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125 promenade Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2
Telephone/Téléphone : 613.944.8278 www.cfp-pec.gc.ca Fax/Télécopieur : 613.944.0687

REPORT FROM THE NORTH KOREA ROUNDTABLE

Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

January 22, 2001

University of Victoria Conference Centre
Sidney, British Columbia

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Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
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Canada

Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development
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125 Sussex Dr. Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

North Korea Roundtable
January 22, 2001
Sidney, British Columbia

On January 22, 2001, the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development organised a roundtable on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) at the University of Victoria Conference Centre in Sidney, British Columbia. The roundtable brought together security scholars, NGOs, Churches, academic specialists, students, business people, and government officials to share information and to contribute ideas to the development of Canada's foreign policy. Participants included Paul Evans (University of British Columbia), Tiger Lee (Canadian Food for the Hungry), Mary-Wynne Ashford (International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War), Michael Hwang (Korean Presbyterian Church), Charles Kim (Trans-Pac Fibre Inc.), David McLellan (Deputy Director, Korean and Oceania Division, DFAIT), and Bohdana Dutka (CIDA). Steven Lee (CCFPD) chaired the meeting. Marketa Geisler (CCFPD) was the Rapporteur.

This report is a summary of key themes discussed during the roundtable, they included:

1. The Economic, Social, and Political Conditions in the DPRK
2. The Role of Foreign NGOs: from Aid to Development?
3. Canada – DPRK Relations: Engagement without Illusion
    - 3.1. Diplomatic Relations
    - 3.2. Track II Initiatives
    - 3.3. Future Business Relationships
4. Concluding Remarks

The participants were broadly supportive of the recommendations made by the *Canadian Research Delegation to the DPRK*, led by Senator Lois Wilson, September 16 - 23, 2000 (outlined in a Box below). Some of these recommendations were emphasised and other ideas added:

- Canadian Track II initiatives should be diversified and involve a wide-range of sectors including health, forestry, agriculture, Parliament, and businesses.
- Canada should build on its existing Track II relationships in the future. The importance of Track II should not be diminished as diplomats begin their work.
- There is a growing need for bottom-up leadership and resources to maintain (and expand) Canadian Track II initiatives in the DPRK.
- It is better to be engaged, formally and informally, than leave the DPRK isolated. Doing nothing to relieve human suffering is not an option, especially for the humanitarian

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NGOs.

- Efforts should be made to move from aid delivery to more development-oriented assistance.
- The Canadian government could insist that aid it provides to the DPRK does not allow diversion of resources toward the development of weapons of mass destruction.
- Attention was raised to the grave humanitarian situation of refugees in the North of the DPRK and in Manchuria.
- Policy options to ensure North Korea's "soft landing" could be considered.

1. The Economic, Social, and Political Conditions in the DPRK

The report of the *Canadian Research Delegation to the DPRK* was outlined at the beginning of the discussion. Some of the delegates, present at the roundtable, said they were surprised with the level of access granted to them by the DPRK authorities during their visit. The difficulty for foreigners to develop personal relationships with North Koreans and the constant struggle for access to information were noted. The ability to venture beyond Pyongyang, allowed the delegates to assess economic and social conditions in rural areas. They have concluded that, compounded by the withdrawal of subsidies in the 1990's, a cold winter, poor crops, heat shortages, and an insufficient public distribution system have pushed the country to a crisis point and enhanced reliance on foreign aid.

Key recommendations made by the *Canadian Research Delegation to the DPRK* were:

- Continue with humanitarian assistance in the short-term to address critical food shortages and explore ways of moving, in the medium term, from humanitarian assistance to a sustainable development framework.
- Encourage the establishment and expansion of the Canadian NGO presence inside the DPRK.
- Continue existing dialogue mechanisms with the DPRK and look to supplement them in the future with regular academic exchanges and training programmes.
- Promote bilateral exchanges of government officials for purposes of capacity building, sharing of experience, and broadening understanding.
- Encourage governmental discussion on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament issues.
- Promote parliamentary exchanges
- Encourage business contact.
- Encourage people-to-people contacts.
- Establish formal diplomatic relations as soon as possible.*

* John Manley, Foreign Affairs Minister, announced that Canada established diplomatic relations with the DPRK on February 6, 2001.

