

With a subject so large, we had to make choices. We could not possibly have discussed, even superficially, the entire range of issues coming within our mandate. We have not dealt with enhanced trade negotiations with the United States or with the Strategic Defense Initiative because they were covered in our interim report. Knowing that the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade was undertaking a major examination of official development assistance, we decided to concentrate on the broad thrust of Canadian development policy and suggest to the Standing Committee issues that we considered merited further study. Similarly, since a white paper on defence policy is in preparation, we limited our efforts to an overview of defence issues. Finally, we were not in a position to make a cost-benefit analysis of administrative practices. This would have required a detailed internal examination of the operations of the Department of External Affairs and the embassies abroad as well as of relations with other departments and agencies concerned with defence, foreign aid and immigration.

With limited time available—six months for public hearings—we decided to devote our time to listening to concerned citizens rather than government officials. Furthermore, our reference from Parliament did not authorize foreign travel. We were pleased that so many Canadians came forward and hope that our report reflects their views.

Although we did not examine the operations of the Department of External Affairs, the committee had some opportunity to consider the importance of having competent public officials capable of contributing to the wise formulation and efficient execution of Canadian foreign policy. We believe that Canada is well served by those that have chosen the career of representing the country abroad. We note that this career has become more dangerous on account of increasing instances of terrorism directed against diplomats. We were also impressed by the burden borne by families of officials serving abroad. Foreign language training, for example, should be made available in the same manner to both officials and their spouses, who also carry the responsibility of representing Canada. We also urge the government to give priority to negotiating reciprocal agreements with foreign governments, so that spouses who want to work abroad can do so. In this and similar ways, the government must recognize that a highly professional public service is a valuable national asset, strengthening Canada's hand in its international dealings.

Given the enormous diversity of issues that fell within the committee's mandate and the limited time available, we decided to concentrate on elaborating principles and goals for Canadian foreign policy. We have attempted to comment on many of the major concerns of our witnesses and have made specific proposals for action when we found them topical or when a particularly good idea was brought to our attention. But there was neither time nor space to take positions on every issue raised in testimony. Our approach has been broadly functional rather than regional. By its very nature, foreign policy must adapt constantly to shifting circumstances, and a foreign policy review that lays down specific directions in every area is simply not possible.

Our report was constructed with a view to making the most of limited resources. We could have recommended far more in the way of public expenditures, but we recognized that it would be unrealistic to depart from the financial constraints that bind the government. We did not, however, take the need for frugality as an excuse for inaction. Instead we looked for ways to render government activities more efficient. Several recommendations—that resource centres be established abroad to serve the emphasis on a particular region (Chapter 3), that there be closer federal-provincial co-operation in export development (Chapter 6), that there be a study of long-term