GROUP OF 78
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
REPORT TO MEMBERS, 2020-21
OTTAWA, MAY 27 2021

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, 2020-21.

GOVERNANCE
The Board of Directors met, virtually, immediately before and after the 2020 annual general meeting on October 1. Prior to the AGM the outgoing Board reviewed the financial report, report to the members for 2019-2020, upcoming programming, the report of the nominations committee, and a preview of the AGM. Subsequent to the AGM the newly elected Board appointed its officers and identified priorities for action. It met again March 24, 2021, to approve the Budget for 2021, review financial performance year-to-date, and approve a change in scheduling of the AGM, among other things. 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
   Susan Tanner, Vice Chair
   Gerry Schmitz, Secretary
   Eileen Olexiuk and Bruce Campbell, Treasurer

Eileen Olexiuk was appointed Treasurer by the Board in October 2020 but stepped down shortly thereafter. On February 26 Bruce Campbell was invited to join the Board and Executive Committee ad interim as Treasurer, succeeding Lew Auerbach. The above officers, along with Richard Harmston, Past Chair, and Lew Auerbach and Manfred Bienefeld, members at large, 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 October 2020 included:
Nadia Abu-Zahra
Joan Broughton
Gordon Breedyk
James Christie
Ruby Dagher
John Foster
Peter Larson
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. In addition, the Working Groups provide analysis and suggestions for other G78 policy positions and ideas for further activities.

Annual Conference 2020
The topic for the 2020 annual conference was “The Future of UN Peacekeeping in the Transition to a More Peaceful World”. Because the Covid pandemic prevented convening an in-person event, the conference was held as a series of six virtual webinars, held on September 24, 26 and 28 and October 3 and 5. A final wrap-up panel was held February 3 to help distill principal conclusions and recommendations.

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. Speaking events organized over a luncheon have transitioned into virtual webinars. This year’s line-up of speakers included:

- Ruby Dagher, *Getting to the Bottom of the Crisis in Lebanon*, October 27, 2020
Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the physical isolation measures that came into effect in March 2020, we have organized webinars broadcast on the internet utilizing Zoom conferencing software. This has proven to be quite popular, and has attracted greater attendance, with some participants and speakers joining us from distant locations, albeit online. It seems likely that virtual conferencing will continue to be the modality of our events until public health authorities announce that public gatherings may again be held. We miss the camaraderie and personal interactions of in-person events 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. However, it is also likely that for some of our programming we will continue to utilize virtual webinars to facilitate the participation of speakers from distant locations.
Special Initiative—Climate Legacy Project
The Group of 78 initiated the Climate Legacy Project in mid-2019. It 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. Roy Culpeper sits on the Steering Committee. 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 is examining ways of networking seniors and seniors’ groups to facilitate access to information and resources to help seniors—particularly those who are concerned about climate change but would like to become more engaged in climate action—to make informed choices, in the policy arena or in decisions about their pensions and their retirement savings. Climate Legacy now has its own website, issues a regular newsletter, and it holds occasional webinars on issues related to climate finance. It is currently seeking funding to support ongoing activities.

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, taking into account current circumstances including post-pandemic recovery.

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 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. The theme of the G78 policy conference in 2021 is on climate adaptation.

The **working group on peace and security** organized the 2020 policy conference on the theme of improving UN peacekeeping. The conclusions and policy recommendations 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 addition to advocacy arising from our annual conferences, the G78 engaged in advocacy initiatives pertinent to its mandate, typically in the form of letters to the Prime Minister, other Ministers, or key officials. Many of these letters originated with other like-minded CSOs espousing policies or actions which the G78 supports. Some examples follow:

- In May 2021, as a member of the Canadian Network against Nuclear Weapons, the G78 endorsed a submission to the UN Human Rights Committee calling on Canada and others to disavow the policy of nuclear deterrence
- In April 2021 the G78 signed on to a letter to Heads of State demanding the international trade policy and the WTO be transformed in order to put people and the planet first
- In March 2021 the G78 signed on to a letter supporting a waiver on the Trade-related intellectual property system (TRIPS) to facilitate the production and distribution of drugs and medical equipment at affordable prices in developing countries
- In January 2021 the G78, to mark the coming into force of the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, signed on to an appeal with a number of other CSOs, entitled “Toward a Nuclear Weapons Free World”, published in *The Hill Times* on January 18.
- In November 2020, the G78 submitted a brief in concert with a number of CSOs to Global Affairs Canada on Canada’s Feminist Foreign Policy.

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 2021**

The 2021 annual policy conference on “Adaptation: building resilience in the climate emergency”, currently planned to open September 23, is organized by the G78 Working Group on Climate Change chaired by Susan Tanner. As with the 2020 conference, the format will consist of a series of six virtual webinar panels, spread over one to two weeks. The initial panel will feature the keynote speaker, and four subsequent panels will take up specific themes: Infrastructure, Health, Finance, and Food and Agriculture. The 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. And as mentioned above, membership levels have remained between 65 and 70.

Revenues from membership in this range (amounting to around $6,000), along with modest charitable donations (around $2,000) do not provide enough income to sustain the Group of 78 in its current form. However, as reported for the past three 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 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.

The Board agreed with the Executive Committee’s recommendation in 2019 to invest the remaining funds through Genus, an independent financial management firm with a clear commitment to fossil-fuel free, sustainable and ethical investing and a strong reputation and track-record. The market value of our portfolio was $185,226 at the end of February 2021.

Our intention has been to use these bequest funds, and the investment income generated by them, to support our overall programming by supplementing funding from membership fees and donations. Ideally, if not drawn down too rapidly, the bequest would remain as a long-term 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 continue in the
range of $12,000-$14,000 annually. Depending on the market value of our portfolio, this is likely to reduce the value of our bequest over time, and eventually lead to its depletion, perhaps within ten years. Market volatility, and even more so a large market correction, could accelerate this process.

Broadly speaking there are two options for the Group of 78:

(1) the status quo: continue to manage the organization as we have done, deriving some funding through memberships and charitable donations, while drawing down the bequest to cover the deficit. This may sustain the G78 for a decade or so.

(2) Build up an endowment, on the foundation of the current bequest, to a level where it is more likely to endure for the longer term. (In this option we would continue to solicit memberships and small donations to provide annual revenues of $8,000-$10,000.) We would seek to build the endowment to a level of at least $300,000, one which could yield revenue of $12,000-$15,000 per year.

We are recommending the second option, which would require an endowment campaign with a goal of raising around $150,000 which, added to the current bequest valued at $185,000, would build an endowment fund of over $330,000.

We propose to launch the endowment campaign as part of the celebration of the G78’s 40th anniversary that falls this year. However, we seek support from the membership for this endowment strategy, after which we will develop a plan of action for the endowment campaign.

Secretariat
Sarah Bowles, our intrepid Executive Secretary, has served us for five 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 luncheons and special events, and a policy conference, annually, to an organization holding all its events electronically, using conferencing software. Moreover, because our lease was terminated, and because the pandemic has made leasing other office space problematic, she has moved the office from Sparks Street to her home. 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. Many thanks, Sarah!