**GROUP OF 78**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**REPORT TO MEMBERS, 2023-24**

**OTTAWA, JUNE 17, 2024**

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, 2023-24.

**GOVERNANCE**

The Board of Directors met, virtually, immediately before and after the 2023 annual general meeting on June 8 2023 and again on November 30 2023. Prior to the 2023 AGM the outgoing Board reviewed the financial report, report to the members for 2022-2023, upcoming programming, the report of the nominations committee, and a preview of the AGM. Immediately after the AGM the newly elected Board appointed its officers and discussed priorities for action.

The Board Officers for the year have been:

Roy Culpeper, Chair

Susan Tanner, Vice Chair

Gerry Schmitz, Secretary until December 31 2023

Bruce Campbell, Secretary from February 1 2024

Gordon Breedyk, Treasurer

The above officers, along with Richard Harmston, Past Chair, Ruby Dagher, member at large, and Bruce Campbell, member at large to February 2024, comprise the Board’s 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, supported by the Executive Secretary. Until November 30, 2022, Sarah Bowles had served as the Group of 78

Executive Secretary; Sarah was succeeded by Maude Stephany from December 1 2022.

Other Board Directors previously elected, elected or re-elected to the Board of Directors at the AGM included:

Manfred Bienefeld, continuing to 2024

Bruce Campbell, re-elected for two years

Gordon Breedyk, re-elected for two years

James Christie, re-elected for two years

Roy Culpeper, continuing as Chair to 2024

Ruby Dagher, continuing to 2024

Brigitte Demers, elected for two years

John Foster, continuing to 2024

Richard Harmston, continuing to 2024

Amélie Lauzon, continuing to 2024

Sylvie Lemieux, continuing to 2024

Angella MacEwen, continuing to 2024

Peggy Mason, continuing to 2024

Rebecca Pryce, continuing to 2024

Susan Tanner, continuing as Vice-Chair to 2024

**PROGRAMS**

There are two 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 to advance the policy objectives of the G78, notably, world peace and security ( a group currently led by Ruby Dagher), and planetary survival (currently led by Susan Tanner). Efforts in the past two years to create a third Working Group focused on universal economic and social justice have proved elusive. 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 WorkingGroups 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 2023*

The topic for the 2023 annual conference was “Stopping and Preventing Violence: Effective Responses to Conflict”. As with the 2022 conference, the Covid pandemic prevented convening an all in-person event; accordingly, the conference began with a set of hybrid keynote presentations on September 23 and was followed by virtual webinars on September 26, 27, and 28. A final wrap-up panel was held September 30 to help distill principal conclusions and recommendations. All sessions were recorded. The videos have been uploaded into the G78 website and may be viewed on YouTube. A report of the conference summarizing its key messages and recommendations is now on the website.

*Webinars*

The Group continued to explore a wide range of international and foreign policy issues in our ongoing webinar series, held between April 2023 and May 2024. Speaking events organized over a luncheon have transitioned, because of the pandemic, into virtual webinars. This year’s line-up of speakers included:

· Evan Fraser, The Role of Innovation and Technology in Feeding the Future, April 6, 2023

· Adam Scott, Nichole Dusyk and Zachary Rempel, Financing the Energy Transition, April 18 2023 (cohosted with Climate Legacy)

· Adam Scott and Julie Segal, Greening the Financial System, April 25 2023 (cohosted with Climate Legacy)

· Maxwell Cameron and Laura Macdonald, Prospects for Latin American Democracy, May 4 2023

· Spencer Thomas, Brian Tomlinson and Jennifer Bansard, International Climate Financing, May 25 2023 (co-hosted with Climate Legacy)

· Tony McQuail, Dana Penrice and Blain Hjertaas, Taking a Bite out of the Climate Crisis through Regenerative Agriculture, June 22 2023 (co-hosted with Climate Legacy)

· Catherine McKenney, Donna Chiarelli, and Dustin Carey, Climate Crisis Close to Home: How Municipalities can lead the Way, September 22, 2023 (co-hosted with Climate Legacy)

· Amber Bennett and Louise Comeau, Effective Climate Messaging for Seniors: what the latest research tells us November 29 2023 (co-hosted with Climate Legacy)

· Jim Stanford, Armine Yalnizyan, and Ken Delaney, Decarbonizing Canada’s Economy: how the transition will affect workers. December 13 2023 (co-hosted with Climate Legacy)

· Ricardo Tranjan and David MacDonald. Unaffordable Housing: Market Failure or Market Success? January 31, 2024.

