

Engaging young people in international issues is also a priority for Canada Corps, with programs aimed at harnessing the energy of young Canadians who have a desire to gain international experience and make a difference in the world.

A program managed by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, for example, allows about 100 senior university students to experience governance issues first-hand while earning an academic credit. Through the program, four students at the University of Toronto helped develop a project with the University of Prishtina in Kosovo to strengthen student government and develop

practical skills in conflict resolution. A series of workshops brought together students, faculty, administration and the non-governmental community to discuss the role of student government within the university, and

to explore ways to apply Canadian experiences to the Kosovo context. "We worked with them to create an ideal student government," says Ericka Stephens, a former student government president, "one that was independent and autonomous, as well as accessible and understandable to students."

At workshops held in Montenegro, Macedonia and Toronto, the Canadian students gave their Kosovo counterparts lots of ideas. The sharing went both ways, Stephens adds, which is the essence of the international exchange. "We learned what we had in common, and what was different," she says, "And how we could each take from those experiences." ❁

PREPARED FOR ANY CONTINGENCY

On the 50th anniversary of international peacekeeping, some 2,800 Canadian soldiers are stationed around the world in hot spots such as Haiti.

The staging of February's presidential and parliamentary elections in Haiti was an organizational feat unlike any Colonel Barry MacLeod had seen as a soldier in the Canadian Forces. First there were security issues caused by gangs and political agitators threatening to disrupt the vote. Then there was the logistical ordeal of coping with the country's difficult terrain and complex social and technical conditions.

Col. MacLeod's experience with elections in the past had been limited to casting a ballot. But as general manager of the Elections Assistance Task Force at the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), his job was to plan, organize and direct all UN logistical and security support for the elections, including the distribution and recovery of all electoral materials. His team saw to it that the vote so critical to Haiti's nation-building was successfully concluded despite the many challenges.

"Roads here are terrible; we got the elections material to where it had to be by all means of transportation," he says. "We used vehicles; we used coast guard vessels; we used dugout canoes; we used donkeys; we used horses; we used porters and we used helicopters."

On election day, people were still voting when night fell, Col. MacLeod

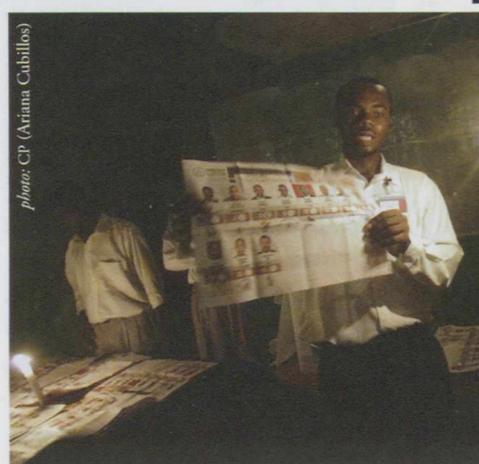


photo: CP (Ariana Cubillos)
Election workers count ballots by candlelight in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

says, but with no electricity in huge areas of the country, the election day package included three candles per polling station. "You can't send batteries out with flashlights, because the batteries would be either pilfered or burned out before the time to use them," he says.

Col. MacLeod is among a half-dozen Canadian soldiers who are serving as key members of the United Nations-sponsored mission to Haiti.

Since four Canadian military officers were sent to Kashmir as part of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan in 1949 and the first official international peacekeeping force responded to the Suez Crisis of 1956, Canadian military personnel have regularly taken part in all manner of difficult assignments abroad. There have been missions to observe elections, implement peace settlements, support aid and human rights efforts and undertake civilian tasks such as police training.



photo: CP (Ariana Cubillos)

Organizational feat: Uruguayan peacekeepers protect electoral materials being carried by donkey to the small town of Michelle in northeast Haiti.

The number of Canadian Forces personnel involved in operational missions around the world varies and today stands at more than 2,800, says Colonel Denis Thompson,

Director of Peacekeeping Policy for the Department of National Defence in Ottawa.

They serve in a wide range of capacities. The largest mission is in Afghanistan, where more than 2,200 members of the Canadian military are stationed, largely in conjunction with the country's commitment to the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar. But Canadians are also serving in small numbers in Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haiti, the Middle East, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Ethiopia.

For example, 11 Canadian Forces members are stationed in Sierra Leone, teaching the army there how to work with the country's civilian authority, Col. Thompson says. Another 13 Canadian soldiers are working in the office of Afghan President Hamid Karzai providing training in strategic planning.

"Some missions involve capacity building and some literally involve answering the call of the UN," Col. Thompson says, adding that

missions usually last six months to a year. Canadians tend to get high-profile positions, he says, because of Canada's experience and the quality of Canadian officers.

In Haiti, for example, Col. MacLeod served for eight months in 2004 as the chief of staff of MINUSTAH, for which he was recently awarded the Meritorious Service Decoration by Governor General Michaëlle Jean. He returned three months ago as the general manager of the Elections Assistance Task Force at the request of the special representative of the secretary general. The current chief of staff, Colonel Michel Duhamel, is also a Canadian. Col. Duhamel is effectively third in command of the international security operation in the country, which involves 7,500 soldiers from some 20 countries.

"The challenge with Haiti is the complexity of the mission, where many national and international players and interests converge," says Col. Duhamel. "Haiti is like a pot of boiling stew on a hot stove. The military can keep the pot from exploding, but only political and socio-economic solutions can turn the heat down." He explained that some of the countries involved in MINUSTAH have never before contributed military contingents to international missions. In addition,

the UN force there does not have free rein but must support and collaborate with the Haitian police force.

Col. Duhamel says the UN force ends up doing work considered too dangerous for the Haitian police—such as patrolling in the notorious Cité Soleil district of Port-au-Prince. It also steps in at demonstrations and armed confrontations.

During the recent vote, in addition to logistical problems, the UN forces had difficulty ensuring basic security for more than 800 voting centres, especially with gangs present and assaults on voting centres in some remote areas, Col. MacLeod adds. "In order to deliver material to such places you have to have a strong security force." ❁

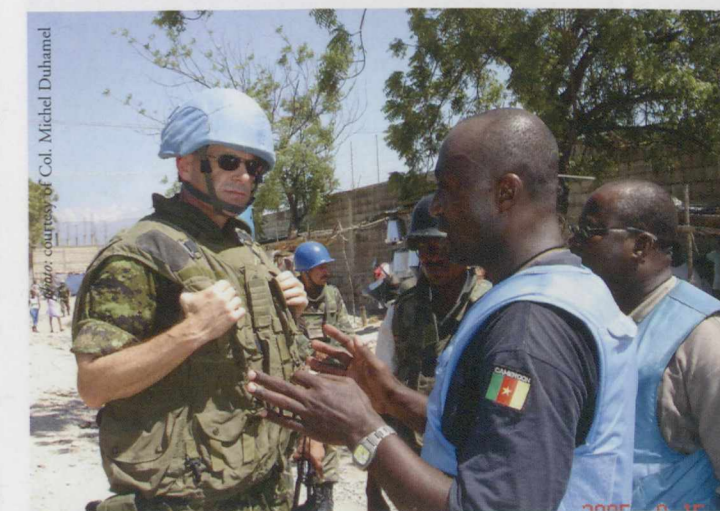


photo: courtesy of Col. Michel Duhamel
Colonel Michel Duhamel (left) from Canada is chief of staff of the international security operation in Haiti, which involves 7,500 soldiers from some 20 countries.

photo: Ericka Stephens



Students from Canada and Kosovo worked together to strengthen student governance at the University of Prishtina.