

Group of 78

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT TO MEMBERS, 2021-22

Ottawa June 9, 2022

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, 2021-22.

Governance

The Board of Directors met, virtually, immediately before and after the 2021 annual general meeting on May 27 and again on November 24. Prior to the AGM the outgoing Board reviewed the financial report, report to the members for 2020-2021, 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.

The Board Officers for the year have been:

Roy Culpeper, Chair
Susan Tanner, Vice Chair
Gerry Schmitz, Secretary
Bruce Campbell, Treasurer

The above officers, along with Richard Harmston, Past Chair, and Lew Auerbach 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. Other Board Directors previously elected, elected or re-elected to the Board of Directors at the AGM in October 2020 included:

Nadia Abu-Zahra
Manfred Bienefeld
Joan Broughton
Gordon Breedyk
James Christie
Ruby Dagher
John Foster
Sylvie Lemieux
Peggy Mason
Eileen Olexiuk
Earl Turcotte (resigned March 11, 2022)

Programs

There are 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. Membership of the Working Groups comprises Board members and others who have an interest in the G78's work and bring their expertise or knowledge to the groups.

Annual Policy Conference 2021

The topic for the 2021 annual conference was “Adaptation: Building Resilience in the Climate Emergency”. As with the 2020 conference, the Covid pandemic prevented convening an in-person event; accordingly the conference was held as a series of virtual webinars, held on September 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, and 30. A final wrap-up panel was held October 5 to help distill principal conclusions and recommendations.

Webinars

The Group continued to explore a wide range of international and foreign policy issues in our ongoing webinar series, held between June 2021 and May 2022. Speaking events organized over a luncheon have transitioned, because of the pandemic into virtual webinars. This year's line-up of speakers included:

- Mitchell Beer and Vanessa Corkal, *Federal financing for fossil fuels*, June 8, 2021
- Peter Singer, *Global Vaccine Inequity*, June 16, 2021
- Aaron Thornell and Dick Bakker, *Community-owned Renewable Energy*, July 6, 2021
- Paul Robinson, *NATO: Solution or problem?* August 10, 2021
- Seth Klein, *Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency*. September 14, 2021
- Tim Nash and Sue-May Talbot, *Putting your money where it can fight climate change*, October 20, 2021
- Guy Belisle, Romeo Dallaire, and Steven Moore, *Religious leader engagement: an emerging contribution to peacebuilding*. November 23, 2021
- Craig Martin and Clara Portela, *Economic Sanctions: Legal and Policy Implications*, January 16, 2022
- Merle Lefkoff, *The Impossible Dream: Bending the long arc of growth and profit toward social benefit at a time of climate emergency*, February 22, 2022
- Adam Scott, Patrick DeRochie and Laura McGrath (SHIFT), *From Climate Laggards to Leaders: Transforming Public Pension Funds*, March 3, 2022

- Graham Saul, *The Nature Revolution: Global trends in the fight against species collapse*, March 15, 2022
- Jennifer Clapp, *Global Food Security and the Ukraine Crisis*, March 29, 2022
- John Anderson, *Why we must take control of Artificial Intelligence*, April 26, 2022
- Robin Collins and Cesar Jaramillo, *Prospects for Nuclear Disarmament in the wake of the Russia/Ukraine war*, May 3, 2022

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the health protocols that came into effect in March 2020, we have for the last two years organized our conferences and webinars to broadcast them on the internet utilizing Zoom conferencing software. On the positive side our audience has actually grown, with many participants and most speakers joining us from distant locations online, in addition to our traditional audience from the Ottawa region. Video recordings have also attracted additional viewers, and some new G78 members, after the original broadcast. Safe to say, virtual conferencing is here to stay. However, in March 2022 public health authorities announced that public gatherings may again be held. Out of an abundance of caution our annual conference 2022 will follow a hybrid format, with at least one in-person event and a series of virtual webinars. It is likely that, going forward, most of our programming will utilize the hybrid format enabling the participation of speakers and audiences from distant locations, but opening the possibility of more in-person participation, including some luncheon speakers' events.

Special Initiatives

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. Its achievements over the past year included completing a Communications Plan; hiring a Communications Coordinator; launching the Climate Legacy Website (www.climatelegacy.ca) with 2,300 visitors in 2021; launching the Climate Legacy Newsletter (with 14 issues to date; launching ads on Facebook advertising (117 followers); and launching a Twitter Account (535 followers).

A focus of activity has emerged from seniors' pension funds and retirement savings—do they contribute to global warming through investments in fossil fuels? Can these investments be reallocated to green technologies instead? It initiated a Working Group on Pensions which has helped plan a series of webinars, co-hosted with the Group of 78:

- a. How to Make your Pension Fund Climate Friendly Webinars Part 1 and 2 (Dec. 2020)
- b. Potentials and Pitfalls of Sustainable Investing (April 2021)
- c. Public Funding for Fossil fuels – From part of the Problem to part of the solution (June 2021)

- d. Community Owned Renewable Energy (July 2021)
- e. Putting Your Money where it can fight Climate change (in conjunction with NAFR; Oct. 2021)
- f. From Climate Laggards to Climate Leaders (March 2022)

Joint G78/Rideau Institute Research

The Rideau Institute and the Group of 78 have agreed to undertake joint research on certain topics of mutual interest. The first joint project resulted in the report, *Economic Sanctions Under International Law: A Guide for Canadian Policy* by Craig Martin, published in English and French. This report was also the subject of a webinar on January 16, 2022, featuring Craig Martin and Clara Portela.

