



Civil Society Fund

Strengthening the capacity of civil society to make useful contributions to the development of Canadian foreign policy is an important goal.

Pursuit of this goal is in recognition of the dilemmas and critique of "democratizing" foreign policy, summarized well by Professor Kim Richard Nossal (Canada Among Nations 1995). Nossal warns against defining democratic foreign policy as consultations with stakeholders and elitist "intermediate groups".

Therefore, we have set out with the longer term goal of strengthening the awareness and ability of broader civil society to make relevant and useful contributions to policy development. This is in keeping with the advice offered by Betty Plewes and Tim Draimin of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation in the same issue of Canada Among Nations.

"the proposed Centre for Foreign Policy Development...could play a key role in strengthening the democratic evolution of policy by....initiating cooperative approaches to policy which enhance the capacity of the existing foreign affairs constituency to be a more effective participant while broadening public participation."

Betty Plewes and Tim Draimin
Canada Among Nations 1995

"it can be argued that stakeholder politics, far from being democratic, instead entrenches and institutionalizes access to the policy making process that is limited to the few; the many have little place in such a process."

Kim Richard Nossal
Canada Among Nations 1995

Our variation on this advice is to try to strengthen capacity beyond the established "existing foreign affairs constituency." Canadians in many walks of life, with a vast range of international experience, have a great deal to offer if invited to do so. Young scholars, youth and Indigenous Peoples are keen to make their contributions.

The Civil Society Fund is meant to provide support for citizens to gain policy thinking experience and to make policy development contributions. In this first year the Fund has been used to build the community network, support NGO policy capacity and enable Canadians to undertake policy discussions on Asia-Pacific issues (related to Asia-Pacific Year and the APEC Peoples Summit). The Fund also supported a few pilot projects abroad to strengthen the experience and capacity of Canadian civil society to contribute to Canada's foreign policy (promoting Canadian culture and values) and to assist Canadians in contributing to stronger civil society in emerging democracies.

