
Organizing the Conference: A "behind-the-scenes" look

Organizing a conference at which the foreign ministers of the 16 NATO and 7 WTO states, between 250 and 500 delegates, and between 500 and 1000 representatives of the Canadian and international media are expected to be present for at least three days is no small matter. This is the job that has fallen to the Open Skies Conference Task Force, or ICO as it is known in the argot of External Affairs and International Trade Canada (EAITC).

The Task Force is headed by Mr. Bill van Staaldunen of EAITC, who was among the organizers of the three international summits hosted by Canada during 1987 and 1988 (the Francophonie in Quebec City, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Vancouver and the Economic Summit in Toronto). In recruiting the ICO team, he has tried to draw as much as possible on the expertise that was built up during those events.

The Task Force numbers approximately 50 people, drawn from the permanent staff of EAITC and other government departments, as well as from the private sector. In the period immediately prior to the Conference, this staff is expected to grow to a total of 100, to meet the day-to-day demands of the Conference itself.

The Task Force is responsible for all physical preparations for the Conference. These range from arranging ministers' motorcades to making sure that the right flags are displayed in the Conference Centre. To help ensure that no tasks are left undone, ICO has divided itself into four major areas: finance and administration; logistics and protocol; conference operations; and media services.

The finance and administration unit began its work before the rest of the team, preparing estimates for the cost of the Conference and obtaining Treasury Board approval for the expenditure. The unit looks after the staffing, printing, communication, supply and other needs of the Task Force itself, and is responsible for paying Conference bills as they come in.

Task Force duties range from organizing motorcades to lining up Conference Centre flags

Accommodation, transportation, conference accreditation and official hospitality fall under the purview of the logistics and protocol unit. Delegates and media will be responsible for their own hotel costs, but ICO has made block bookings at various hotels around Ottawa to ensure that space will be available for all who require it. ICO will also be providing motorcades for all foreign ministers while they are in Ottawa, as well as a

car for each delegation, using vehicles obtained under a special arrangement with General Motors of Canada Ltd. The logistics and protocol unit works closely with the RCMP and the Department of National Defence, which will provide drivers for the vehicles, and with the City of Ottawa in mapping out motorcade routes and arranging for police escort.

The logistics and protocol unit is also responsible for conference accreditation. To ensure that unauthorized individuals do not gain access to the site, colour-coded photo-identification cards have to be provided for everyone who will come into contact with the Conference, from hotel staff to heads of delegation.

As suggested by the second half of its name, this unit also looks after meeting ministers as they arrive in Ottawa, organizing dinners hosted by Canada, arranging food services for delegates if they are held up in meetings and providing the other official courtesies required at a gathering of this nature.

The conference operations unit is responsible for providing a facility for the Conference—in this case the Government Conference Centre — as well as a facility for the numerous media expected. It takes care of equipping these facilities for the Conference — providing furniture, communication links, electronic systems for speakers and interpreters, for example — and makes sure that necessary support services, such as an emergency medical team, will be available during the Conference.