

A UNIQUE POSITION, A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE



As an Aboriginal foreign service officer, Deborah Chatsis has had a deep impact at home and abroad.

In order to deliver the commencement address to the high school graduating class on the Ahtahkakoop Reserve in central Saskatchewan last year, Deborah Chatsis had to circle the globe.

Stops along the way included Nairobi, Beijing, Bogota, Miami, Geneva, New York and Ottawa, all places where Chatsis has worked with Canada's Foreign Service during the past 15 years.

Speaking at her niece's graduation, she says, was "somewhat unnerving," especially as the gathering was made up largely of family and friends. However, her message was delivered with steady passion: there is a world of opportunity out there.

Chatsis is testament to that fact. As a child growing up near the reserve in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, her global curiosity was sparked by exploring an old trunk of mementos her parents had collected while her father was stationed in Germany with the Canadian Armed Forces in the late 1950s. In university, she trained

first as an engineer and then became a lawyer. Finally, looking for a way to work abroad, she entered the foreign service, moving quickly to overseas training in Nairobi and her first posting doing visa and consular work in Beijing in 1990.

China was fascinating for both the sense of connection she felt between the peoples of North America and Asia and the flood of consular and immigration issues her office faced in the post-Tiananmen Square period. "I enjoyed the culture and the travelling, meeting people and making friends. It was difficult to leave."

A subsequent year in Bogota, Colombia, managing the immigrant enforcement program for parts of South and Central America featured new challenges, including personal safety concerns for embassy staff and logistical problems with travel in the region that precipitated a move to Miami to do the job for another eight months.

In more recent positions in Ottawa and postings with Canada's missions to the UN in both Geneva and New York, much of Chatsis's work has been focused on international humanitarian and criminal law, disarmament, peace and security, and human rights, particularly in relation to Indigenous peoples, where she is uniquely positioned.

"There are concerns that are common to Indigenous peoples around the

world; I can draw on my own experience to put those into context and to help shape Canadian positions," she says. "Indigenous rights are at a much more advanced level in Canada than they are in many other countries. Nevertheless, there's still much to be done and many ways to improve."

Chatsis played a central role in the drafting and negotiation of the Ottawa Convention banning landmines. In 1998 she received the Award of Excellence from the Treasury Board of Canada as well as the Canadian Foreign Service Officer Award presented by the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers for her work on it.

Chatsis is now settling into a new role as Deputy Director of the Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and International Women's Equality Division of Foreign Affairs Canada in Ottawa.

Her travel and assignments abroad have "made it a challenge to be so far away from family," she says. "When you join the Foreign Service, you're young, you don't really know the impact it will have." She in turn has had an impact, from opening the eyes of the young graduates of Ahtahkakoop Reserve to "playing a little part" to help advance Canada's role in the international dialogue on Indigenous issues. 🌱

Read about the distinguished foreign service career of James Bartleman in a new book called *On Six Continents* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2004). Bartleman, a member of the Mnjikaning First Nation, served in the Canadian foreign service for more than 35 years, heading Canada's missions to the European Union, Australia, South Africa, the North Atlantic Council of NATO, Israel, Cyprus and Cuba. He is currently Lieutenant Governor of Ontario and has identified among his priorities the need to encourage Aboriginal young people.