

OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

There has been significant progress in East-West relations over the past four years. This evolution carries the promise of further improvement.

Within the Soviet Union there have been important changes in the leadership accompanied by the introduction of a wide range of reforms affecting every aspect of life. There is more open debate, a serious attempt at economic reform which will encourage greater personal initiative, and welcome stress on the need for a 'rule of law'. There has also been welcome progress on human rights, although much yet remains to be done before the USSR will fully comply with its international obligations. These changes are also reflected in developments in some countries in Eastern Europe, especially Hungary and Poland.

In security and arms control, a series of Soviet-American summits has resulted in the INF agreement, with its path-breaking verification provisions. Talks have been held over several years on long-range strategic nuclear weapons (START). Complicated issues including strategic defence are involved, but it is to be hoped that the momentum established by the INF Agreement and improved East-West relations generally will result in a reasonably early agreement.

New negotiations on conventional armed forces and on confidence- and security-building measures will start in March. Both are within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Meanwhile, the USSR and some of its Warsaw Pact allies have promised cuts in defence spending and in the size of their conventional forces. Chemical weapons have become a key item on the international arms control agenda. Canadians take a strong interest in these issues, and the Canadian government has sought to promote arms control and disarmament multilaterally and through bilateral channels. Canada has also continued to conduct research on verification techniques.

In regional disputes, progress in the past few years has been encouraging. After a decade, the USSR seems about to complete the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, and has promised to provide \$600 million in aid. With US mediation and Soviet encouragement, agreements have been signed on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and on the independence of Namibia. Canada is involved in peacekeeping in Afghanistan, and if asked is committed to serving in Namibia as that country makes the transition to