

GROUP OF 78
REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
To the MEMBERSHIP 2009-10
September 2010

The Board can report that we have had a successful year for the programming we have undertaken but continue to confront the serious challenge of limited resources to maintain the organization and make our actions more effective.

GOVERNANCE

The Board of Directors met immediately after the 2009 annual meeting, elected its officers and set some priorities for action. It met again in March 2010 to review progress and identify key issues for the year. Its final meeting was just before this year's AGM.

The Board Officers for the year have been:

Richard Harmston, Chair
Gerald Ohlsen, Vice Chair
Peggy Mason, Past Chair
Joan Broughton, Treasurer

Two other Directors joined the Officers to form the Executive Committee, Susan Shenstone and Nadia Abu-Zahra. The EC met at least once a month to guide most of the business of the organization in terms of programs and operations; it paid particular attention to budget and finance.

PROGRAMMING ACTIVITIES

Luncheons

Our monthly luncheon presentations line-up was well received this year and covered a wide range of engaging topics, including:

- Peter Jones on *How Iran Sees the World*, October 2009
- Susan Tanner on *Climate Change and Copenhagen: What's at Stake for Canada and the World?*, November 2009
- Kerry Pither on *Can Rights Trump Fear? Four cases on Canadian Complicity in Torture*, January 2010
- Daryl Copeland on *Guerrilla Diplomacy: Some Implications for Canadian International Policy*, February 2010
- Louis Delvoie on *Afghanistan and Al Qaeda: Second Thoughts*, March 2010
- Ben Hoffman on *Waging Peace with rebels, spies and some good guys*, April 2010

- Gerald Ohlsen on *Afghan Civil Society and a Sustainable Peace: A Report from Kabul*, May 2010
- Bernard Wood on *Aid Effectiveness: What's in a Name?*, June 2010

Conference Planning

Coming out of some of luncheon discussions has been the ongoing concern that a narrow view of national security was, particularly since 9/11, taking too prominent a place in Canada's foreign policy, particularly at the expense of the promotion and protection of human rights. To explore this subject area more in depth, the Executive and the Board decided to focus the 2010 policy conference on this theme. The intent is to bring greater understanding of the places of security and human rights in our foreign policy, to consider how they can be properly balanced, and to generate conclusions and recommendations for future government policy and practice. The Executive Committee has served double duty as the conference organizing body for this year's conference.

Middle East – UNRWA

On an issue of urgency coming out of our 2009 conference on the Middle East, the Board wrote to the Prime Minister and others to urge Canada's full and generous financial contribution to UNRWA. Canada has been a principal supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, and particularly its general fund that underwrites costs for education and health of Palestinian refugees, for nearly 60 years and there were questions about Canada's continuing commitment. The government decided in fact not to support the general fund. We deemed the response unsatisfactory and developed a correspondence with the Minister for International Cooperation on the issue. To date we have not been given a proper justification for the action, other than all-purpose "aid effectiveness" reference. The issue remains an active one for the Group and we will continue to press the government on it.

Afghanistan Project

Our Vice Chair, Gerald Ohlsen, has led the Afghanistan Pathways to Peace project, anchored within Peacebuild Canada. It is a major initiative, and the only one from Canadian civil society that has focused on mobilizing Afghan civil society for the peace process in that conflicted country. A brief summary of the project to date is attached to this report. A longer report is available to anyone interested.

Afghan Detainee Issue

In the previous year we became engaged with the issue of Afghans detained in their country by Canadian military and turned over to Afghan authorities. It is an issue that has received extensive attention over several years. Amnesty International and others had led a challenge in the courts to have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms apply to Canadians serving abroad. The Group was prepared to work with Amnesty in support of

its court action. We were mobilizing interest and resources for the final round when the Supreme Court decided not to hear the appeal of the Federal Court decision, thus terminating the case. If Amnesty continues its work in this area, we are prepared to be supportive.

MEMBERSHIP

A major goal this year has been to expand the membership of the Group of 78 both for new energy for the activities and as a stable base for its continued operation. Although we attracted a number of new members, we came up short of the target of an increase by 50%, which we considered the threshold for sustainable of the G78. We encouraged members to reach out to others and Michael Byers, as a Director, challenged the membership to bring in one or two new members each. As we move toward the end of this year, the principal organizational challenge for the Group is finding another 40 or more new members. At present we have approximately 110 members.

FINANCES

As mentioned, the Group's financial sustainability has been the prime preoccupation for the Board and Executive throughout the year. We conducted an appeal for additional contributions in December 2009 that helped our year-end position. Two Directors with Mary Edwards in the Secretariat mounted an on-line book auction – with books contributed by members – that successfully met our modest target. And we have asked members to help recruit new adherents to our organization. Specifics of our budget and finances are reported separately by the Treasurer but the Board remains seized with the Group's precarious position.

OPERATIONS

Logo

We made some progress to update and renew the Group of 78's logo during the year. A new design is nearly ready but requires some additional testing in both colour and black and white versions before the Board can make a final decision.

Website

We have also made some minor changes to improve our website. This is a matter that requires some serious attention because of the importance of electronic communications to most civil society organizations. If we have the opportunity, financially and otherwise, in the near future, upgrading the website will be a priority.

Secretariat

The Board once again salutes the work of our Executive Secretary, Mary Edwards, who anchors the operations and supports the programming of the Group of 78 from her seat at 145 Spruce Street in Ottawa. She continues to demonstrate her dedication and enthusiasm for the Group's mission and activities, even in the face of our difficult situation.

QUESTION OF FUTURE OPERATIONS

The Board determined in March that the Group needed to add to its membership and attract other financing such that it could see – by end of September – financial sustainability for the Group going into 2011. We are now at this point and must consider the viability of the Group after this year. Separately, the Board is putting forward options and proposals for consideration by the membership.

FUTURE PROGRAMMING

Should we find our way through the financial crunch and discover a sound basis for operating, we shall also have to renew our program of activities. In addition to our well-established and valued luncheon series and annual policy conference, we need to develop new lines of programming. These can include working more closely in alliance with other organizations and groups engaged with foreign policy issues. Fueled by the voluntary energy of our members, we should pursue opportunities to deepen our analysis on key issues and sharpen our focus in our public engagement and advocacy.