss "Governance, Civil Society and the Americas." The discussion is one in a series of roundtables helping to shape Canada's interests in the hemisphere by identifying opening initiatives for Canada in preparation of the Windsor Foreign Ministers' Meeting, June 2000, and leading to the Summit of the Americas in April, 2001. This seminar focussed on issues of political systems, corruption and threats to democracy.

1. Introduction

As the world underwent changes in the late 1980's, Canada joined the OAS in 1990, attended the Miami Summit in 1994, and became encouraged by more liberalized economic policies and commitments to democracy within the OAS states. The second Summit (Santiago-1998) witnessed commitments to a Plan of Action which included conventions on corruption, small arms, gender equality and indigenous issues. Recent new opportunities such as the Pan American Games, Spouses of Heads of States meetings, the Business Forum and an upcoming model assembly (Alberta) for youth are indicators of additional progress. There remain, however, real problems - waning economic growth, serious inequalities, democracies remain fragile. There is a need to strengthen societies by reducing inequalities and building democratic processes and institutions, introducing a more integrated economic approach within the hemisphere and bringing the living human dimension closer to the expert agendas. These were some of the challenges facing the Victoria seminar participants as they identified options for Canadian policy-makers to pursue in the next months leading to Windsor and the Quebec Summit in 2001.