

## **Summit of the Americas Information Exchange Session with Civil Society November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

*The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade convened another information exchange session on Thursday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, to discuss the themes of the Third Summit of the Americas, to be held in Quebec City next 20-22 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 (on the phone), 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, the Department of Human Resources/Labour, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the Department of Environment.*

**Report:** Mr. Lortie welcomed the participants to this other Information Exchange Session. He informed on the number of events related to the Summit that have taken place since the last Session held on September 15<sup>th</sup>. Among those, he talked about the Prime Minister's trip to Central America last September where he had, among other things, a very interesting conversation with Guatemala's President who explained that in his view, in order to strengthen a young democracy coming out of a long civil war like Guatemala, it is important to connect with a country like Canada, and a starting point to this relationship is to have a bilateral free trade agreement between Central America and Canada. Mr. Lortie also report on the Carter Centre Conference on the Challenges to Democracy, attended by 7 ex-Presidents and Prime Ministers as well as President Chavez who was guest speaker. He said that it had been a very constructive and relevant discussion for the Summit agenda. He also mentioned that he was just back from a very instructive trip to Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador and that the situation in Colombia was especially complex. The guerillas are exercising control on a large area of the territory and it has serious repercussions on its neighbours.

Mr. Lortie then briefed his interlocutors on the meeting of the 34 National Coordinators-Sherpas (SIRG) that was held in Quebec City at the beginning of October. He explained that the Sherpas-meeting launched the process of negotiation leading up to the April 2001 Summit of the Americas where the Heads of State and Government will discuss how to strengthen democracy, create greater prosperity and create the conditions to realize human potential in the hemisphere. At that meeting the delegates emphasized the importance of ensuring that the Summit process is a continuous one in which each new Summit builds upon the success of the last. He explained that the focus of the SIRG meeting in Quebec City was the first theme of the Action Plan, *Strengthening Democracy*. The Sherpas recognized the strong link between democracy and development; agreed that democracy can better take hold in a climate of financial stability than amid financial crisis and devastating poverty, that it is crucial to implement a rule-of-law based system. They discussed ways of achieving strong, fair and impartial justice systems and protecting the security of the individual, as well as the need for transparent and accountable government institutions and electoral processes. Mr. Lortie said that the Sherpas discussed whether or not there should be a Democratic Clause that would serve as a condition either for the participation of countries in future Summits or for their integration to the FTAA. He asked the views of civil society representatives on this idea and referred to the Mercosur Clause that was adopted in April 1997 after the tentative Coup d'État in Paraguay. He said that the idea of a Democratic Clause is still to be discussed by the Sherpas and would probably not be resolved until the Leaders meet next April.

Discussions on how to strengthen democracy will continue at the next SIRG together with a dialogue on the third theme of the Summit, *Realising Human Potential*. Mr. Lortie explained that this theme is very

important in order to develop balanced hemispheric cooperation. Part of this discussion will be on education, which was the major focus of the Santiago Summit in April 1998. He explained that a Group of Eleven, led by Mexico, is working on proposals for the Plan of Action. The other sub-themes to be considered in the Third part of the Plan of Action are health, gender equality, indigenous populations, cultural diversity, and children and youth. Canada is trying to enlist the cooperation of international and regional institutions, for example the Pan-American Health Organisation, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and the Inter-American Children Institute, so that they better match their programs with the priorities of the Summit. With reference to indigenous peoples, Mr. Lortie said that at the Santiago Summit, indigenous issues were, for the first time, dealt with in a thorough manner and the Santiago Summit was able to raise the level of indigenous peoples=issues. He explained that Leaders will continue to deal with indigenous issues in this manner in Quebec City, supporting the continued efforts to negotiate the proposed Inter-American Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Populations and to look at ways of reviving the Inter-American Indian Institute. He said that it will be important to watch the results of the Ibero-American Summit currently taking place in Panama since they have decided to focus on youth. He explained that Canada is a strong advocate of cultural diversity in international fora, including in the Summit where it happens to be the only international forum where the U.S.A. is present that discusses this issue.

Mr. Lortie mentioned that civil society organizations had again been invited to express their views and submit their suggestions on these questions at the open meeting of the Special Committee on Inter-American Summits Management (CEGCI) on November 7. The Canadian Ambassador to the Organisation of American States, Peter Boehm, who chairs the Special Committee gave an overview of the number of issues raised by civil society and member states at that meeting. It was agreed that DFAIT would send the CEGCI report together with the Information Exchange Session Report. The next Sherpas=meeting is to be hosted by the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC, on November 28-30, 2000.