A similar account was given by the representative of the International Physicians for Global Survival. Through the NGO's hospital visits, the daily hardships faced by North Koreans became evident. For instance, the lack of electricity precluded the installation of a neonatal unit at one hospital. In another, dire shortages of medical supplies were evidenced by

the presence of a single IV bottle. It has also became apparent that North Korean doctors often do not have access to the latest medical expertise, leaving them about 8 years behind their Western counterparts. Many doctors are forced to turn to traditional Korean practices. A point was made that the ways in which North Koreans cope with hardship, including famine and lack of medicine are not obvious to an outside observer.

The grave situation of refugees in the North of DPRK and in Manchuria was cautiously raised. Both the DPRK government and Chinese officials perceive these refugees as illegal migrants and treat them extremely harshly. Since the issue is politically sensitive, a call was made to address the situation quietly rather than through formal bi-lateral channels. Others disagreed, suggesting that immediate measures should be taken. One option would be to air-lift refugees out of the area and bring them to Canada, as was done in Bosnia.

Critical economic and social conditions did not seem to have caused regime instability. It would appear that the political leadership is in firm control and despite some new diplomatic initiatives, domestic "opening-up" is unlikely. Nevertheless, some participants pointed out that agricultural reform and economic restructuring are needed, if the regime was to survive in the longer-term.

The participants debated whether it was useful to pressure the DPRK government to loosen its grip on the population, either through Track II initiatives or formal diplomatic links. What should countries like Canada do to contribute to the so called "soft landing," if the regime was to collapse?

A plea was made not to make conditions even worse than they already are. We should avoid making people suffer by blindly attempting to tear down the regime, however oppressive it may be. It would be an "illusion" to think that the regime could collapse as a result of external pressure. Perhaps, long-term efforts could be aimed at mobilising democratic forces, but immediate political pressure will accomplish little. While some accepted that external pressure may be impotent and that change may not occur for a long time to come, others pointed out that "sometimes, the long-term is really short." How many inside and outside observers anticipated the collapse of the USSR?

Some said that even though the regime appears to be strong, an increased flow of information will be inevitable as the country opens-up externally. A moment may arise when the government's loss of control over information results in a sudden shift. At that moment it may be useful to have an emergency plan in place to cope with new conditions and needs (i.e., migration and refugee flows). One participant noted that, according to a DPRK official, it is premature to talk about a "soft landing" before even taking off.

2. The Role of Foreign NGOs: from Aid Delivery to Development?

The degree to which the DPRK relies on food imports and aid remains disputed.

Nonetheless, concerns were raised that "systemic" aid allows the DPRK government to divert resources toward armaments and strengthens the military regime in the longer-term. At the minimum, the Canadian government should insist that resources are not diverted towards the development of weapons of mass destruction. The DPRK government's lack of accountability for managing foreign aid and growing donor fatigue were also raised.

The question whether the time is ripe to move from aid delivery to longer-term development projects was widely discussed. Is the DPRK government ready to allow foreign NGOs into the country for longer periods of time (three years or more)? Can the "Western" perceptions of development be squared with the prerogatives of a highly centralised economy and a totalitarian ideology? How can grass-roots, small-scale development projects take off when centralised mass-production is favoured and foreign NGOs are denied contact with the local people?

Some optimism was expressed about the incipient willingness of the DPRK government to let aid delivery grow into small-scale development programmes, with examples in agriculture and health. However, the DPRK government continues to be extremely suspicious about the involvement of foreign NGOs and often interprets their activities as neo-colonial. An informal exchange with an official from the Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee would support this assertion. According to him foreign NGOs represent, first and foremost, the interests of the donor. Some resident NGOs, on the other hand, do have a strong government backing.

