

**GROUP OF 78
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
REPORT TO MEMBERS, 2019-20
OTTAWA, OCTOBER 1 2020**

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, 2019-20.

GOVERNANCE

The Board of Directors met immediately after the 2019 annual meeting on September 28, elected its officers and identified priorities for action. It met again March 26, 2019, to decide on next steps, and approve the Budget for 2019. Its final meeting was to be held just before this year's annual meeting, subject to the shift in modalities due to the pandemic (on which more below).

The Board Officers for the year have been:

Roy Culpeper, Chair
Manfred Bienefeld, Vice Chair
Richard Harmston, Past Chair
Joan Broughton, Secretary
Lew Auerbach, Treasurer

The above officers, along with Susan Tanner and Gerry Schmitz 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 about once a month to manage the programs and operations of the organization. Others previously elected, elected or re-elected to the Board of Directors at the AGM in September 2019 included:

Nadia Abu-Zahra
Gordon Breedyk
James Christie
Sylvie Lemieux
Peggy Mason
Vera Morbey
Eileen Olexiuk
Earl Turcotte

PROGRAMS

There are now three Working Groups that meet regularly to discuss programming and advocacy initiatives arising from our scheduled events, or more broadly relating to the mandate of the Group of 78. The Working Groups strive, respectively, to advance the three policy objectives of

the G78, notably, world peace and security, climate sustainability, and social justice. Every three years in rotation, each Working Group takes the lead in organizing the annual policy conference. Following each conference, the relevant Working Group helps to distill its principal messages and implications for policy, which provide a springboard for advocacy initiatives.

Luncheons...and Webinars

The Group continued to explore a wide range of international and foreign policy issues in our ongoing luncheon series, held between October 2019 and August 2020. This year's line-up of speakers included:

- Nathalie Chalifour, *Carbon Tax on Trial*, October 29, 2019
- Stephen Baranyi, *Haiti: another Crisis in the Making?* November 26, 2019
- Ted Manning, *Adapt to Survive*. February 25 2020
- Kumanan Wilson, *Battling Pandemics in an age of Populism: Lessons from Coronavirus*, March 31, 2020
- Timothy A. Wise, *The Battle for the Future of Food in the Deepening Climate and Coronavirus Emergencies*, April 28 2020
- Marc-André Gagnon, *The Battle for Universal Pharmacare in Canada*, May 26 2020
- Sen. Mary Coyle, *Getting to Net Zero*, June 23 2020
- Peggy Mason and Daryl Copeland, *Canadian Foreign Policy: Time for a Re-set?* July 28, 2020
- Jayati Ghosh and Robert Wade, *Why the 'Trump Era' Could last for Thirty Years*. August 25, 2020

Our scheduled speaker for the luncheon of January 28, Hassan Diab, who was to speak about Canada's Extradition Law, informed us that he had to withdraw shortly before the event, so we had to cancel.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the physical isolation measures that came into effect in March, the Group of 78 had to radically change the format of its events. As in-person gatherings were strongly discouraged in order to limit the spread of the virus, we could no longer hold public meetings. Instead, starting with the event featuring Dr. Kumanan Wilson—who, aptly, spoke about the international context of the pandemic—we have organized “virtual meetings” broadcast on the internet utilizing Zoom conferencing software. This has proven to be quite popular, and has attracted greater attendance, albeit online, than we typically experienced with in-person meetings. It seems likely that virtual conferencing will be the modality of our events for several months to come, or until public health authorities announce that public gatherings may again be held. We miss the camaraderie and personal interactions of the luncheons but are pleased with the way we have been able to pivot and continue to engage our membership and beyond in meaningful discourse on key issues.

Special Events

In addition to our “luncheon” series we occasionally convene panels to discuss topics of current interest. On January 31, 2020 we co-convened a panel featuring Richard Kozul-Wright, Director,

Globalization and Development at UNCTAD (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). He presented the 2019 UNCTAD Trade and Development Report, “Financing a Global Green New Deal”. The event was held in collaboration with the International Development Research Centre and the Centre for International Governance Innovation, and was hosted by IDRC in Ottawa. A panel discussion followed Mr. Kozul-Wright’s presentation. The panel comprised Manfred Bienefeld of the Group of 78; Martha Melesse, IDRC; and Aaron Shull, IDRC. It was moderated by Dominique Charron, IDRC.

