



125 Sussex Dr. Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

**"CULTURE MATTERS: HOW VALUES SHAPE HUMAN PROGRESS"
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION WITH LAWRENCE E. HARRISON**

October 6, 2000

Ottawa

*During his recent visit to Ottawa, Lawrence Harrison (Academy for International and Area Studies, Harvard University) was invited by Hugh Stephens (Assistant Deputy Minister, DFAIT) to discuss a book he co-edited with Samuel Huntington, **Culture Matters – How Values Shape Human Progress** (Basic Books, June 2000). The participants at the hour-long meeting included academics, NGOs, and government officials: Errol Mendes (Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa), Daniel Osabu-Kle (Carleton University), Madonna Larbi (Match International Centre), Josette Couture (Canadian Heritage), Jill Sinclair (Global and Human Issues Bureau, DFAIT), Lorenz Friedlaender (Policy Planning, DFAIT), and Julie Rechel, the organiser. The following is a brief synopsis of the presentation and discussion.*

1. Presentation

Lawrence Harrison proposed that the unsatisfactory progress of humankind toward prosperity and political pluralism during the past half century may be a function of cultural values and attitudes. Colonialism (imperialism) and dependency are no longer viable explanations for poverty and authoritarianism, he argued. As well, exceptions to geographic and climate explanations (determinism) abound (i.e., tropical Singapore, Hong Kong, etc.). This shift in thinking is epitomised by Enrique Fernando Cardoso's ideological transformation from a foremost Latin American dependency theorist to a proponent of free market policies as Brazil's Minister of Finance, and the enthusiastic support of (formerly sceptical) Mexico for NAFTA. The weight of the dependency school is on the decline even in Africa where more people seem to express the view that colonisers can not be blamed for the Continent's travails forever. In a similar vein, Harrison proposed that racism and discrimination are no longer satisfactory explanations for minority underachievement in the United States. Culture, he went on to say, may be the key to why certain ethnic groups "do better" relative to others.

Drawing attention to Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber, as the intellectual precursors of the cultural interpretation of development, Harrison outlined key factors which, he suggests, determine whether a culture is progress-resistant or progress-prone. They include time focus, agency, approach to work, and other factors (presented in the table below). Therefore, for any society to develop, it has to reject its progress-resistant practices and characteristics. Harrison drew attention to a "spontaneous initiative" to transform the progress-resistant culture of Peru (where a Peruvian established a "progressive" school, teaching the "10 Commandments of Development"). However, he remains sceptical about the practical steps actors located in progress-prone societies should take to aid the (supposed) necessary cultural transformation of