A suggestion was made that to be able to engage the non-government sector in North Korea more easily, we should distinguish between service/delivery and advocacy/development NGOs. The service delivery mode is likely to continue, at least in the short-term. Meanwhile, the advocacy/development NGOs should not be too appositional and wait until confidence with the regime is secured. In short, NGOs should work with the existing institutions rather than try to subvert them. Others disagreed with this assessment and asked whether this, supposedly "do no harm" approach, does not actually inadvertently support the totalitarian regime. It is plausible that systemic foreign aid does sustain the system. Could it also be that foreign NGOs may legitimise the DPRK government by developing a "good" working relationship with its officials? While it is not in Canada's interest to support an oppressive regime, there was a general agreement, especially among the humanitarian NGOs, that it is better to be engaged and that doing nothing to relieve human suffering is not an option.

3. Canada -- DPRK Relations: Engagement without Illusion

3.1. Diplomatic Relations

The Canadian government has adopted a more proactive engagement policy toward the DPRK, encouraged by the DPRK's greater openness, the Republic of Korea "Sunshine Policy," and most recently the success of the inter-Korea Summit. Late 1999 and early 2000 saw bilateral visits of increasing seniority and formality, which prepared the ground for a meeting between

former Foreign Affairs Minister, Lloyd Axworthy, and DPRK Foreign Minister, Paek, on July 26, 2000. This was the first Ministerial-level meeting between Canada and the DPRK. Following the meeting Minister Axworthy announced Canada's recognition of the DPRK. (On February 6, 2001, the current Foreign Affairs Minister, John Manley, announced that Canada has established diplomatic relations with the DPRK.)[1]

Participants asked whether it was in Canada's national interest to have diplomatic relations with the DPRK. How will Canada benefit from a closer relationship with the regime? What will the DPRK government expect from Canada?

There is a growing international and domestic awareness that the DPRK's isolation hampers, rather than helps, the search for solutions to such concerns as food shortages, the missile program, and proliferation. Greater Canadian engagement with the DPRK would serve Canadian and global interests. For instance, Canada could use the formal channels of diplomatic communication to express views on pertinent issues (including missile development and human rights) and to draw the DPRK into greater involvement with the outside world. Implementing the Vienna Convention will likely impact the ability of the DPRK government to exclusively control information and (foreign) access to the public.

A point was made that the criticism of the Canadian approach as being too "soft," too altruistic, too expensive, and generally contrary to the national interest is unfounded. It is logical to interpret the approach as *real-politic* since one of its goals is to prevent the creation of "fortress America" – a development to which Canada strongly objects. Normalising relations with North Korea and the country's opening-up may well become a key reason for banishing, or at least discrediting, the need for the U.S. to build National Missile Defence (NMD).

An informal discussion with DPRK officials suggested that they do not have a clear sense

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[1] From a brief *Security on the Korean Peninsula,* prepared by David McLellan (Korea and Oceania Division, DFAIT), Canada's current engagement with the DPRK builds on the significant Canada-DPRK contact which took place throughout the 1990s, including DPRK participation in Track II cooperative security dialogue starting in 1990, attendance by Canadian Parliamentarians at the Inter-parliamentary Union meeting in Pyongyang in 1991, Canadian contributions of $5 million to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization since 1994, Canadian humanitarian aid donations since 1997 exceeding $30 million through the World Food Program and Canadian NGOs, and liaison visits of increasing frequency to the DPRK by government officials from Beijing. Meanwhile, Canadian trade with the DPRK is negligible. Canadian imports from the DPRK have fluctuated between $3 million and $8 million annually. The major items are woven apparel; books, newspapers and manuscripts; paper and machinery. Canadian exports have ranged between $100,000 and $700,000 and are principally pharmaceutical products; wood pulp and wood; mineral fuel and oil.

of what to expect from the Canadian government and that they have little understanding of Canada. Nevertheless, the officials indicated that Canadian aid is most welcome and seemed willing to undertake development projects in the future. Some participants pointed out that the DPRK government is not so much interested in development as in food aid and material inputs for their state-run (mega) projects.