Special Initiative—Climate Legacy Project

The Group of 78 initiated a new activity in mid-2019. The Climate Legacy project is distinct from the activities that have constituted the bulk of the G78’s programming, which have aimed at contributing to policy dialogue and decision-making on leading international issues of the day. In contrast, the Climate Legacy Project aims at mobilizing a particular demographic—Canadian seniors—to engage in climate action (i.e. tackling climate change) either as individuals or as members of particular groups (e.g. as pensioners or as voters). It is hosted by the G78 through the Working Group on Climate Change. Two members of the Executive (Susan Tanner and Roy Culpeper) sit on the Steering Committee of the project. (Other Steering Committee members include Tim Brodhead, Betty Plewes, Wendy Quarry, and Rieky Stuart.) In its early stages the project attracted financial support from the Ivey Foundation (\$45,000) and the Haynes-Connell Foundation (\$25,000). The project held a Roundtable in early March 2020, bringing together a number of leaders of seniors’ groups or local community organizations in Ontario. The project is examining ways of networking seniors and seniors’ groups to facilitate access to information and resources to help seniors make informed choices about climate action, in the policy arena or in decisions about their pensions and financial decisions. The Steering Committee is considering extending its activities into next year and beyond, possibly on a national basis.

Advocacy

Advocacy has always been part of the bedrock of the Group of 78’s existence. It stems from the first action before the Group was created – an open letter to the Prime Minister of the day, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, in 1981 to urge more forceful attention and action on several issues in Canada’s international policies. When the organization was later created, the intention was to stimulate dialogue and learning across the broad range of international affairs and to share our thinking and views with the government. Discussion was only half of the equation; it was important also to express a position. The annual policy conferences became the prime vehicle for assembling analysis and findings for the Group to advance and, over time, it added positions to respond to more immediate issues and concerns that arose between conferences. In recent years, the Group has worked more concertedly to add its voice to public discourse and to impress on government the need to adopt a decidedly progressive lens to policy making and Canada’s actions in the world.

The 2019 annual policy conference generated a series of policy recommendations that the Group of 78 will be forwarding to politicians and government officials and will use over the next few years as a source of ideas for continuing follow up. The **working group on economic and social justice** will anchor this ongoing effort.

The conclusions and recommendations from our 2018 policy conference on climate change have served as a baseline for advancing our work on climate action. The **climate change working group** formulated a series of questions for candidates in the 2019 federal election to enable G78 members and others make their voting decisions. Post-election, the working group drafted letters to the Prime Minister, ministers, leaders of the other parties and provincial premiers calling on the 43rd Parliament to develop and implement “a long-term, comprehensive national plan, both to mitigate further climate change and to adapt to unavoidable effects”. The letter specified a number of features that G78 advocates for such a plan, including revising carbon targets, eliminating subsidies for the oil industry, investing in a just transition to a carbon-free economy, and contributing Canada’s fair share to helping poorer countries adapt to climate change.

The working group has engaged with Global Affairs Canada on climate finance and Canada’s efforts to support global actions on climate change. It will continue to work with other civil society organizations to pressure the government on this issue.

The climate change working group has put a strong emphasis on adaptation or resilience to climate change, in Canada and abroad. So much attention has focused on mitigation, to the neglect of addressing the inevitable consequences of climate change now and in the future. It produced an “op ed” piece (as yet unpublished) and is currently tracking the United Nations year on climate adaptation, and particularly the global summit on this theme, scheduled for January 2021. Canada is the co-convenor of this event, which represents an opportunity for Canada to improve its policies and actions on climate change. The theme of the G78 policy conference in 2021 will be on climate adaptation.

The **working group on peace and security** (formerly on arms control and disarmament) continued to track global events and Canadian government policy in this broad field. In March 2020 it prepared a letter to the Prime Minister, relevant ministers and leaders of the other parties on a package of recommendations on a range of peace and security issues. The 15 recommendations covered four sub-themes: sustainable peace and common security, arms trade, nuclear disarmament, and the focus of the new Canadian Centre for Peace, Order and Good Governance. A detailed response in September from Foreign Minister Champagne acknowledged the many points made in our March letter but took issue with a number of our recommendations, for example on prohibiting arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

The working group is also anchoring the 2020 policy conference on the theme of improving UN peacekeeping. The results of this event will, in turn, be forwarded to Canadian politicians and officials to encourage a more robust and serious effort by Canada as one of its key foreign policy elements.

