



Dear Friends,

The 1998 National Forum on Canada's International relations was especially challenging and exciting. This year, Foreign Affairs Minister, Lloyd Axworthy, asked for public deliberations to help prepare for the first-ever meeting of the Arctic Council foreign ministers (Iqaluit,



September 17-19, 1998) and to help shape a Northern Vision for Canadian foreign policy. These deliberations built upon earlier work by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and the government response to the Committee's report on circumpolar relations.

For some Canadians, especially those in the North, there is already a Northern Vision and a de-facto Arctic frontier to our foreign policy. For most Canadians, however, notions of foreign policy rarely include a circumpolar perspective. This is a foreign policy development challenge.

Foreign policy is based in part on perceived national interests. Public support is often necessary and sometimes essential for major policy directions (ie. defence of the European democracies earlier this century, support for the United Nations and Peacekeeping, broad cooperation with the United States, non-isolation of Cuba, abolishing landmines). Like prairie historian W.L. Morton, some have argued that our perceptions and national interests include "the North", that we are a Northern People, and that public policy, including foreign policy, requires a northern dimension.

"Canadian life to this day is marked by a northern quality (which) runs through every Canadian psyche The Canadian frontier is a northern frontier and is an extension overseas of the northern frontier and northern economy of the North Lands of Europe."

But, are we a Northern People? If so, what does that mean for foreign policy?

In preparing for this public discussion we asked Paul Koring, a senior Globe and Mail journalist with experience in the Canadian North, in Russia and in international relations, to address these questions in the 1998 National Forum Discussion Paper, "Foreign Policy and the Circumpolar Dimension".

To summarize one of Koring's central themes:

"A sense of northernness has long been central to Canadian identity, but the North plays a relatively small, in some aspects minute role in Canadian lifestyles. Any consideration of a Northern foreign policy cannot proceed just because a small minority believes it should. Nor will romantic attachment suffice to support any lasting policy. If it is only important to current stakeholders, Northerners and a small group of Southerners whose lives are tied to the North by vocation, then there will be not much interests. To be blunt; if a Northern dimension to Canadian foreign policy matters only to those who attend Forums like these, then it won't happen."

Foreign Affairs Minister Axworthy expressed his recognition that most Canadians look South, and his hope that the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996, with Canada as founding Chair, would help facilitate both circumpolar cooperation and a Northern Vision for Canadians. "The creation of the Arctic Council heralds a true commitment to cooperation in the region – it marks the establishment for the first