· Corey Levine, Back to the Future for Afghan Women and Girls, February 20, 2024

· Louise Comeau and Susan Tanner, Climate Change, Love and Seniors—what is the connection? April 30, 2024

· Fergus Watt, Prospects for Ambitious Reform of the United Nations. May 22, 2024.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the health protocols that came into effect in March 2020, we have for the last three years organized our

conferences and webinars to broadcast them on the internet utilizing Zoom conferencing software. On the positive side our audience has 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 on our website and our YouTube channel have also attracted additional viewers, and some new G78 members, after the original broadcast. Safe to say, virtual conferencing is here to stay. While in March 2022 public health authorities announced that public gatherings may again be held, out of an abundance of caution our annual conferences will continue to follow a hybrid format, with at least one in-person event and a series of virtual webinars. Going forward, some of our programming will utilize the hybrid format enabling the participation of speakers and audiences from distant locations, but working towards more in-person participation for our audience in the Ottawa region, including some luncheon speakers’ events.

*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 was hosted by the G78. While Climate Legacy operated autonomously, there was active collaboration with the G78 (particularly in organizing webinars—see above list). Climate Legacy was self-financing because with its specific project focus on the climate crisis it was able to attract support from philanthropic foundations such as Ivey and Echo. However, as the funding was managed on its behalf by the Group of 78 as a registered charity, this resulted in significantly higher auditing fees for the G78. Given its precarious financial position it was decided that the G78 would relinquish its role as soon as another charitable organization was identified to assume the role of financial host. In 2023, such an organization was identified— the Small Change Fund--with the interest and capacity to host Climate Legacy. In February -March 2024 the transition to Small Change Fund took place. While collaboration between CL and G78 still takes place, G78 no longer retains the responsibility for managing CL’s finances (thus, it no longer incurs the higher auditing fees).

Roy Culpeper continues to sit on the Steering Committee on behalf of the G78.

*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 formally created – an open letter signed by seventy-eight prominent Canadians 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 subsequently launched with the name of the Group of 78, 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.

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. These letters and statements are typically compiled on our website. The Israel-Hamas war that erupted after October 7, 2023, occasioned three such letters: the first on October 28 2023; the second on February 20, 2024; and the third on March 18, 2024. These were all addressed to the Prime Minister, although the second was copied to three ministers and the third was copied to the leaders of the federal political parties. All called for an immediate ceasefire and for expediting the flow of humanitarian aid. The first letter resulted in a polite response from the Prime Minister’s Office acknowledging our concerns while taking issue with our demands for an immediate ceasefire.

**OPERATIONS**

*Membership*

Membership fell from its historic levels of around 80-90 to between 35 and 45 during the past year. Two factors led to the fall in membership: the pandemic of 2020-22 and transition in the Secretariat during the last months of 2022. The former led to the cessation of in-person events and the erosion of a sense of community in the G78. The latter led to year-end appeals for membership renewals and donations not being launched, with a corresponding drop in memberships and donations. To recover lost ground, a call for membership renewals and donations was sent out in March 2023, and another vigorous appeal was launched at the end of 2023. We are now tentatively resuming in-person luncheon events at a location in west Ottawa. This will hopefully bring back some lapsed members and attract new members. As for our annual policy conference, rather than a return to fully in-person events, we are contemplating adhering to a hybrid format to enable some speakers and audience participants to attend virtually, i.e on Zoom. We shall try to capture the opportunities offered by the annual conference to make a pitch for memberships and donations.

