



Canadian diplomat Kimberly Phillips in Kyiv, Ukraine, where she was a member of the Canadian team observing the repeat Ukrainian presidential election of December 2004.

service in 2002 to put her degrees in environmental science and geology to work internationally. The head of public affairs in the Canadian High Commission in India finds herself in a commuting relationship with her boyfriend in Berlin.

“A career in the foreign service means uprooting yourself on a regular basis,” she says. “The challenge is to find a partner or spouse who likes that lifestyle and has a career that is mobile.”

Meanwhile, Canada’s diversity affords a deep pool of talented women

who have much to offer the foreign service. In 1993, DFAIT hired former journalist and public servant Kimberly Phillips, a Métis of Ojibway descent. “Despite a keen interest in travelling and working overseas, I had never considered a career in the foreign service,” says Phillips, 37, who serves as a public affairs counsellor at the Canadian embassy in Stockholm. “Had I not been approached, I never would have applied.”

Since signing on, she has travelled to more than 60 countries, lived in four countries, studied two foreign languages, served as an election monitor in Timor Leste and Ukraine and attended several G8 summits. She also reaches out to members of Canada’s aboriginal community, especially women, to suggest that they consider a diplomatic career, but says “more needs to be done to make our diplomatic service even more reflective of Canada’s diversity.”

Like their male counterparts, women diplomats use special events to take Canada’s message to the world. Earlier this year, on the occasion of International Women’s Day, Consul Andrea Clements hosted a networking lunch for local businesswomen in

Fukuoka and asked each invitee to bring a female guest. Such an all-women event is rare in Japan, notes Clements, who used the occasion to talk about the support that exists for women in the workplace in Canada.

“This has not only given us the opportunity to highlight Canada’s leadership in this area...and promote Canadian values,” she observes, “It also made for excellent business relationships and contacts for the consulate and Canadian businesses.”

Ultimately, breakthroughs for women diplomats enrich Canada’s reputation in the world, says freshman diplomat Dilani Hippola. The daughter of Sri Lankans who came to Canada almost 40 years ago, Hippola, 26, was shaped by her family and by the respect for diversity and human rights she witnessed while growing up in Canada.

This fall, she heads off to a posting in India eager to communicate Canadian values abroad and interpret the fast-growing region for those back home. The path beaten by previous Canadian women envoys makes her job easier, Hippola says. “If you are trying to sell an idea, the best way is to be an example of it yourself.” ❁

Leading by example

Diplomats seek out every avenue to showcase Canadian values and promote Canada’s place in the world. But sometimes an opportunity presents itself. That’s what happened with Pamela Isfeld, 40, a foreign service officer serving as political advisor to Canadian Brigadier-General David Fraser, the commander of the multinational military coalition in Southern Afghanistan based in Kandahar.

Isfeld recalls being mobbed by little girls “fascinated by the idea that I got to travel around with all those soldiers,” while on a visit earlier this year with the commander to a nearby province. “I’d like to think that some of them might remember meeting me and think, ‘hey, she did that, I should be able to.’”

A political scientist with a specialty in Soviet studies, Isfeld joined the foreign service in 1993. Last fall after taking part in a tactical reconnaissance mission to Kandahar, she volunteered for the one-year assignment there.

She believes that women sometimes have an advantage in such difficult settings because they are not seen as a threat. “Feminine qualities can be quite valuable in diplomacy, even in a traditional society like Afghanistan,” she says. “I have certainly been able to gain access, pass messages, and ask impolitic questions that my male colleagues would not have gotten away with.”

But no matter who is in the job, she adds, “flexibility and adaptability are huge assets in this kind of work.”



photo: Maj. Derrick MacAuley, DND

Canadian diplomat Pamela Isfeld travels by helicopter to Qalat, the capital of Zabul province, north of Kandahar.