In April the Group wrote to the Prime Minister to add Canada’s voice to support the call by the UN Secretary General to roll back sanctions that are heightening the health risks for millions of people and weakening the global effort to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

In May the Group wrote to the Prime Minister to commend his government for participating in a UN initiative to tackle the international development emergency caused by the COVID-19

pandemic. Also in May, an article by Roy Culpeper, in collaboration with Laura Macdonald and Sam Van Oort (both of Carleton University), titled “Financial crisis and the pandemic: Is it time for international money?” was published by the Hill Times. It advocated a large allocation of Special Drawing Rights by the IMF to meet the needs of the poorest countries.

To augment our outreach, recently our conferences/webinars/events have become accessible in part or completely on our web site, as YouTube videos or audio podcasts.

Conference 2020

The 2020 annual policy conference on the Future of UN Peacekeeping, currently planned to open September 25), is organized by the G78 Working Group on Peace and Security co-chaired by Peggy Mason and Robin Collins. Due to the pandemic, the format of the conference was substantially changed, from our traditional single in-person event spread over two days, to a series of five virtual webinar panels spread over two weeks. The initial panel will feature the keynote speaker, and three subsequent panels will take up specific themes. A concluding panel will invite participants to consider key messages and policy recommendations emerging from the discussion.

OPERATIONS

Membership

After falling somewhat from its historic levels of around 80, G78’s membership has ranged between 65 and 70. More reminders to members for renewals and appeals to attract new members have paid off, as have improved and more consistent record-keeping by our Executive Secretary, Sarah Bowles. The challenge of attracting new members, and donors, remains.

Financial Position and the future of the G78

The bulk of the G78’s funding has traditionally come from membership fees and donations. This is supplemented by fees paid by participants in our luncheon or conference events. During the past year we have not engaged in fundraising through other means, notably social events (music and dancing), as these have not raised much funding (a few hundred dollars), particularly given the organizational effort required. We have discussed striking a fundraising committee but it has been a challenge recruiting members for this endeavour.

As reported for the past two years, the G78 has been the fortunate beneficiary of a bequest from the Edith Fowke estate. The funds were distributed in four tranches; the final tranche of \$34,850 was disbursed in late December 2019, bringing the total bequest to \$219,850. The Executive Committee decided to set aside \$10,000 as an emergency cash reserve, and to transfer \$6,000 of this bequest annually to support operations. However, annual transfers have totalled \$41,000 over the three years 2017-2019, considerably more than the \$18,000 budgeted. The principal

reason was a shortfall in membership fees and donations, leading to higher than anticipated deficits.

After extensive discussion the Executive Committee recommended to the Board to invest the remaining funds, approximately \$169,000, through Genus, an independent financial management firm with a clear commitment to sustainable and ethical investing and a strong reputation and track-record. (The market value of our portfolio fell to \$164,473 by April 9th due to the financial volatility caused by the COVID pandemic.)

Our intention has been to use these funds, and the investment income generated by them, to support our overall programming by supplementing funding from our traditional sources (primarily membership fees and donations). Ideally, if not drawn down too rapidly, the bequest would remain as a perpetual source of funding for the G78. However, based on our financial performance over the last three years, it seems unlikely that annual transfers from the bequest of \$6,000 will suffice in order to cover all our expenses. Unless membership fees and donations can be increased by \$6,000-\$8,000, the amount we shall require to be transferred from the bequest is likely to be in the range of \$12,000-\$14,000 annually. This is likely to reduce the value of our bequest over time, and eventually lead to its depletion, perhaps within ten years. But this process is likely to be slow enough to allow us to adjust our activities accordingly.

The possible depletion of the Fowke bequest does not necessarily signify the eventual termination of the Group of 78. The organization existed for 35 years without a bequest and may be able to do so again. However, to do so will likely necessitate mobilizing significantly more funding through memberships and donations, which may be a challenge. It is also possible for the G78 to seek bequests and legacies from other individuals who may wish to be benefactors, thus augmenting what remains of the Fowke bequest. The important point is that for the next few years, the G78 is in a strong financial position. But the membership and Board may wish to engage in some strategic thinking about the future funding of the organization before too long.

Secretariat

Sarah Bowles, our intrepid Executive Secretary, has served us for four years. She continues to review and update our membership records. She has played a leading role in helping the G78 to adapt to the new climate imposed by the COVID pandemic. As a result we have transitioned almost seamlessly from an organization hosting 10 to 12 in-person luncheon and special events, and a policy conference, annually, to an organization holding all its events electronically, using conferencing software. And she does all this while also providing administrative support to the Rideau Institute, the Canadian Network Against Nuclear Weapons, and Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Bravo, Sarah!