

Building Capacity, Strengthening Community: Canadian Foreign Policy and Northern Voices

Introduction

On March 28, 1998 a day-long workshop entitled, "Building Community, Strengthening Capacity: Canadian Foreign Policy and Northern Voices," was held in Prince George at the main campus of the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). Sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development and supported by the International Studies Program at UNBC, the workshop brought together 45 individuals to discuss issues pertaining to Canadian foreign policy and the North. The workshop was an outstanding success. The response of the participants, which will be discussed below, is testimony to the value of efforts to develop the capacity of Northern communities to address aspects of foreign policy.

The Participants

The list of participants (Appendix I) excludes the organizational affiliations of many persons engaged in the workshop. This option was adopted as an operational policy by the workshop organizers in response to individual concerns about people being asked to "speak for specific organizations". It should also be understood that the list does not include the names of all workshop participants. Some requested anonymity. Both aspects reflect sensitivities encountered during the organization of this meeting. Consequently, the list of participants does not do justice the wealth of experience represented by the individuals involved in the workshop. Registration records indicate that the length of time that these individuals have lived in Northern BC spanned from 3 months to 30 years. The group ranged from first year university students to retired community members. The organizations that the participants are involved include Amnesty International, Council of Canadians, the Prince George Anti-Poverty Coalition, Prince George Food Security Network, Prince George Community Planning Council, Ten Days for Global Justice, Canadian Relief Fund for Chernobyl Victims in Belarus, Prince George Crisis and Information Line, Canadian Crossroads International, HOPE International, Bridgehead, Multicultural Society of Prince George, Green Party, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women, and CUPE Local 3799. As what pointed out at the meeting, the organizers sought to secure the participation of individuals from First Nations groups, but, due to the presence on campus that day of two other large workshops dealing specifically with First Nations issues, these efforts regrettably went unrewarded.