



Toronto, Edmonton

POLICY OPTIONS

Overview

Communications and technologies used to communicate play a critical role in promoting human rights and democracy at home and abroad. They are also important to economic development and trade. Although Forum participants in Toronto and Edmonton expressed concerns about the move to "delink" trade policy from the promotion of democracy and human rights, there were differing ideas of how to best accomplish this.

There are divergent opinions on the emphasis and approach which should be taken, and tensions among the objectives of promoting civil society, international economic and social development, and Canada's economic and cultural interests. There are issues related both to communications content or messages and the means to distribute them (broadcast or electronic communications networks). There are complex linkages between domestic and international policies and practices.

On the issue of content regulation, some argued for protecting cultural expression and exchange, while others argued for market-driven models.

Messages

1. Government must develop new partnerships that go beyond a functional division of labour between firms, NGOs and relevant agencies. Partnerships among citizens, the private sector and non-governmental organizations are playing an increasingly important role in international affairs.

Civil society should be given a prominent place in the policy development and

implementation process of a Canadian International Information Strategy. (Toronto)

2. The task of the Government is to identify a consistent and homogenous message that reflects Canadian values and is sensitive to the audience. In promoting Canadian values, it is imperative that Canada lead by example. Some of these values include: human rights, multiculturalism, democracy, mutuality, fair labour and business practices, and civil society and public education. Messages should also highlight Canada's image abroad as a multilateral peacemaker and supporter of rule-based international trade. (Edmonton)

Infrastructure

1. Universal access to communications is an integral part of democratic politics. Access involves more than the opportunity to purchase communications services.

It involves the opportunities to make informed use of those technologies, to receive relevant training and services in the user's language, and the maintenance of platforms for democratic exchange.

Support should be focused on the long-term development of indigenous communications networks, especially as they support local community-based economic and educational projects. There is also a need to be sensitive to the cultural values of other societies.

2. While meeting basic needs is a priority in international development, we must facilitate growth of infrastructure, support technology-enabled economic and social development, and promote partnerships in development policy.