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Centre Canadien
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de la politique étrangère

Policy Options

1997

NATIONAL FORUM ON CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

VICTORIA REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

Dept. of Foreign Affairs
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The first 1997 National Forum meeting was held on April 11, 1997 at Dunsmuir Lodge in Victoria, British Columbia. Fifty participants gathered from across Canada, and from across various sectors of society. The goal of the National Forum is to discuss issues in foreign policy and policy options. As 1997 has been designated Canada's Year of Asia-Pacific with Canada hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Commission (APEC) in Vancouver, and with civil society hosting the Peoples' Summit in Vancouver as well, Asia-Pacific is a highly relevant region on which to focus the discussions.

John May, an international affairs journalist, set the context for the Forum with the presentation of his paper "Asia-Pacific: Opportunities and Choices". This paper was provided to participants as a starting point for the discussions. The paper highlights many of the issues which would be critical to the day's discussions.

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The task put forth for the participants was to discuss the issues and to learn from each other. As there were representatives from the business community, labour organizations, NGOs, as well as government officials, academics and youth present, the opportunity to discuss issues across sectors of civil society was actively encouraged. Emphasis was placed, not on the need to reach consensus but to generate ideas, collect them, and pass them on to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his department.

The Forum is not a singular event, but part of a larger foreign policy process that places considerable value on citizen input and further develops the multi-sector foreign policy network in British Columbia, and in Canada.

Working Groups

In order to focus the discussion, the participants were divided into four working groups to address the following topics: sustainable development, human rights, free media, and a business code of conduct. Each group was provided with four questions to help generate discussion and policy options, although all participants were advised that the questions were to function only as guidelines, and other avenues could be explored if necessary. All four topics are fundamentally relevant to Canada's relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific, and the issues and policy options that emerged out of the discussions are valuable as a societal contribution to the development of Canadian foreign policy and the countries of Asia-Pacific.

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INTRODUCTION

The first 1997 National Forum meeting was held on April 25-26, 1997 at Dunsmuir Lodge in Victoria, British Columbia. Fifty participants gathered from across Canada, and from across various sectors of Canadian society. The goal of the National Forum is to discuss issues in foreign policy in order to generate ideas and policy options. As 1997 has been designated Canada's Year of Asia-Pacific with Canada hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Commission (APEC) in Vancouver, and with civil society hosting the Peoples' Summit, in Vancouver as well, Asia-Pacific is a highly relevant region on which to focus the discussions.

John Hay, an international affairs journalist, set the context for the Forum with the presentation of his paper "Asia-Pacific: Questions and Choices". This paper was provided to each of the participants prior to the meeting to help focus the discussions, provide relevant information, and highlight many of the issues which would be critical to the day's discussions.

The task put forth for the participants was to discuss the issues and to learn from each other. As there were representatives from the business community, labour organizations, NGOs, as well as government officials, academics and youth present, the opportunity to discuss issues across sectors of civil society was actively encouraged. Emphasis was placed, not on the need to reach consensus but to generate ideas, collect them, and pass them on to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his department.

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Sustainable Development

Questions

- 1. How should Canadians promote sustainable development in Asia-Pacific (aid, trade, private sector, new technologies etc.), and where.*
- 2. What should Canadians/Canada contribute/pay.*
- 3. Is there a minimum level of economic/industrial development needed before advancing sustainability.*
- 4. How can Canada best work with like-minded countries in promoting sustainable development.*

The discussion concerning sustainable development in Asia-Pacific centred around five observations about Canadian foreign policy in the region, and ten recommendations to enhance Canada's influence over issues related to sustainability.

Observations

1. Canadian engagement in Asia-Pacific is lower than in other regions in the international arena.
2. Promotion of NGO activity in some countries in Asia-Pacific can sometimes be perceived as undermining the authority of the domestic government.
3. Foreign policy can be used as a tool to respond to diverse issues in a context sensitive way.
4. There is a substantive link between good governance and local capabilities for sustainable development.
5. There are different levels of interest in and commitment to sustainable development in various countries of Asia-Pacific that correspond to different levels of economic development.

