

**GROUP OF 78
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
REPORT TO MEMBERS, 2015-16
OTTAWA, SEPTEMBER 2016**

TRANSITION AND RE-PURPOSING THE G78

This report from the Group of 78 Board of Directors to its membership presents an account of the activities and operations of the organization in the past year, 2015-16.

The past year has been one of continuing transition. The office was moved, at the invitation of Rideau Institute President and G78 Board member Peggy Mason, from the Bronson Centre to 63 Sparks Street, where we rent space (at lower cost) from the Rideau Institute. There are a number of synergies between the RI and the G78. When our Executive Secretary, Angela Mackay, informed us she wanted to move on in June this year, we engaged Sarah Bowles, who also provides administrative support to the Rideau Institute. Moreover, the G78 Executive is now able to meet in the RI Boardroom.

Following last year's AGM, when membership and financial issues posed some stark choices for the future of the G78, the Board proposed that we embark on a re-purposing exercise to inject new energy and fervour into the organization. A Special Membership Meeting was convened on January 12 to discuss some proposals suggested by the Board. Perhaps the principal outcome of these deliberations was the decision to form up to five Thematic Working Groups and two Operational Groups, to engage members and others more actively in policy and organizational issues of interest to the Group of 78.

Of the five possible Working Groups proposed, the group on Nuclear Disarmament and Arms Control, led by Earl Turcotte, quickly established an active work program, holding a number of discussions on key issues. The group took the lead in drafting an open letter to the Prime Minister expressing serious concern about Canada's \$15 billion contract to export light armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia. This highly publicized initiative succeeded in bringing together over a dozen organizations as signatories to the letter, released at a press conference on Parliament Hill on April 26th. The group also drafted a submission to the Liberal Government's Defence Policy Review, and is continuing to discuss a number of other issues.

However, none of the other four proposed working groups (on Sustainable Peace; Multilateral Co-operation and UN Reform; Economic and Social Justice; and Environment and Climate Change) have yet gelled, principally for lack of leadership. And in addition to forming working groups, we proposed that we should be bolder in how we seize hot topics of the day, rather than simply holding our monthly luncheon talk on a regular basis. Accordingly we organized three special events: (1) on November 19, 2015, Ed Broadbent spoke about "The future of social democracy: reflections on Canada's federal election; (2) on March 10, 2016, a special panel on the crisis in Syria; and (3) on September 15, 2016, "The Leap Manifesto: a Climate Change Debate" between Avi Lewis and Thomas Homer-Dixon.

GOVERNANCE

The Board of Directors met immediately after the 2015 annual meeting, elected its officers and identified priorities for action. It met on November 7, 2015 to prepare for a Special Members' Meeting on Re-Purposing the G78. It met immediately after that Members' meeting on January 12, and again February 24, 2016, to decide on next steps, and approve the Budget for 2016. Its final meeting was held just before this year's annual meeting.

The Board Officers for the year have been:

Roy Culpeper, Chair
Manfred Bienefeld, Vice Chair
Richard Harmston, Past Chair
Peggy Mason, Secretary
Sylvie Lemieux, Treasurer

The above officers, along with Joan Broughton, comprise the Executive Committee, which serves as the management team for the Group of 78, accountable to the full Board of Directors. The Executive met at least once a month, sometimes more as needs dictated, to manage the programs and operations of the organization. Others elected or re-elected to the Board of Directors at the AGM in September 2015 included:

Nadia Abu-Zahra
Elisabeth Barot
Jean-Jacques Blais (who resigned in April)
Gordon Breedyk
Sohaib Gabsis
Erica Noordemeer
Susan Tanner
Earl Turcotte

PROGRAMS

Luncheons

The Group continued to explore a wide range of international and foreign policy issues in our ongoing luncheon series, held in eight of the 12 months of the year. This year's line-up included:

- Wendell Wallach: *A Dangerous Master: How to keep technology from slipping beyond our control*, October 27 2015
- John Foster: *Petroleum and Geopolitics: Rivalries in Syria, Iraq, Ukraine*, January 26, 2016.

