



and encourage and support the exploration of further opportunities for interactivity using computer-mediated communications (ie. the Internet);

- establish "cultural alliances" with like-minded states (ie. France, Australia).

On general questions concerning content regulation, some participants argued that regulation can always be circumvented, and that it is more appropriate to facilitate market-driven forms of exchange. Another suggested that the government think in terms of setting parameters, rather than determining content. On the other hand, a number of others argued that the government must play a leading role in sheltering and facilitating cultural expression and exchange. One participant emphasized the importance of encouraging Canadians' creativity, both in stimulating the evolution of Canadian culture and in showcasing it abroad.

Several of the participants expressed the opinion that public consultation, including fora such as this one, are essential to the development of foreign policy that is both practically informed and resonant with the values and purposes of Canadians. There was a high degree of interest in feedback from the Government on the findings of this Forum and in future consultation in other contexts.

Working Group 2

The title of Working Group #2 was "Universal Access and the Global Information Infrastructure". The group raised access issues in both domestic and international contexts, but (recognizing that each context is related to the other) agreed to focus on the latter. Participants agreed that Canada's commitments to the international promotion of democracy and

economic development both entail a commitment to the construction of a sophisticated global communication infrastructure and to the extension of access to communications technologies.

After some debate, the group's participants agreed to a set of principles regarding "access" which should inform Canadian foreign policy:

- universal access to communications is an integral part of democratic politics;
- access involves much more than the opportunity to purchase communications technologies. It involves opportunities to make informed use of whatever technologies are relevant to one's individual and community goals, regardless of social or economic status. It also involves opportunities to receive relevant training, the provision of services in the user's own language, and the maintenance of platforms for democratic exchange;
- it is important, in thinking about promoting access to communications technologies, to be sensitive to the diversity of cultural values and to avoid imposing our values and priorities on others.

The subsequent discussion generated a number of policy recommendations, both general and specific. Many lent qualified support to one participant's initial proposal for the organization of interactive communications systems to be deployed on an emergency basis to promote peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance. This program would involve the deployment of mobile technical support units, including instructors and cultural liaisons, to assist with the establishment of communications networks to support elections monitoring, balanced news media, and the strengthening of civil society, in societies that have been disrupted by conflict, famine, and/or environmental degradation.