

and collect energy from converted waste materials as well as build a modern landfill.

Under the CUI's international program, local government employees and other urban professionals from Canada volunteer on projects around the world aimed at promoting excellence in the governance and management of cities. "What we work on is the quality of urban life," says David Crombie, the former federal cabinet minister and Toronto mayor, who is now president and CEO of the institute.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities runs a similar initiative through its International Centre for Municipal Development. The centre, with support from Canada, allows officials in Canadian cities to help their international counterparts offer better services.

A new international policy lens

Global urbanization raises new issues for international affairs, particularly in areas such as development and immigration, says Canada's High Commissioner to Kenya, James Wall, who is Canada's Permanent Representative to UN-Habitat.

Mr. Wall says that challenges such as urban decay are "emerging issues" that will affect how Canada spends international assistance dollars. He adds that Canada must attract would-be immigrants to its cities from the so-called "global creative" class.

"Certain cities seem to have the key to success in terms of getting balance in life—providing a humane living environment and being able to attract talented people necessary for ongoing economic, social and cultural growth," Mr. Wall says. "That's certainly something Canada should be concentrating on."

The country has a key advantage in this area—one that is a lesson for the world's cities, he says. "Canada's multiculturalism policy has shown itself to allow for harmonious integration for people from around the world.... We do have something to offer by way of example."

The road ahead

The World Urban Forum meeting in Vancouver was a bridge to the fourth WUF session, which will be held in 2008 in Nanjing, China.

Canadian organizers are helping the next host city prepare for the event, mindful that China is a country dealing with massive urbanization. Between now and 2020, an additional 300 million Chinese are expected to move to cities; five of the world's 10 most polluted cities are in China.

"The need to focus on the issue of urbanization and the opportunities for Canadians to have an influence couldn't be clearer," says Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay. "We are looking at an international issue that needs concerted, long-range solutions."

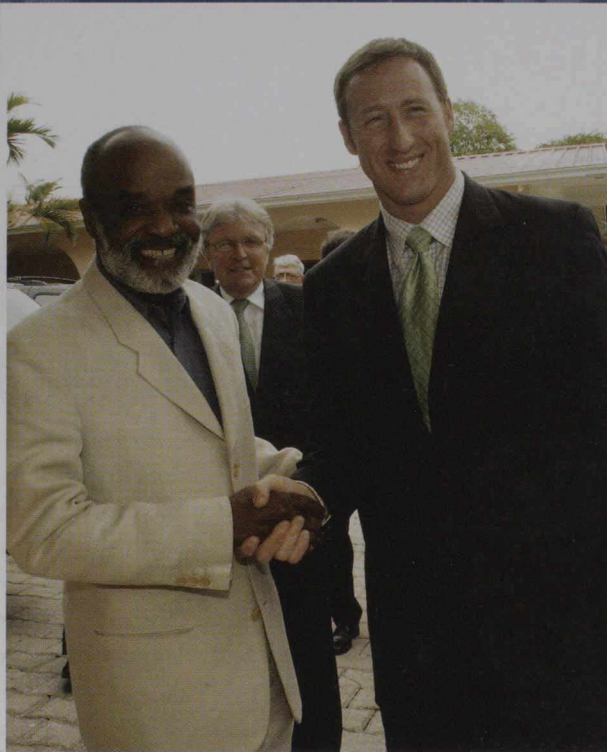


Photo: CP / Ariana Cubillos

Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay meets with Haitian President René Prével in June. A program sponsored by Canada in Haiti has helped bring sustainable electrical service to Jacmel, giving the city a level of social and economic development not seen elsewhere in Haiti.

Indeed, in the midst of dire problems in many cities, there is reason for optimism.

Canadian environmental consultant John Carter found hope in Dhaka in the fact the Bangladeshi government agreed to act on environmental recommendations from the Canadian team there. Plastic shopping bags, a major pollutant constantly clogging already fragile drainage systems, are now banned in Dhaka. Police enforce the prohibition by issuing on-the-spot fines for storekeepers who use them.

Also gone are Dhaka's "baby taxis," which burned both oil and petroleum, spewing deadly black exhaust into the air. By government order, they've been replaced with vehicles that run on compressed natural gas. "These are indications of government will and commitment," Carter says, "and that's the key."

This also sets an example for others facing air pollution challenges. "Initiatives such as switching to compressed natural gas have great potential for replication in other crowded urban centres in South Asia," says Hau Sing Tse, vice president of the Asia Branch at CIDA.

For Charles Kelly, the WUF commissioner general, hope comes from an image that has stayed with him from a visit to a slum in Jakarta, Indonesia. There he watched as dozens of men and women left their shacks perfectly turned out in pressed white shirts and smart outfits, bound for jobs or schools.

"The hard work and tenacious spirit you find in these places fill one with hope," Kelly says. "They move to cities for a better life. Their aspirations need to be backed up by the rest of the world." ♣

For more information on the World Urban Forum visit www.wuf3-fum3.ca.