- Kimberly Brown: *Stop bombing civilians: bringing field evidence to international policy* February 12, 2016.
- Rouba Al-Fattal: *Syria: The military campaign, the peace process and refugee resettlement” what next?* April 26 2016.
- John Packer: *The Second Covenant: Reflections on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.* May 31, 2016.
- Peter Larson: *Nice words but bad policy: why the Trudeau/Dion doctrine on Israel/Palestine is all wrong.* June 21, 2016.

Advocacy

Traditionally, following each annual conference, the Group of 78 has shared the report of the event, particularly the conclusions and recommendations, with government ministers, senior policy makers and other Parliamentarians, as well as with a swath of civil society engaged in international issues. The results of our 2014 conference on *World War I and Contemporary Issues on War & Peace* were distributed to politicians, officials and others. For various reasons pertaining to office turnover and organizational mishaps, we did not manage to disseminate the results of our 2015 annual conference on “*Strengthening Multilateral Cooperation: the United Nations at 70*”. Subsequently the Executive Committee has been re-thinking whether and how to disseminate our annual conference results. In the future, our conferences are likely to be more compact, with fewer speakers and a shorter agenda. The Executive is inclining toward releasing a summary of the proceedings, prepared with the help of the speakers, but not to compile a “policy recommendations report” as we have done in the past. Members’ views are welcomed on how we should disseminate the results of our annual conference in future.

However, notwithstanding the above shift in disseminating our conference results and any recommendations/resolutions, our advocacy initiatives have not diminished; indeed, they have increased. The following list summarizes our advocacy activities over the past year:

- Letter to the Prime Minister on arms exports to Saudi Arabia, April 2016;
- Brief on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, in response to the Government’s consultations, June 2016;
- Brief submitted for the Defence Policy Review, June 2016;
- Endorsement of the Call to Action by the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (of which we are a member) in June 2016

Conference 2016

The 2016 annual policy conference is being held in two new venues: the Army Officers’ Mess (for the Keynote September 23) and a conference room at Elisabeth Bruyère (for the panels on September 24). We have scaled down the conference to two panels in the morning followed by a luncheon talk by Manfred Bienefeld, a concluding session and the AGM in the afternoon.

OPERATIONS

Membership

Although the “repurposing” initiative has injected a new sense of urgency and more energy into some of the policy discussions of the G78 (particularly with respect to issues relating to war and peace), and we have adopted a more nimble posture for organizing topical events, this has *not* so far translated into a surge in new memberships. The G78 membership continues to stall at its traditional levels, and at the time of writing we are 50 percent below our target membership levels. This does not bode well for the organization’s future or its finances (considered below). We will, as in the past, mount our usual campaigns for membership and membership renewal. However, other means of increasing our membership beyond its traditional base need to be considered.

Financial Status

The core and most important factor in the finances of the Group continues to be its members who, through their fees and special contributions, ensure its operations and underpin its programming. We are currently 50 percent below our membership target for 2016 with the result that our revenues from membership fees are almost \$4,000 below their targets for this year. We need to ensure that during the remainder of the year we make up the shortfall through membership and membership renewal drives. We are also holding a fundraiser (a jazz evening) in November to raise money.

Secretariat

Angela Mackay, who served the G78 office as Executive Secretary for the past year, wanted to pursue other opportunities, but wishes to remain involved as a member of the G78. The Board and membership are extremely grateful for her service and salute her brief but valued contribution to the organization. We are also pleased to welcome Sarah Bowles as our new Executive Secretary.

CONCLUSION

Our banner message this year is that the G78 has been able to change its modus operandi in significant ways and has also been able to become more engaged in advocacy. But our presumption that this would help to grow the membership has so far not been fulfilled, and as a result our financial viability is still in question. We would suggest continuing with our strategy of engaging members and others in policy discussions and advocacy initiatives, perhaps with the formation of one or two more thematic working groups. More generally, with the new Liberal Government in office, there seem to be avenues of engagement in the policy dialogue, so we would advocate staying the course that we have embarked on over the past year.