

A Multilateral Quick Study

By Darren Rogers

When she became an intern at Canada's embassy in Washington, D.C., in 2005, Patricia D'Costa didn't imagine that two years later she'd be the face of Canada on hemispheric security issues at the Organization of American States (OAS). Perhaps even more unexpected is that D'Costa, now an alternate representative at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the OAS, is locally engaged (LES).

D'Costa leads the mission's security file with the same autonomy that her Canada-based colleagues lead their respective democracy, human rights and development portfolios. A typical day might see her consulting with other government departments on language for a declaration on mine action, representing Canada at a meeting on drug trafficking or checking with other missions to reconcile differing positions on arms proliferation.

Instrumental in the planning and execution of the Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas in Banff in 2008, D'Costa has helped to advance civilian-military relations among the OAS member states. She vice-chaired the OAS Committee on Hemispheric Security in 2008-2009.

Her competence and approachability have earned her the respect of civilian and military counterparts alike. "On the security side, many of my colleagues are military guys," D'Costa explains. "I feel lucky that they accept me as a peer." In a multilateral context, relationships often matter more than positions on single issues. "You have to be able to pick up the phone and know whom to call." Those at other missions are eager to talk; D'Costa has acquired a reputation as a knowledgeable ally and a focused and fair negotiator.

D'Costa was born in Kenya. When she was eight, her family moved to Canada, settling in Mississauga, and she became a Canadian citizen. She attended the University of Waterloo and then did a master's program in international relations at Syracuse University, during which she moved to Washington to complete her studies and pursue career opportunities.

Her position as alternate representative is challenging and offers opportunities, which she loves, to travel in the Americas. Her LES status does not factor into her approach—or others' perceptions. "Outside the mission, no one knows or cares that I'm an LES. They just see Canada." One difference between those who are locally engaged and those who are Canada-based is that "LES often have to hit the ground running," she says. "We don't receive the transition time that someone coming from Headquarters does."

For her part, D'Costa has more than made up for that with her savvy and enthusiasm. "When I arrived, someone told me that you either love or hate multilateral work." She considers this for a second. "I guess I love it."

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Patricia D'Costa in the Canada chair at an OAS session