

WOMEN OF THE WORLD

A new generation of women diplomats is delivering Canada's message abroad and putting a fresh face on the country's foreign policy.

Two years ago, Andrea Clements accepted her first foreign posting as Consul and Senior Trade Commissioner in Fukuoka, Japan.

Clements' background as an academic and management consultant, a stint as a teacher in Japan and three years serving in Canada's diplomatic service made her a natural choice to run one of the country's six offices in Japan. But she left for her assignment mindful that as a married woman with a newborn baby, she would have been barred from taking on the job just a generation ago.

Clements is one of a new crop of women diplomats—multilingual, highly educated and juggling relationships and families—who are putting a fresh face on what was once largely a man's world. Representing Canada abroad, they underscore the country's determination to be a global leader in areas such as promoting progress for women, protecting human rights in war-torn

regions and fighting against HIV/AIDS.

In 1995, Canada, along with the international community, committed

itself to the Beijing Platform for Action, which identifies key concerns such as the dangers for women in conflict and opportunities for women in political decision making. At the United Nations, Canada has co-led a campaign to improve the participation of women in high-level decision-making positions. And through membership in multilateral bodies such as the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States and La Francophonie, Canada is pressing for recognition of the rights of women, especially those who, as a result of armed conflict, have no voice, property rights or security.

"Over the last 30 years, the Government of Canada has not only demonstrated its awareness of gender parity but has played a leading role in integrating a gender-based perspective and the advancement of the rights of women internationally," observes Marie-Lucie Morin, who was recently named Canada's second female Deputy Minister of International Trade. A mother of four, Morin, 48, has had foreign postings in Norway, Moscow, London, Jakarta and San Francisco and is one of eight women among the 26 deputy ministers in the federal government. "Canada is seen as a world leader in promoting women's rights and gender equality."

Canadian engagement in Afghanistan, for example, involves women and girls as participants in the rebuilding of their country in areas including governance and economic development. And in Sudan, Canada provides direct aid to help Darfuri women who are victims of rape and marginalized by limited access to education, property and power.

"It is only by making women a part of Afghanistan's recovery that change and progress will be sustainable," says Chantale Walker, senior advisor on gender equality at DFAIT. "We have been active in addressing gender equality as a crucial component of the Darfur peace talks." The benefits, Walker adds, accrue to all. "Gender equality is not only about women; it is about equality between men and women, boys and girls."

Women currently account for some 40 percent of foreign service officers, up from just eight percent in 1981, while the proportion of those in senior management climbed to 27 percent from 8.7 percent over the same period. In January 2005, 27 of 132 heads of Canada's foreign missions were women, an increase from just 15 in 2000.

"In the foreign service, as in many other fields of endeavour, women are making slow but steady progress, while facing the same basic issue of how to combine a career with family life," remarks Margaret Weiers, author of a recent book on Canadian women diplomats called *Envoys Extraordinary: Women of the Canadian Foreign Service*.

In the early days, the diplomatic field was virtually closed to Canadian women. Those with talent got their start as departmental clerks—"lady typewriters" according to historian John Hilliker—and rose through the ranks on sheer ability. Agnes McCloskey, for example, was trilingual and joined what was then the Department of External Affairs in 1909 as a clerk, later working for legendary Under-Secretary of State O. D. Skelton in the 1930s. She went



Andrea Clements with her son Kai, who was two months old when Clements became Canada's Consul and Senior Trade Commissioner in Fukuoka, Japan, her first foreign posting.