



April 1998

Dear Friends,

Participants in the 1997 National Forum on Canada's International Relations met in Victoria, Waterloo, Halifax and Quebec from April to October. They included academics, NGOs, business, labour, students, Asian-Canadians, Native Canadians, government policy officials and others. Together they addressed three questions from the National Forum discussion paper:

How can Canadians promote and protect human rights in the Asia-Pacific region?

How can Canadians help the region's Indigenous Peoples find their voice and place in the countries of Asia-Pacific?

How should Canadians help Asia-Pacific societies transform environmentally destructive growth into sustainable development?

There is a strong view across the country that Canada and Canadians have a leadership role to play in Asia in environment issues, human rights, and regional cooperation – even if opportunities to do so are often limited by Asian circumstances and limited Canadian resources. There is agreement that “Asia-Pacific demands new efforts of understanding by Canadians and their government. In the years to come, events in Asia-Pacific will go a long way to determining our prosperity as a country, our security in the world, and the prospects for sharing democratic values in an emergent Pacific community.”

Each National Forum meeting also generated some specific recommendations. The Victoria meeting recommended Canadian efforts to promote freedom for journalists, editors, technical workers and others in the media in Asia. British Columbians at the Victoria Forum also recommended incentives for business that would encourage annual reporting on “business and environment practices” in Asia. Victoria participants included Jim Cooney of Placer Dome, Yuen Pau Woo of the Asia Pacific Foundation, Phil Fontaine, now Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and Sandra Schatzky of the University of Victoria Asia Pacific Centre.

The Waterloo Forum recommended an APEC Summit follow-up meeting of regional parliamentarians to discuss sustainable development and human rights, in 1998. The Halifax Forum noted the role of Oceans in Canada's Asia-Pacific relations and “further, there is a natural linkage between people in coastal communities in Canada and Southeast Asia, including Indigenous Peoples.” The Quebec Forum recommended that Canadian companies seek ISO 14000 certification (environmental standards designation).

The results of the National Forum are worthy of attention for several reasons. The Report proposes specific policy options that can be considered by government, business, NGOs, academics and others engaged in Canada's relations with Asia-Pacific societies.

The Report also urges the Government to open up media access to APEC-related meetings, to require businesses to agree to a voluntary code of conduct before participating in Team Canada trips to Asia, and to promote human rights in Asia with a creative, flexible, case-by-case strategy. It also addresses other