

1998 National Forum on Canada's Circumpolar Relations

Whitehorse - May 9, 1998

Policy Recommendations

- The federal government should review its traditional role in policy making and work towards increasing its emphases on facilitating the links already established between circumpolar groups and regions, and fostering the growth of new relationships. The traditional top-down Ottawa driven approach tends to underestimate the uniqueness of existing and emerging relationships among circumpolar peoples. In addition, the federal government should activate strategies for encouraging networking and consensus building among northerners. Of particular importance is the support of existing networks among northern scientists, businesses, NGO's, arts and First Nations.
- The federal government should review its traditional role in policy making, which has tended to emphasize the "triumph of particular nations", and work toward the development of a new model of foreign policy that focuses on cooperative relations, joint collaboration and the betterment of all parties. This approach already characterizes such areas as land claims resolution in the north, the "soft" approach to the devolution of responsibilities, and such institutions as the Arctic Council. As embodied in today's north this model is a "people-to-people" approach that is community based and embraces such elements as gender equality, cultural diversity, environmental integrity and sustainable development. Consistent with this recommendation, it is strongly recommended that the exchange of people and ideas, whether internationally or within the country, should be an anchor for the policy process.
- Northern people often feel closer to each other than to their nation. Northern foreign policy should be built on the fact that this circumpolar closeness grows from common challenges (climate, isolation, size, demography, etc.) and the development of similar solutions to such challenges. The building and sharing of northern solutions to northern problems should be a foundation of Canada's northern foreign policy.
- The federal government should take great effort to continue the CCFPD fora as a first step toward embracing northern ideas in the development of northern policy. Furthermore, in keeping with this recommendation, it is recommended that these fora be routinized to become an ongoing mechanism for the involvement of northerners in the foreign policy development process. The traditional approach of asking for reactions and other forms of short term issue-based information gathering should be replaced with this more open developmental approach.
- The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should document its initiatives, and policy development in a more "user friendly" form. This is of particular importance in the north where there are language barriers, and the current form may hinder the aims of inclusiveness, broad acceptance and understanding of policy initiatives.