INTRODUCTION
THE DEBATE

According to Abid Hussein, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, "Today, information has become power and it's a swift [shift?] that can not be changed. Human rights and information are the defining facts of this century. We have to create the consciousness among people. And for that, we have to act in a civilized way. To my mind," asserts Hussein, "the Internet was born free... don't put it in chains."

In the opinion of Alain Modoux, of UNESCO's Freedom of Expression and Democracy Division, "The Internet embodies tremendous hope for those who have been condemned to silence through censorship. As stated in UNESCO's 1945 Charter, we must facilitate the free circulation of ideas through words and images. Today, we must encourage the free circulation of information and develop unhindered means of communication. Communication has nevertheless remained the poor relation of development."

José Soriano, of Red Cientifica Peruana, says, "We must 'evangelize' the Internet tool. We must give this tool to people so that they can learn how to use it. Local information must circulate because, if local networks are not developed, this technology will not be internalized. We must therefore promote the right to universal access to new technologies. It is important to demonstrate that people can do things themselves, without counting on foreign governments or even international organizations."

Jagdish Parikh, of Human Rights Watch (United States), nevertheless questions the acceptability of what can be published on the Internet: "How do we establish a dialogue on what is acceptable and what is not?".

The observations made by these speakers effectively sum up the mood at the conference: the Internet is a tool with tremendous potential that could help the causes of freedom of expression and human rights, but it also has "a dark side" that could jeopardize the advantages it brings.

The goal of this conference was to make the most of the expertise of international players working in the fields of human rights and/or the Internet. It involved formulating constructive ideas focussing on five different themes: human rights education, the Internet as a communications channel, questions of access, the Internet's technological potential and the misuses of this tool. Most of the participants see Canada at once as a hub of communication between two worlds, a human rights champion and a place conducive to debate and the development of ideas on promoting human rights and the Internet. These ideas should lead to policies that would make Canada a leader in this area.