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 with more determination 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 2021 annual policy conference generated a series of key messages and policy recommendations that the Group of 78 shared with politicians and government officials and will continue to do so over the next few years. The **working group on climate change and the environment** will anchor this ongoing effort, taking into account current circumstances including post-pandemic recovery. The first round of advocacy initiatives, through letters to the Prime Minister and key cabinet ministers, led to follow-up discussions with senior officials in Natural Resources Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Global Affairs Canada. We also got a response from the Province of Ontario in a letter from the provincial environment minister. The feedback we have received was very positive in the sense that the officials agreed with thrust of our key messages on the need for much greater policy attention to 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:

- *February 26, 2021 - End Canada's support of the war on Yemen and ongoing weapons exports to Saudi Arabia, Canada-Wide Peace and Justice Network.*
- *September 9, 2021 - Call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty*
- *October 11, 2021 - Canada needs to demonstrate sincerity in its climate adaptation actions, Hill Times*
- *October 25, 2021 – Letter to Prime Minister, COP26*
- *October 28, 2021 - CNANW Letter to Prime Minister Trudeau: Canada can join Norway and attend first TPNW meeting*
- *June 16, 2021 - Open Letter to Presidents Putin and Biden in advance of their June 16, 2021 Summit*
- *January 17, 2022 - Fulfil the NPT: From nuclear threats to human security: An Open Letter to the States Parties of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty*
- *May 3, 2022 - THE CLIMATE action plan*

On April 5 2022, the G78 published a *statement on our website on the Russian invasion of Ukraine*. The statement was drafted by a committee of the Board after some debate among members with different perspectives on the genesis of the war. The statement obtained the endorsement of the Board with one abstention.

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 2022

The 2022 annual policy conference on “Transforming International Finance: toward Economic, Social and Planetary Justice”, currently planned to open September 23, is organized by the G78 **Working Group on Economic and Social Justice**. As with the 2021 conference, the format will consist of a series of virtual webinar panels, spread over one to two weeks. However, the organizing committee is planning to hold one hybrid session, likely on the first day, with some in-person participation. The opening session will feature two keynote speakers and provide a light lunch to participants, and 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

In last year's report we recommended launching 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. This would help to put the operations of the G78 onto a stable, long-term footing. Last year's AGM endorsed this recommendation.

We had proposed launching the endowment campaign as part of the celebration of the G78's 40th anniversary in 2021. Other demands on the time of the Executive Committee have meant that we are postponing the campaign for the time being. However, we shall continue to keep an endowment campaign as part of our long-term strategy for the G78 and the incoming Board will address first steps for the campaign. In the meantime, the Group of 78 would certainly welcome gifts, bequests and large donations as contributions toward our endowment. Kindly contact Roy Culpeper (Chair) or Bruce Campbell (Treasurer) if you have any queries. Finally, we would welcome input from members on this issue.

Secretariat

Sarah Bowles, our Executive Secretary, has now served us for six years. She has helped stabilize and expand our membership. Having helped the G78 to adapt to the restrictions of the COVID pandemic she is now helping us to migrate back toward events that would include in-person and hybrid formats. Last year she moved the office from Sparks Street to her home in Ottawa. This year, for personal reasons she has moved the office to a new home near Barry's Bay in the Ottawa valley. Thanks to the wonders of communications technology, she remains connected to the G78 and its events while also providing administrative support to the Rideau Institute, the Canadian Network Against Nuclear Weapons, and Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Great work, Sarah!

Conclusion

The fact that the Group of 78 continues to exist—indeed, to thrive—after forty years is a testament to the vision of those who were midwives to its creation in the 1980s. The Declaration signed by seventy-eight Canadians calling for a bolder and more progressive foreign policy for Canada resonates more than ever today. Their demand for a world spared from the horrors of nuclear war are startling in their relevance as the nuclear-armed NATO powers and Russia confront each other over the war in Ukraine. Their vision of economic and social justice is more

compelling than ever with widening disparities between the world's rich and poor. Such disparities between rich and poor are particularly evident in the Covid pandemic and even more so as the survival of the planet is threatened by the deepening climate crisis.

Alas, the threats posed by nuclear war and the climate crisis are not the only ones imperilling our future. We are still emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic—if we are emerging at all, with dangerously low vaccination rates in the poorest countries, and the mutation of the virus into ever-new variants. Beyond Covid-19 it is likely that in the future other dangerous pathogens will emerge to challenge the health and well-being of people around the world.

Some emerging threats to our well-being and peace may have benign origins. Many technological developments, for example, in the world of information and communications, have brought untold benefits to society. At the same time such technologies have been enlisted in the development of weapons—for example, with unmanned aerial vehicles (drones); or their terrestrial equivalents, killer robots. Such weapons have made killing by remote control commonplace. Also, technological innovation and the emerging world of cybersecurity present us with new and dangerous threats not only to our peace and well-being, but also to the integrity of our institutions, the media, the quality and quantity of work and employment, and our system of democracy. But they also present opportunities for more satisfying occupations and leisure and a more sustainable way of life.

Finally, there are signs that the nature and scope of globalization may be changing, partly as a result of the war in Ukraine, but mostly because of the frailty of the global order that has emerged since the 1970s. A retreat from the hyper-globalization of the last half-century may be overdue, but will the international order that succeeds it be any more stable and equitable?

All of which to say that the Group of 78 has no shortage of issues and opportunities in the years ahead for dialogue and advocacy as it seeks to advance the prospects for peace, justice, and survival, and to promote a progressive foreign policy for Canada in a rapidly changing world.