From the discussion emerged three recommendations/objectives to help guide Canadian foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

Recommendations

1. To develop international linkages and networks of influence.
2. To pursue and coordinate unofficial consultation and collaboration. ie. Track 2 process (ARF, CSCAP, APEC study centres, PECC).
3. To increase representation of Asian-Canadians in DFAIT and international organizations involved in Asia-Pacific.
4. To promote consultative mechanisms and collaborative problem solving through the official process. ie. Track 1/APEC.
5. To ensure that issues of sustainable development are on the agendas of the other Forum meetings.
6. To integrate business and NGO input into relevant APEC fora.
7. To ensure that terms of reference for publicly funded feasibility studies in infrastructure projects include components relevant to sustainable development.
8. To make Canadian foreign policy on sustainable development explicit.
9. To develop a statement on Canadian foreign policy sustainable development values.
10. To develop and support strategies to aid in implementation of value structures in relation to issues of sustainable development concomitant with Canada's. For example:
 - a) industry awards for clean technology exporters, b) annual review of public and private sector sustainable development activities, c) partnership between private and public sector capital flows, and NGOs, to support sustainable development.

The discussion also touched on the specific role that Canadians should play in the sustainable development practices in the Asia-Pacific region. It was agreed that internationally, Canadians should promote the development and use of clean technology, and provide support to the region through the dissemination of environmental planning expertise, as well as foster educational links between Canada and Asia-Pacific. Canadians should also support sustainable development in the region by establishing linkages with like-minded countries through efforts at collaborative, non-competitive research and development.

The group supported a model of sustainable development that could reconcile the need for economic growth with a social imperative (to create and maintain an environment in which others want to live) and an equally important environmental

imperative (not to destroy the resource base).

Human Rights

Questions

- 1. How can Canadians best promote human rights in Asia. Where.*
- 2. Are there human rights pay-offs with economic development and trade.*
- 3. How can Canadians strengthen the voice and participation of Indigenous Peoples.*
- 4. Can Canada act alone in promoting human rights. How can Canada work best with like-minded countries in promoting human rights.*

The human rights discussion revolved around eight observations and recommendations that the group developed to aid in the enhancement of Canada's role vis-a-vis the Asia-Pacific region. There was a significant level of consensus reached regarding the importance of domestic diversity and patterns of inclusion within Canada to provide the appropriate setting for valuable contributions to the human rights debate.

Observations and Recommendations

1. Issues should be addressed when representatives from minority groups are present and can contribute. eg. indigenous peoples, people of colour, women etc.
2. Indigenous peoples perspectives need to be incorporated into the contemporary foreign policy and human rights frameworks. The role of indigenous peoples needs to be incorporated and expanded upon in foreign and human rights policy and become an integral part of the "Canadian approach". As well, organizations like APEC should include and consult indigenous peoples from member countries in order to deepen understanding on various issues.
3. There must be a recognition that Canadian credibility and efficacy particularly in relation to indigenous peoples depends on Canada's domestic response to related issues.
4. While human rights have universal applicability, they also have a cultural context and therefore, a Canadian response must be context sensitive. And, as the civil, political, and economic spheres are not separate, but interdependent, strategies aimed at issues concerning human rights should not be targeted at one sphere, but

should be multi-faceted. For example, while implementing programs like the training of judges in Asia-Pacific directly targets problems of corruption in the legal system, it also opens up avenues for reform in other sectors of society.

5. There must also be a recognition that strategies can be direct or indirect, and that the indirect ones are often more effective. Human rights strategies need to incorporate both, and the choice should be driven by capacity to achieve human rights objectives, not by other factors, economic or otherwise.

6. It is important to work in concert with like-minded countries, but to remember that like-mindedness is more fluid and issue-specific than it ever has been before.

7. It is important to realize that there needs to be a move toward a different type of foreign service that is more fluid and flexible and less eurocentric, that has a greater depth of knowledge and encourages and supports greater cooperation, not only with societal sectors but with other departments and organizations. eg. the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

8. It is important to note that there is a greater receptivity in the Asia-Pacific region to approaches that emphasize economic/social rights rather than civil/political rights. This should be taken into account when considering a choice of strategy.

Free Media

Questions

1. *Should Canadians promote free media in Asia-Pacific. How. Where. (Is there a role for RCI and other Canadian media).*

2. *How can Canadians help maintain a free media in Hong Kong.*

3. *How can Canada help maintain the internet as "free media".*

4. *How can Canada work with like-minded countries to promote free media in Asia-Pacific.*

The discussion of free media revolved around the effective means of utilizing the Canadian role as a niche player in the region. The agreed objective was that Canada should act in a constructive and concerted fashion to promote a free media in cooperation with like-minded countries. The discussion then focussed on how this might best be accomplished.

