

"Canadian young people are already the best educated and most literate. You are the most technologically adept in Canadian history. Your potential is as limitless as Canada's itself."

- Minister of Human Resources Development Canada, Pierre Pettigrew, October 3, 1997

An Eye to The Legacy: Youth Involvement in CYAP

Young people were invited to play a leading role in Canada's Year of Asia Pacific - they will be the ones to shape the nature and quality of Canada's ties to Asia Pacific. And as Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy noted, "young people are keen to learn more about opportunities in Asia Pacific and want information on Canada's links with the region."

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien got the year off to a good start when he included a sizable contingent of young entrepreneurs, as well as a group of student participants in the Team Canada trade mission to South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines that kicked off the year.

Human Resources Development Canada set up the APEC Youth Coordination Bureau staffed by seven young Canadians. The Bureau was responsible for bringing a strong youth component to the APEC ministerials, the leaders' meeting, as well as assisting with *Asia Connects* - the centerpiece of CYAP's youth component.

The idea for this conference came out of a discussion between Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy and Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 1996. The two ministers were looking for ways to bring together Canadian and Asian youth to develop skills in cross-cultural communication and appreciate similarities and differences between contemporary Canada and Asia.

Originally scheduled for May, but postponed until September 28 due to the Red River flood, *Asia Connects* attracted 200 delegates from Canada, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Taiwan to the national site in Winnipeg, with another 400 participating from eleven multi-sites across Canada via video-conference links. Multi-sites in Toronto, Saskatoon, and Vancouver also played host to UNICEF-sponsored students from the Philippines, Thailand, and Cambodia. Another 10,000 individuals followed conference discussions on the internet, including students in Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, and Taiwan.

The conference was organized by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada in cooperation with the Students Commission and with the assistance of several corporate sponsors. After opening remarks by Ministers Axworthy and Badawi, participants spent the week exploring the challenges facing Canada as it broadens its ties with the Asia Pacific region, focusing, above all, on opportunities for mutual understanding and cultural exchanges. As one delegate put it, "to understand the issues, you have to understand the people." Participants also looked at ways to make Asia Pacific a part of the everyday life of Canadian students, and how multimedia technology can be used to meet their goals.