A possible element in the future of Canada -- DPRK relations may be immigration, since there is a large North Korean community in Canada. A question was raised whether Citizenship and Immigration Canada will deal with immigrants and refugees from the DPRK in the same way as before. A indication was given that the answer is most likely positive.

Concerns were raised about a possible change in approach toward the DPRK by the new Bush administration. Has the U.S. become more reluctant to engage with the DPRK government and could this have a bearing on Canada's aims? A suggestion was made that there is no indication of the U.S. government's opposition to the steps Canada undertook to formalise its relations with North Korea. Observers are quietly optimistic that the level of U.S. aid and interest in the region will be maintained.

Other Countries and the DPRK*

United States of America. Former U.S. Secretary of State Albright met with Kim Jong Il in Pyongyang from October 23-24 in an effort to move relations toward a more normal footing. The U.S. insists that the DPRK address U.S. concerns about missile development and proliferation prior to placing the establishment of diplomatic relations on the table. Missile talks in Kuala Lumpur November 1-3 covered the full range of missile issues under consideration, including the DPRK's export and indigenous programs, but significant issues remain to be resolved.

Japan. On October 30-31, 2000, the Japanese and the DPRK governments held their eleventh round of normalization talks in Beijing. Although cordial, the talks failed to narrow important differences between the two countries. Key points of contention include Pyongyang's demand for an apology and compensation for Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula earlier this century, and compensation for seized cultural assets. The Japanese government, meanwhile, wants the DPRK to take action on alleged abductions of Japanese nationals by North Korean agents, and continues to have concerns regarding the DPRK's missile program.

The ***United Kingdom*** and the ***Netherlands*** recently announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with the DPRK. ***Italy*** established, and ***Australia*** restored, diplomatic relations with the DPRK during 2000. More than 120 countries have relations with the DPRK.

* From a brief *Security on the Korean Peninsula* prepared by David McLellan (Korea and Oceania Division, DFAIT)

3.2. Track II Initiatives

The Canadian Track II approach should be diverse and involve a wide-range of sectors including: health, forestry, agriculture, the Parliament, and business. Good coordination will be needed to avoid duplication of initiatives and ensure their consistency. Both Track II and formal

initiatives should build on existing relationships with the DPRK.

The importance of Track II should not be diminished as diplomats begin their work and "shadow diplomacy" loses its *raison d'être*. Instead, Track II should be perceived as a new arena for conducting international relations.[2] For instance, academic relations and exchanges may be the ground for discussing politically sensitive issues such as missile development or regional stability. It would be useful to carefully consider where Track II should go from here. Who should be involved on the Canadian side? Whom should we engage in the DPRK? Which issues need to be aired? How should the connection be made so it does not appear threatening to the DPRK government?

The non-government sector should be aware that although DFAIT subtly encourages Track II, the federal government will most likely limit resources to such activities in the future. With the new Foreign Affairs Minister, the priorities of DFAIT may also shift. Therefore, there is a need for a bottom-up leadership and resources to maintain and expand Canadian Track II initiatives.

3.3. Future Business Relationships

As diplomatic relations normalise, business links between the two countries may also develop. Business representatives suggested that before this happens, the DPRK government will have to initiate major reforms, including the creation of a banking sector and the construction of a basic transportation infrastructure. A fair regulatory system will also have to be created. While some were extremely doubtful of such changes occurring any time soon, others pointed out that a real shift did occur at the political level, with the success of the inter-Korea Summit. Signs of a thaw are apparent and anticipating increased economic engagement may not be as far-fetched as some may think.

A point was made that North Korea has some real economic potential, especially in mining and the steel industry. However, at present, visa and other restrictions prevent Canadians from doing business with North Korean companies. Addressing these barriers (i.e., loosening export controls and opening-up access to foreign investment) may earn the DPRK government enough hard currency to be able to feed people.

Some enthusiasts brought up the "causal link" between free markets and democratic development. Others doubted the willingness of the DPRK government to allow anything remotely similar to a free economy. Instead, any economic change would be tightly managed by

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[2] For a discussion of New Diplomacy, you may see CCFPD Policy Report, No. 1011.6, *Report From the Conference on New Diplomacy: the United Nations, Like-minded Countries and Non-governmental Organisations* (September 28-29, 1999, Millcroft Inn).

the state, with profits and other benefits going into state coffers rather than "trickling down" to impoverished wage-earners.

4. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, coordination and information sharing among those engaged with the DPRK was encouraged. The involvement of the North Korean Canadian community was welcome and a call was made to stay in touch. Throughout the day, government officials expressed their willingness to listen to outside views and recommendations, as they begin to work out the details of the new Canada -- DPRK relationship.

The representative of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) called on NGOs to submit projects. While logistics of how to create adequate conditions for Canadian NGOs working in the DPRK still have to be worked out, new diplomatic relations will create room for more development-type initiatives.

The Chair closed the discussion by thanking the participants for their valuable contributions to Canada's foreign policy development. He encouraged participants to submit project proposals to the CCFPD John Holmes Fund.[3]

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[3] For guidelines and an application form click on:
http://www.cfp-pec.gc.ca/ProjectFund/proj-e.htm

See also CCFPD Policy Report, No. 5004.1. *North Korea Roundtable* (May 1998, Winnipeg)

North Korea Roundtable
List of Participants
January 22, 2001
Dunsmuir Lodge
Sidney, British Columbia

Paul Evans
Director
Program for Canada-Asia Policy Studies
Institute of Asian Research
University of British Columbia

Park Kyung Ae
Professor
Institute of Asian Research
University of British Columbia

William Neilson
Professor/Director
Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives
University of Victoria

Robert Anderson
Professor
School of Communications
Simon Fraser University

Marv Frey
Program Services Director
Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Clarence Tuin
Board member
Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Dale Albertson
Canadian Food for the Hungry

Tiger Lee
Korean Church Liaison
Canadian Food for the Hungry

Laura Loewen
Director
Mennonite Central Committee

Dr. Mary-Wynne Ashford
Co-President
International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War

Erich Weingartner
NGO specialist

David MacDuff
Research Analyst
Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada
Vancouver

Reverend Alfred Lee
Korean Presbyterian Church

Michael Hwang
Korean Presbyterian Church

Charles Kim
President
Trans-Pac Fibre Inc.

J.W. Lee
Businessman

Cornell Pich
Director of Business Development and International Marketing
Raytheon Systems, Ltd.

Earl Ritchie

Zhang Rong
Graduate Student
University of Victoria

Yuko Kimura
Graduate Student
University of Victoria

Matthew Jackson
Graduate Student
University of Victoria

Jonathan Weier
Research Intern

Bohdana Dutka
Country Program Analyst
Canadian International Development
Agency (CIDA)

David McLellan
Deputy Director
Korea and Oceania Division
Department of Foreign Affairs and
International Trade (DFAIT)

Steven Lee
Executive Director
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy
Development

Marketa Geisler
Rapporteur
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy
Development

Nao Yokoyama
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy
Development

Dawn McLean
Consultant
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy
Development

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Le 6 février 2001 (*8 h HNE*) Nº 17

LE CANADA ANNONCE L'ÉTABLISSEMENT DE RELATIONS DIPLOMATIQUES AVEC LA RÉPUBLIQUE POPULAIRE DÉMOCRATIQUE DE CORÉE

Le ministre des Affaires étrangères, M. John Manley, a annoncé aujourd'hui que le Canada a établi des relations diplomatiques avec la Republique populaire démocratique de Corée (RPDC). Cette annonce fait suite à la décision prise par le Canada, le 26 juillet, de reconnaître la RPDC en tant qu'État et membre de la communauté internationale. Les deux pays avaient alors convenu d'entamer des pourparlers techniques devant conduire à l'établissement de relations diplomatiques.

« Les relations diplomatiques créeront un mécanisme officiel grâce auquel le Canada et la RPDC pourront mieux communiquer et coopérer ainsi que renforcer leur compréhension mutuelle, a déclaré M. Manley. À cette étape décisive, le Canada est convaincu que le resserrement des liens avec Pyongyang est la meilleure façon de contribuer à relever les défis que posent la sécurité, la non-prolifération et les questions humanitaires dans la région. »

Le ministre a ajouté que les liens entre les deux pays se fonderaient sur les principes du respect mutuel de la souveraineté nationale, de la non-ingérence dans les affaires internes et seraient conformes à la Charte des Nations Unies ainsi qu'aux pratiques et au droit internationaux.

