

To realize the full potential of the North, northern Canadians and the circumpolar community need to recognize and act on the basis of being a natural community — bound not only by geography but also linked by common experiences and often values as well. The challenges are to define those shared values and interests; to put them into sharper focus; to make better use of the community of existing organizations and the network of contacts in the circumpolar region; and to draw on our collective resources to address these issues within the circumpolar region.

### The Consultative Process - Listening to Canadians

In 1997, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (SCFAIT) took a new look at the North and prepared a comprehensive report, *Canada and the Circumpolar World: Meeting the Challenges of Co-operation into the 21st Century*. This began a process of extensive consultation and discussion throughout Canada over the next two years that has led to the preparation of this policy statement, the Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy. Key elements of the consultative process (starting with SCFAIT's review and report) included Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy's September 1998 discussion paper *Towards a Northern Foreign Policy for Canada*; the 1998 National Forum; a major expert roundtable in December 1998; an extensive round of consultations in 1999 focussed on northerners and other key stakeholders, led by Canada's Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs Mary Simon; and a final series of discussions held by Minister Axworthy with his Arctic Council counterparts and by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien when he met with the President of Finland and the head of the European Union, Martti Ahtisaari, in December, 1999.

Based on these extensive consultations, Minister Axworthy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) prepared a draft policy statement, which was then subject to further discussions involving key federal agencies responsible for policy areas that touch on the circumpolar North — including the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Environment Canada, Natural Resources Canada and Health Canada — before public release.