

Report on The National Forum 2000 and National Forum Youth during and after the Conference on War-Affected Children

The Process

Each year, the Centre for Foreign Policy Development undertakes a National Forum with Canadians. The summer and fall of 2000, the National Forum was held with Canadian youth in order to seek their advice on the issue of children and conflict and to prepare some of them for the International Conference on War-Affected Children in Winnipeg. The Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development devised a strategy of three streams for The National Forum on War-Affected Children: an internet-based activity and modules for learning, a series of round-table discussions by youth organized by the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver), and a National Forum which brought together 50 youth from across Canada in Gimli, Manitoba.

The internet-based modules gave teachers, youth and youth groups opportunities to learn about the issue prior to the events. The roundtable discussions were held through the late spring and summer, with youth invited to discuss the issues for a day. These discussions were powerful and moving and created a series of recommendations which were carried forward to the National Forum in Gimli, Manitoba for youth to examine. Each roundtable was facilitated by youth, trained for two days by the Centre for Victims of Torture prior to the roundtable. At each roundtable, delegates were invited to apply to attend the National Forum in Gimli.

The Students Commission designed and executed the National Forum in Gimli, Manitoba event, working with staff from the Centre for Foreign Policy Development, and consulting with youth interested in the issue, either from the roundtables, organizations working in the area, or youth applying through the internet.

The Students Commission was also invited to several working group meetings set up by the Secretariat for the Conference on War-Affected Children, and brought youth to some of these events. In time, the Students Commission was asked to continue its work with the National Forum youth by joining the team working on youth participation for the Conference. Linda Dale, executive director of the Children as Peacebuilders Project, headed up the international youth delegate selection, preparation and involvement. The third key member of the team created by the Secretariat, which was led by Gail Cochburn, was Susan Fountain, a UNICEF-NY youth facilitator with a great deal of international experience in education for development and peace.

A selection process was in place to select the 50 applicants for the Forum held in Manitoba. Applicants were encouraged to submit descriptions of their experiences in the area of war affected children. Letters of references were also sent in to recommend delegates for the conference.

A selection team of 5 people from the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, the Canadian Centre of Foreign Policy Development and Students Commission reviewed the applications and chose the delegates who best fit the criteria. The team was looking for racial diversity, linguistics, first hand knowledge or volunteering experience with organizations, national representation, gender representation, involvement with round table discussion held prior to the conference, and general knowledge of the topic.

