

All Politics Are Global: Canadian Foreign Policy in an Inter-connected World

Group of 78 Annual Foreign Policy Conference

**September 26 – 28, 2008
Marriott Residence Inn, Ottawa**

Statement from the 2008 Policy Conference

INTRODUCTION

The Group of 78 held its Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting in Ottawa, September 26-28, 2008. The theme of the Conference was “All Politics are Global: Canadian Foreign Policy in an Interconnected World”. The Conference's stated objectives were:

- to provide an opportunity for further understanding and discussion of the interconnected nature of key elements in Canadian foreign policy,
- to continue to build the substantive framework for a revitalized, long term progressive Canadian foreign policy and
- to examine the means by which civil society can help restore Canada 's position as a leader in the pursuit of peace and sustainable development.

The Conference chair noted that the Group had come into being twenty-seven (27) years ago. Two years ago it began a renewal process to update the statement signed by the original Group of 78. At that time, the Group resolved to draft a more contemporary statement and to define what could be understood as a “progressive foreign policy for Canada” reflecting a broader array of foreign policy issues and practices. The 2007 Conference developed a vision statement as well as principles and long-term goals for Canadian foreign policy.

The following conclusions and policy proposals based on these 2007 documents emerged from the September 2008 Conference. The proposals are intended primarily to be conveyed to the Government of Canada in a manner to be decided by the Group of 78 Board of Directors while a number of more detailed proposals mainly for civil society

action are directed to the Group of 78 Board of Directors for its consideration and action, as it deems appropriate.

POLICY POSITIONS & PROPOSALS

Peace and Security

The Conference participants called on the Government and people of Canada to assert their commitment to the building of Human Security, the conceptual underpinning of the Group's 2007 Annual Conference. The notion of human security indeed summarizes much of what has preoccupied the Group over time.

The participants were unanimous in their agreement that the pursuit of peace is of paramount importance and that the Government of Canada must give the highest possible priority in the development of Canadian foreign policy to the preservation and building of global peace. Their conclusions and proposals followed from this premise.

Building on the work of the September 2007 conference, recommendations for the 2008 Conference were centered on the importance of peace and the necessary policies for achieving that peace. Afghanistan was seen as an example of the failure of a policy that ignored these principles and sought to solve a very complex situation by brutal foreign military force. Canada's role in Afghanistan with NATO was seen as an ill advised, long reaching adventure, extending the catastrophe well beyond its borders.

Peace keeping and peace building, strengthening international non-proliferation treaties and negotiating the abolition of weapons of mass destruction are policies the present government should return to and follow. The importance of "capacity building," that is creating possibilities and structures for the resolution of violent conflict, and the building of durable and sustainable peace were emphasized. This capacity needs to be strengthened at the levels of both Government and civil society.

The Conference participants wished to underline the essential imperative of Canada's complying with its international treaty obligations. They noted the Senate of Canada report: "Promises to Keep, Implementing Canada's Human Rights Obligations," and the section on Canada in Amnesty International's 2008 annual report, both of which outline instances in which Canada fails to comply with its international obligations.

The participants expressed alarm that Canada's involvement in Afghanistan has become the central preoccupation of this country's foreign policy. This single focus, particularly without reference to the wider geo-political context of the Central Asian, Middle Eastern and other regions of traditional interest to Canada such as Latin America, South and East Asia, and Africa, has distorted Canada's global vision, effectively militarizing its international policy and practices. Participants felt that Canada's current involvement in Afghanistan is unsustainable and called for serious discussion on the military and development aspects of Canada's role in that country. Such public engagement, lamentably absent from the recent federal election campaign, is both urgent and essential

for the formation of intelligent public policy and informed public opinion, as is financial transparency. The Group of 78's submission to the Manley Report on Afghanistan in December 2007 explains in clear detail the complexities of what is needed to bring peace to this harassed land.

The participants noted with grave concern the continuing of longstanding and deep-seated conflict in many parts of the world. Of particular concern to the 2008 Conference, alongside the deplorable situation in Afghanistan, is the state of unresolved conflict in the Middle East, particularly in Israel-Palestine, but also as complicated by other related situations of strife. For example, it is important to recognize the political as well as economic motives behind proposed oil and gas pipelines in the area. Canada should adopt balanced and comprehensive measures in pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution throughout the region.

In conjunction with Afghanistan, participants considered the time ripe for a public debate on the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Canada's role within it. This debate should include the potential expansion of NATO's membership, constraints to Canadian independence resulting from the military obligations of NATO members, and the implications for Canada's development efforts.

In the view of the participants, Canada needs to bring greater international pressure to bear on the implementation of the UN- approved "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P), on which Canada gave considerable leadership till the recent past. The related "Will to Intervene Project" (W2I) of Concordia University's Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies merits the support of this Group and all others committed to this principle of action. Building on the R2P, the goal of the W2I project is "to develop practical tools to generate sufficient political will to prevent genocide and other crimes against humanity."

International Development

The Conference participants noted with satisfaction the recent passing of the "Better Aid Bill." Poverty reduction should be the sole purpose of and motivation for international development assistance. Canada should renew its early commitment to achieving the long-established internationally agreed goal of 0.7 percent of Gross Domestic Product to be devoted to official development assistance (ODA).

The participants also commended the Government of Canada for its recent decision to untie its ODA programmes.

In order to achieve the greatest possible effectiveness and credibility, official aid needs to be delivered with maximum transparency and accountability. Empowerment of civil society, including disadvantaged communities, is also a central concept that needs to be at the centre of Canada's aid policy. The participants were strongly in support of donor co-ordination in developing countries. In this regard, the Group wished to underline its support for the United Nations Global Development Forum.

The participants also emphasized the importance of de-linking development and military activities, most particularly in Afghanistan where Canada is involved in a war but also has a mandate to do social and economic development.

The participants stressed the importance of the role played by non-governmental organizations, local, national and international, in articulating and responding to development needs.

The participants also emphasized the need for genuine respect for local cultures in the shaping of socio-economic development priorities.

Human Rights and Governance

Canada should adopt a consistent foreign policy that places peace, social justice, human rights and the rule of law at the centre of its international concerns. There must be a fundamental and visible consistency between the practices that shape domestic policy and those that inform foreign policy.

Noted with concern were certain distortions that have crept into the democracy - building practices of several countries around the world. Canada needs a clear understanding of what it means by “democracy” and what approaches are and are not proper in pursuit of democracy building. The Government of Canada's involvement in such programmes should only be on the basis of a clear understanding of the essence of democracy and the adaptation of activities that are uncontaminated by ulterior motives.

Energy and Environment

The overarching importance of global climate change and associated environmental impacts was recognized. Canada should redouble its efforts to integrate environmental policies and standards into all of its domestic and international development programmes.

In the view of the Conference participants, Canada needs to play a responsible role in reversing global climate change and promoting green technologies, including the adoption of serious and realistic carbon pricing policies, whether through carbon taxes, cap-and-trade schemes or some combination of these.

The Government should engage Canadians seriously in a debate on sustainable and renewable energy sources and water self-sufficiency.