

## Introduction

The second meeting of the 1997 National Forum on Canada's International Relations was held on June 23-24 at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario. In keeping with parallel forums in Victoria, Québec and Halifax, and the designation of 1997 as Canada's Year of Asia-Pacific, the Forum explored "Canada's relations with the Asia-Pacific." The Forum gave particular attention to policy issues germane to both the Asia-Pacific Economic Commission (APEC) summit that will be hosted by the Canadian government in Vancouver in November and to the People's Summit hosted by the non-governmental community alongside the official event.

The Steering Committee of the Waterloo National Forum invited participants from a range of social sectors — non-governmental, academic, youth, business and labour, media, and government — to explore foreign policy options for Canada's relations with the Asia-Pacific region. Most attending came from southwestern Ontario, reflecting the high degrees of interest and expertise in foreign policy development in the region. As noted in the welcoming remarks of Steering Committee member, and former federal Cabinet minister, Walter McLean, within 100 kilometres of Kitchener-Waterloo there are several universities, leading technology industries, and knowledgeable non-governmental agencies that house experience and expertise relevant to the National Forum.

## Themes and issues

Based on review of the National Forum discussion paper by journalist John Hay and a draft of the Victoria National Forum report, the Steering Committee selected five theme areas for discussion and policy development by five corresponding working groups during the Forum. These themes were: human rights and trade; sustainable development; media and communications; indigenous people, minorities and refugees; and conflict and security. Forum participants were provided with an advance package of materials containing background readings and questions to stimulate policy discussion in each of the five theme areas. During the Forum, participants were provided with additional materials including the Victoria Forum report and policy statements by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade on Canadian support for each of four policy areas: sustainable development in Asia, codes of conduct, human rights in Asia, and freedom of the media in Asia.