

CANADA'S WORLD YOUTH

"Younger men and women are asking that their voices be heard, that their issues be addressed and that their roles be recognized."

— Canadian intern Kevina Power

The voices of Canada's young people are being heard in the world as never before.

For several days next June, Canadian youth will be in the forefront as some 1,000 young people from around the globe converge on Vancouver for an opportunity to speak out on today's most crucial international issues.

They will be attending the World Youth Forum, the first phase of an important UN-sponsored global conference, the World Urban Forum, a biennial initiative of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) that will be co-sponsored by the Government of Canada.

The ideas brought forward from the youth event will play an important role in the larger forum as it works toward meeting the UN's ambitious millennium development goals, which commit countries to reducing poverty and improving education and health in the world by 2015.

"We need young people in the same room at the same time as all the world leaders, the local leaders, all of those people who are making decisions on your behalf," says federal Labour and Housing Minister Joe Fontana, whose department has a special interest in UN-Habitat.

Among the many people working to organize the events is Kevina Power, who is helping to coordinate youth and civil society participation in the conference as an intern sponsored by the Environmental Youth Alliance in Vancouver and by UN-Habitat. Power, 28, a native of Corner Brook, Newfoundland, who recently earned a master's degree in conflict analysis and management at Royal Roads University in British Columbia, says that Canada is a natural choice to host the youth forum.

"Not only was UN-Habitat founded in Vancouver almost 30 years ago," she says, "Canada is a progressive country that has a history of including civil society on the world stage and that is dedicated to allowing young people to use their voice in forming—and informing—policy."

Indeed, in a shrinking world where communications are erasing borders with every passing day, Canadian



photo: courtesy of the One Stop Youth Information Center, Nairobi, Kenya

youth are taking an increasing interest, and playing a larger role, in global issues.

This is in keeping with the government's renewed effort to ensure that Canada realizes its potential economically and diplomatically on the world stage—a goal of the country's International Policy Statement, which was released this past spring and outlines a targeted approach to foreign relations based on Canada's strengths and values.

International youth programs

Young Canadians are also forging international connections in ever-greater numbers—through work-abroad programs, international internships, trade promotion opportunities and educational exchanges—and sharing Canadian values and expertise along the way.

Michel Gigault, who oversees four international youth programs at FAC, says participation in the programs has increased by 27 percent in the last three years. Last year, 22,820 Canadian young people took part in working holiday, student work abroad, co-op education and young workers' exchange programs.

The programs provide young people with the opportunity to gain professional experience or work overseas for varying periods. While the Canadian government doesn't subsidize

Youth working together for change: (left to right) George Mgoph, David Driskell, Faith Mullumba, Canadian intern Kevina Power, Robert Njoroge and Hassan Abdikydin meet in preparation for the World Youth Forum to talk about life in the Kibera Slum in the heart of Nairobi, Kenya.