



Some of the group's participants expressed reservations about this proposal, both on the grounds that a transplanted communications system might be insufficiently sensitive to local cultural values and that it might generate local resistance and/or political dependency that could cause further problems. Nevertheless, there was general agreement that Canada should use its technical expertise and financial resources to assist in the development of communications infrastructures (both transplanted and indigenous) in peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance.

Further suggestions included an extension of the project to include long-term technical support, the employment of local technicians and social activists, and attention to the experiences of Canadian NGOs in setting up local communications networks.

Participants also supported the extension of programs for the long-term development of indigenous communications networks, especially as these would support local community-based economic and educational projects. These programs could also be enhanced by attention to the experiences of the federal government's Community Access Project (CAP), which has supported the development of local communications networks for community-building within Canada, and of Canadian NGOs in establishing communications networks with local communities and other organizations.

Several of the participants supported the establishment of an agency for the exchange of information on Canadian culture and international endeavours ("Internet Canada International"). All agreed that the development of such a program should not undercut funding or support for Radio Canada International.

Finally, several of the group's participants expressed their support for consultative processes

such as this Forum, but remained reserved about the process pending evidence that its findings would be translated into policy action. Some participants were also interested in widening the circle of participants, to include other NGOs and representatives from small firms involved in the provision of communications products and services to lesser-developed countries.

Also proposed was the establishment of an independent consultative process (a "Canadian Platform for Action on Communications Strategy"), which would culminate in a national communications summit and a set of concrete policy actions, within the next few years. This process could be enhanced through the promotion of consultation via the Internet ("virtual consultation"), which would provide for interaction that would be more extensive, more direct, and less expensive.

This last advantage is an important one, as the budgets of government and NGOs are increasingly strained. Participants agreed that, if the government wants to make public input a priority, it will have to find a way to subsidize the participation of the non-corporate components of Canadian civil society.

Working Group 3

The thematic title for Working Group #3 was "Trade Liberalization and Communications Regulation." Participants to this group pursued a variety of issues related to regulation and de-regulation, including job creation, market stimulation, the promotion/protection of Canadian culture, and the regulation of offensive content. The discussion reflected both the importance and the challenge of balancing diverse national objectives. The interests of the cultural industries and telecommunications industries, for