Depuis 1997, le gouvernement du Canada a versé près de 30 millions de dollars en aide humanitaire à la RPDC par l'entremise du Programme alimentaire mondial des Nations Unies et des organisations non gouvernementales canadiennes.

- 30 -

Pour de plus amples renseignements, les représentants des médias sont priés de communiquer avec :

Jennifer Sloan

Directrice des communications

Cabinet du ministre des Affaires étrangères

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Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

News Release

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February 6, 2001 *(8:00 a.m. EST)* No. 17

CANADA ANNOUNCES DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

John Manley, Foreign Affairs Minister, today announced that Canada has established diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The announcement follows the decision taken by Canada on July 26 to recognize the DPRK as a state and member of the international community. At that time, both nations agreed to begin technical discussions leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations.

"Establishing diplomatic relations will create formal channels through which Canada and the DPRK can further enhance communications and co-operation and develop a deeper understanding of each other," said Mr. Manley. "At this juncture, Canada believes that closer relations with Pyongyang is the best way to contribute to security, non-proliferation and humanitarian challenges in the region."

The Minister added that ties between both nations would be based on the principles of mutual respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, and would be in accordance with the United Nations Charter and international laws and practices.

Since 1997, the Canadian government has donated approximately $30 million in humanitarian aid to the DPRK through the United Nations World Food Program and Canadian non-governmental organizations.

- 30 -

For further information, media representatives may contact:

Jennifer Sloan

Director of Communications

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

(613) 995-1851

Media Relations Office

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News Release

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Canadian Peacebuilding in the Middle East: Case Study of the Canada Fund in Israel/Palestine and Jordan. Tami Amanda Jacoby, University of Manitoba. Fall 2000.

Les Enterprises canadiennes et la consolidation de la paix. Jean-Francois Rioux, Francisco-José Valiente, and Christian Geiser, Université du Québec a Montréal. Le 31 octobre 2000.

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Ballistic Missiles Foreign Experts Roundtable Report. Ernie Regehr, Project Ploughshares and Peter Moore, CCFPD. March 30, 2000.

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Report from the Roundtable on Just War and Genocide. CCFPD. December 8-9, 2000.

Report from the Ottawa Roundtable for the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). CCFPD. January 15, 2001.

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Canadian Firms, Canadian Values. Canadian Business for Social Responsibility. May 2000.

Africa

Report from the Ottawa Nigeria Roundtable. CCFPD. March 20, 2000.

Asia-Pacific

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Report from the Burma and Drugs Roundtable. CCFPD. May 15, 2000.

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Report from the Victoria Roundtable on Indonesia. CCFPD. March 13, 2000.

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Report on Cyprus: Living Together in the New Century Roundtable. CCFPD. February 14, 2000.

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Look Ahead to Windsor Roundtable Report (OAS). CCFPD. April 26, 2000.

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Commerce International et diversité culturelle: la recherche d'un dificile équilibre. Ivan Bernier, Université Laval and Dave Atkinson. 2000.

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Roundtable on Northern Foreign Policy: Feedback and Look Ahead. CCFPD. February 5, 2001.

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Gendered Discourses, Gendered Practices: Feminists (Re)Write Canadian Foreign Policy. Claire Turenne Sjolander, University of Ottawa; Heather Smith, University of Northern British Columbia; Deborah Stienstra, University of Winnipeg. May and July 2000.

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ARMES NUCLÉAIRES ET PETITES ARMES

Ballistic Missiles Foreign Experts Roundtable Report. Ernie Regehr, Project Ploughshares and Peter Moore, CCDPE. March 30, 2000.

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Canadian Firms, Canadian Values. Canadian Business for Social Responsibility. May 2000.

AFRIQUE

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