

Summit of the Americas Information Exchange Session with Civil Society September 15th, 2000

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade convened another information exchange session on Friday, September 15th, to discuss the themes of the Third Summit of the Americas, to be held in Quebec City next April 2001. The Session was chaired by the Prime Minister's Personal Representative for the Summit of the Americas, Marc Lortie, who was accompanied by the Canadian Ambassador to the Organisation of American States, Peter Boehm, by the Director of the Inter-American Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Michael Brock, by Sylvie Bédard, responsible for liaison with civil society and by other members of the Inter-American Division, of the Indigenous Affairs Division, by representatives of the Trade Policy Bureau and representatives of the Canadian International Development Agency and the Department of Environment. There were 10 civil society organizations attending the session and 11 participated by telephone. The participants list is attached for further details.

Report: Marc Lortie opened the session noting that this was an invitation to an exchange of information, which he would hope would be very productive and useful to both civil society organisations and Government officials involved in the Summit process. He offered an overview of the themes proposed for the next Summit, following the framework described in the Background Document: A Summit of the Americas: Themes that had been sent to all participants prior to the information exchange session. He added that Canada, as host of the next Summit, was sensitive to a major concern in the hemisphere about the growing digital divide and this is why connectivity was being explored as a means to address the challenge of digital inclusion, and how this should be integrated in the Summit process. Mr. Lortie said that the Private Dialogue between the hemispheric Foreign Ministers held on the margins of the General Assembly in Windsor last June had been extremely useful in defining the Summit's priority themes and securing commitment to further develop them, as the ministers were involved from the beginning.

Mr. Lortie continued with an overview of some regional and international events that were of importance for the Summit process, referring to the two OAS missions to Peru led by OAS Secretary-General Cesar Gaviria and Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy; to the Meeting of South American Presidents which gave a sense of the important issues for that region; to the United Nations Millennium Summit which addressed poverty reduction and other major social issues; and to a Caricom Seminar held two weeks before with the National Coordinators of the Caribbean countries and OAS and Canadian senior officials involved in the Summit process.

In terms of next steps, Ambassador Boehm explained that he was chairing the OAS Special Committee on Summits Management (CEGCI) which has recently developed its workplan for the months leading to the next OAS General Assembly that will be held in San José, Costa Rica, 6 weeks after the Summit of the Americas. He noted that many decisions taken at the Summit by the Leaders will have a major bearing on the General Assembly. He emphasized that there will be many new participants at the Quebec City Summit (14 heads of states or government elected since the Santiago Summit in 1998) and that that would have resonance in the Action Plan. He also explained that the Special Committee will be holding another open meeting in Washington on September 19th, where civil society representatives will have the opportunity to exchange views with OAS member countries. Ambassador Boehm's expectation was that those open meetings would be held prior to each meeting of the Summit's National Coordinators (SIRG) to whom the views expressed by civil society will be communicated. Since the next SIRG meeting to be held in Quebec City on October 1-3 would focus on the first Basket of the Summit's Action Plan, A Strengthening Democracy, so would the Special Committee meeting in Washington. He invited all the Canadian NGOs interested in the Summit process to

attend or to watch the webcasting of the event, through which questions/comments would also be received. He also invited them to register to the OAS in order to have access to relevant hemispheric information and events. (See web site www.summit-americas.org).

After this introduction, the floor was opened to questions, comments and suggestions from the civil society representatives. These are listed below under four categories, 1) General Suggestions; 2) Proposals with reference to Process; 3) Proposals with reference to Basket 1 AStrengthening Democracy@, and 4) Proposals with reference to the Summit's other themes.