*Financial Position and the future of the G78*

The G78 is currently in a financially strong position but that status is largely dependent on the G78’s Fowke bequest, originally at a level of $235,000 when first gifted to the G78 in 2019 but, five years later, now stands at $120,000. Recurrent deficits in the operating budget have been covered by drawing down the bequest. If this continues, over the next five years it will result in the complete exhaustion of the bequest. Unless other ways are found to balance the operating budget through increased membership or donations, or of topping up the bequest through an endowment campaign, the G78 may be forced to drastically alter its modus operandi.

Thus, after a distinguished 43-year history of timely events on foreign policy and policy advocacy, financial pressures may force the G78 to close down. We currently face three alternative scenarios:

1. Status quo: continue as is, and fade away in about 5 years

2. Orderly closure: within next three to five years

3. Revitalizing G78: three options

a. Significant expansion of memberships/donations

b. Grant financing through philanthropic foundations

c. Merge with another organization

The first two scenarios anticipate the closure of the G78, either (1) by default (by running out of funds) or (2) as a deliberate strategy to close down perhaps with a big event (“with a bang”).

Option 3 is aimed at keeping G78 alive through aggressive measures to increase memberships and/or donations, including a possible endowment campaign. Option 3 (a) articulates our current strategy, focused on increasing memberships and donations. Option 3 (b), to seek grant funding from philanthropic donors, is currently being explored. We have as yet to identify such a philanthropic donor to support our work. Option 3 (c) is to merge with another better-funded organization that would continue the G78’s mission. This is a remote possibility, but we are retaining it for completeness.

Our current strategy of emphasizing growth in memberships and donations is so far yielding modest results. The number of members remains around 45, after dipping to 35 a year ago, compared to historic levels of 80-90.

On the 40th anniversary of the G78 in 2021, we recommended, and the Board accepted in principle, launching an endowment campaign with a goal of raising around $150,000 which, if added to the remaining bequest funds now

valued at $120,000, would build an endowment of over $270,000. If invested at a return of 5% this would generate an annual flow of $13,500, helping to put the operations of the G78 onto a more stable, long-term footing.

Our 2022 report said that we are postponing the campaign for the time being. However, we shall continue to keep an endowment campaign as an option for the G78. As part of the 40th anniversary celebration we surveyed the membership to ascertain the degree of interest in and potential funding from an endowment campaign. The results indicated some members would be prepared to contribute to launch the campaign to attract other donors. One idea would be to build a campaign for a new Group of 78—specifically, 78 donors willing to donate $2,000 or more over a period of two to three years. We shall continue to monitor what emerges from the current membership and donations appeals and implications, if any, for an endowment 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 Gord Breedyk (Treasurer) if you have any queries.

The Board recommends striking a committee to examine options for the revitalization of the G78, including but not restricted to the three scenarios sketched above. The committee will present preliminary findings at the Board’s mid-term meeting (January 2025) and in a final report to the next AGM in June 2025. We would welcome input from members on this issue.

*Secretariat*

Sarah Bowles, having served as G78 Executive Secretary for seven years, resigned in late 2022 and was succeeded by Maude Stephany in December 2022. Maude was recruited through a competitive process and brings years of communications, organizational and artistic skills, and experience running their own organization, the Transartivist Project. Maude (who prefers the pronouns they and them) is based at their home in Guelph, Ontario, and provides G78 secretariat support remotely. Since starting over 18 months ago, Maude has brought fresh energy and enthusiasm to meeting the challenges and opportunities faced by the G78.

**Conclusion**

The conclusions in last year’s report continue to resonate. The fact that the Group of 78 continues to exist—indeed, to thrive—after more than forty years is a testament to the vision of those who laid the foundations for its creation. The Declaration signed in 1981 by seventy-eight Canadians calling for a bolder and more progressive foreign policy for Canada is as compelling as 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 continue to confront each other over the war in Ukraine. And the horrors of conventional warfare have been evident in the devastation wreaked upon Gaza by the Israeli Defence Force in response to the brutal attacks by Hamas on October 7, 2023. Moreover, the G78’s 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. And beyond Covid-19 it is likely that 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, including Artificial Intelligence, have brought 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, appropriately controlled and regulated, such innovations also present opportunities for advancing the public good through more satisfying occupations, more 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 challenges 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.