

Introduction

In this study I examine Canadian foreign policy on sustainable development in the context of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)¹ while Canada took over from the Philippines as APEC Chair. I focus on official and popular developments during 1997 which the federal government proclaimed as "Canada's Year of the Asia Pacific (CYAP)" culminating in its November hosting of the APEC leaders summit in Vancouver. I explore public debate in the media, comments by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society representatives involved in the 1997 "People's Summit on APEC," and demonstrations against the APEC Leaders meeting held on the UBC campus. My first aim is to document much of what was said and done by civil society groups, including their perceptions of, and influence on, the APEC agenda. My second aim is to critique the weaknesses of Canadian foreign policy while offering some realistic and strategic alternatives that are more ecologically, socially and economically sustainable than the present course.

Criticisms of, and improvements to, Canadian involvement in APEC and approaches to sustainability cannot be understood in a vacuum. As such I also examine sustainable development as a broader Canadian foreign and domestic policy issue in 1997 as government departments made their first reports to Canada's new Commissioner for Environment and Sustainable Development. Sustainability was an equally important issue implicating APEC as the Canadian government reported to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) in June evaluating its progress five years after the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or "Earth Summit" in Rio.² To critique Canadian policy towards APEC I draw from such parallel

¹ APEC is a group of so-called "economies" led by governments including Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand and the United States of America. The APEC 1997 summit approved three new members, Peru, Russia and Viet Nam, admitted as of 1 January 1998. APEC now consists of twenty-one members.

² See Canada, Country Profile: Implementation of Agenda 21: Review of Progress Made Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992: Information Provided by the Government of Canada to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development Fifth Session, 7-25 April 1997