A concern was raised regarding the legitimacy of Canadian support of free media in Asia-Pacific when such a large percentage of domestic media is concentrated in so

few hands. A concern also arose about the credibility of Canadian advice given the limited involvement of Canadian media (journalists, reporters etc.) directly in Asia-Pacific affairs.

Given these shortcomings, there was agreement that Canada could still have a valuable role to play. Eight recommendations were established.

Recommendations

1. To emphasize the international legal framework in which a free media could operate through the constitution of a set of norms, principles, and rules.
2. To encourage a more tactical approach that would emphasize a more specific, case by case approach. This method would downplay cultural sensitivity, and take advantage of the degree of ambiguity allowed by various governments in the Asia-Pacific region.
3. To recognize free media not as something separate from the issue of human rights, but an integral component of it.
4. To define journalists as not strictly reporters. Instead, a free media should allow for the freedom of editorial writers, technical workers etc. as well.
5. To encourage Canadian embassies to place greater importance on the issue of journalists at risk, and to act in a more timely fashion on alerts given by the International Freedom of Expression Exchange.
6. To promote alternative forms of disclosure via the Internet and support the development of new technology through which information could be disseminated more quickly and efficiently. Canada should also encourage exploring avenues to lower the cost of technology to make information more accessible in Asia-Pacific.
7. To encourage Canadian journalism schools to explicitly tap into networks within Asia-Pacific through methods like exchange and the training of Asian investigative journalists in Canada.
8. To support the opening of regional institutional frameworks, particularly APEC, more thoroughly to media access through the use of daily briefs, and the development of a media centre.

Business Code of Conduct

Questions

- 1. What should a draft Code of Conduct look like (labour and human rights, protection of children and women, environment, other).***
- 2. What is the best role for business, government, citizens, in creating, promoting, enforcing a Code of Conduct.***
- 3. How can Canadians/Canada best address corruption issues.***
- 4. How can Canada best work with like-minded countries, including some in Asia-Pacific, in promoting a Code of Conduct.***

In the discussion, the group decided that in order to encourage the development and implementation of a Code of Conduct in Asia-Pacific, a set of core values needs to be established in consultation with NGOs, the business sector, and governmental organizations in the region. The International Labour Organization (ILO) was recommended as a possible model for the development of these values. In the ensuing discussion, the group agreed upon the following measures that could aid in the development of a Code of Conduct that had the potential to accurately reflect the interests of diverse sectors of society.

1) Roles of affected groups

- i) Non Governmental Organizations: public education, research, information gathering and evaluation, advocacy and identification, and promotion of "best practices."**
- ii) Government: research funding, communication, and negotiation with other affected governments in the region.**
- iii) Business: public and self education, research agenda support, and development and support of human rights issues in business affairs.**

2) Importance of combating corruption

- i) Necessity of a multilateral international process.**
- ii) Importance of the reformation of the legal systems in the region to reflect anticorruption and Code of Conduct standards.**

iii) Recognition that anti-corruption codes are good business practices which should be included in trade policy and agreements.

The group also touched on the importance of linkages with other like-minded countries to promote and support the establishment of a Code of Conduct. The objective would be to influence the market to reflect human rights issues. In this ongoing process, incentives rather than penalties could be utilized to encourage voluntary adoption of Code of Conduct principles. Canadian involvement in this process should be defined by a willingness to adapt to local situations and to maintain flexibility of response in a universal framework within the parameters of which all affected groups could actively participate, and basic human rights could be protected.

PLENARY

Conclusion

At the end of the day, a plenary was held and a representative from each of the working groups provided a synopsis of each of the discussions. From this, several policy options were drawn that seemed to have value and resonance for many of the participants in various groups. They represent themes that ran through the discussions of the day.

Policy Options

1. To develop lateral linkages with like-minded business in Asia-Pacific to encourage the development and adoption of Code of Conduct standards.
2. To actively support the role of NGOs as fundamentally important vehicles for education and human rights monitoring and reporting.
3. To openly support Track 2 processes. eg. through the elaboration of the role and function of APEC study centres.
4. To enhance the role of Indigenous Peoples and Asian Canadians through inclusive staffing procedures at the domestic governmental level. This would help to ensure that a diversity of opinion and experience would be available.
5. To establish incentive programs that would encourage equitable business and environmental practices in Asia-Pacific and to develop an annual reporting procedure to monitor progress.

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