1) General Suggestions

- \$ Need to have a more-focussed, targetted Action Plan in order to get results (FOCAL, IISC, CCIC, Rights & Democracy)
- \$ Important to address the problem of follow-up, the Ahow@(FOCAL, Rights & Democracy) (*M.Lortie: WB and IDB included in our consultations to arrange they line up their priorities and programming with Summit*)
- \$ Should not forget promoting targets that have been set for a long time e.g. on human rights (Rights & Democracy)
- \$ Level of priority given to connectivity seems out of place in relation with other issues (Rights & Democracy, Univ. of Calgary) (*M.Brock: connectivity is a means to serve other 3 broad goals*)
- \$ Need to make sure that connectivity is used as a means to address inequalities (FOCAL) (*M.Lortie: True;Adigital inclusion@should be the goal*);
- \$ When planning action relating to environment, should not forget the Bolivia Summit on Sustainable Devt (FOCAL) (*M.Lortie: Bolivia a long time ago; point is to renew momentum on important issue, in full partnership with OAS*)

2) Proposals with reference to Process

- \$ To report progress on the OAS Declaration on the Rights of Aboriginal Peoples at the Summit (Congress Aboriginal Peoples) (*Amb. Boehm: remain open option; but depends on progress in the working group on the Declaration under new Chair, Guatemala, which includes aboriginal reps.*);
- \$ The Canadian Government should lead by example re. civil society by not only holding info sessions but involving CSO in the SIRG meetings; would be our legacy (FOCAL) (*M. Lortie/Amb.Boehm: SIRG for negotiations among national coordinators; these info sessions and the OAS Special Committee meetings ensure CSO input included, as reflected in Themes paper*);
- \$ CSO should be consulted on detailed action items on timely basis (FOCAL) (*M. Lortie: takes time because of need to consult with hemispheric governments before*);
- \$ How much is this a space to discuss FTAA since other space not available? (Rights & Democracy)(*M.Lortie: FTAA is long process; consultations have taken place in Parliament, and by the Canadian Negotiator; will make sure he remains available on regular basis*).
- \$ Is there a process to accommodate participation by NGOs at Summit? The space allowed for presentations at the OAS was good signal. Would reflect importance that Canada gives to inclusion and equity (C. of Abor. Peoples, IISC, CCIC) (*M.Lortie: Not the practice at Summit and agenda tight; 26 Cdn org. are organizing a Parallel Summit which will likely make recommandations; we will need to think of bridges to interested NGOs*)
- \$ Formal participation either as NGO or in Canadian Delegation is important for aboriginal peoples (C. of Abor. Peoples)

3) Proposals with reference to Basket 1 AStrengthening Democracy@

- \$ Should add strengthening electoral processes, administration of justice and safety of individuals (J. Graham)
- \$ Should recognise importance of developing decentralisation processes as major element of strengthening democracy as ensures grassroot participation-World Bank agrees(FCM); Should add issue of sustainable cities since there is a whole group in Canada concerned (IISC) *(M.Brock: Local democracy strengthening is part of Santiago Action Plan and have to be careful about repeating; but will look at ideas and results of the hemispheric mayors=conference carefully; concrete input welcome but the sooner the better)*
- \$ The South American Summits Democracy Clause commendable (FOCAL) *(M.Lortie: Very attractive, giving us inspiration);*
- \$ How do we plan to deal with governing problems like Colombia at Summit (Univ. of Calgary) *(M.Lortie: Agenda flexible to allow that; Brasil has issued a separate Statement on Colombia because it is having huge consequences on its neighbours)*

4) Proposals with reference to other Summit themes

- \$ Good paragraph on poverty but the ~~How~~ needs to be given precision; need concrete actions to ensure inequalities will decrease, to show commitment in creating a multilateral financial environment designed to reduce inequalities (FOCAL, CCIC)
- \$ Re. Poverty, tax infrastructures should probably be an item (FOCAL) *(M.Lortie: Important issue particularly in Caribbean where tax reform needs to be addressed through hemispheric cooperation; will likely be discussed by Finance ministers next March, will be level of Leaders only if there is need for a sense of direction)*

The Canadian Government officials present thought that this session provided useful ideas for the Summit policy development process. Both civil society and government representatives agreed for the need to repeat the exercise in the future, perhaps under a slightly different format that would allow for greater dialogue on more specific issues, as we advance further in the Summit process. Feedback and suggestions of the participants to the session will be most welcome.