## **COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY:**

### **Democratic Clause:**

*What is the content of the Democratic Clause and whether it would make reference to existing commitments on human rights (North-South Institute).* Mr. Lortie explained that we had always thought it was implicit that democracy was a pre-requisite for participation in the Summit since the first Summit, held in Miami in 1994, was held to celebrate the return to democracy in the region. However since then, there have been a number of challenges/threats to democracy and there is a need to discuss how to send a strong signal to those struggling countries. The current discussion is on the principle of a Clause and not on its text. On human rights, Mr. Lortie assured that the Plan of Action would envisage a strong effort to commit countries to implement existing conventions.

*Would urge that the cause of democracy and human rights be given a strong push with legally binding and enforceable clauses over the FTAA; and that there should be no fear of including such clauses if we believe that trade contributes to promoting human rights and environment (Council of Canadians Windsor).*

*We are concerned about the state of health of the inter-american human rights system and one issue is ratification and implementation. In Canada, we have not ratified the inter-american convention nor the OAS human rights conventions. Political involvement is key and Canada can play a role (Amnesty International).* Amb. Boehm agreed that the Canadian ratification is seen in the region as important to the system. At the same time he insisted that Canada is also seen as one of the countries which most defends the system. He informed that a lot of work had been accomplished in the last few weeks at the OAS and that this

will be central to the next General Assembly in June.

*The issue of suspending countries is not black or white unless there is a major obstacle; we are experiencing the covert militarization of democracy e.g. in Peru and Venezuela. Part of the solution is to allow more room for civil society to alert and express its concerns (Human Rights Internet).* Amb. Boehm agreed. He said that in practice, the hemispheric community is starting to look at degrees of operationalization of democracy. At the OAS, one mechanism is the Resolution 1080 but it is applied only when there is an interruption in the democratic process. The OAS Mission to Peru and its 29-point plan is one solution; another would be to establish a common fund.

*Human Rights are not automatically included in democracy. For e.g. in Ecuador, the uprising was primarily brought about by the indigenous peoples fighting for their rights (May Day Coalition of Human Rights)*

### **Third Basket, Realising Human Potential:**

*We are pleased to see points in the Vital Connections paper on the inclusion of people with disabilities though we would suggest to make sure that the different vulnerable groups listed in the document be consistent. Did Ecuador ask for something specific on this theme? (Canadian Association for Community Living).* Mr. Lortie said that he was there the week before and Ecuadorians had not mentioned people with disabilities specifically though they were still preparing their input for the Sherpas Meeting.

*In reference to gender issues, is there a capacity-building programme in development or plans to desegregate statistics? (National Council of Women of Canada).* Amb. Boehm confirmed that those concerns go right to the heart of what the OAS, through its Inter-American Conference on Women (CIM), and the Inter-American Development Bank, are trying to do.

*Tracy O'Hearn of the Inuit Women Association said that she has been working with the Canadian Government on a number of international conferences such as the Biodiversity Convention, the Circumpolar Conference, etc. and she raised the potential for conflict between those events and for the Government to hide behind conferences but not implement them.*

*We are concerned about democracy and freedom of association at home, in Canada, with reports of the security parameters of the Summit to be extended to the Plainses d'Abraham (CEN).* Mr. Lortie responded that protests will take place and that it is hoped that they will be serene but it is Canada's obligation to protect the Leaders. He informed that he meets regularly with the organizers of the Peoples Summit and that the Government will finance part of it. We want to make sure that both events can take place and that the Leaders Summit is not blocked.

### **Second Basket, Creating Prosperity:**

*What are the next steps in the preparations of this basket and what information will be made available? (North-South Institute; Council of Canadians).* Mr. Lortie explained that the Sherpas Meeting focussed on that basket will be held at the end of February. In terms of the trade negotiations, he explained that the negotiators are due to meet in Lima on January 24-25; that the results of that meeting will be brought to the attention of International Trade Ministers who will meet in Buenos Aires on April 5-7 and then report on their progress at the Quebec City Summit. With regard to the texts, Mr. Lortie said that whether they are made available prior to the Summit depends on whether the 34 countries all agree.

### **Connectivity:**

*Should be mainstreamed throughout Action Plan (Human Rights Internet).* Mr. Lortie explained that this is what we are aiming at.

*Connectivity has to be given substance if it is to be meaningful. We need to develop hemispheric content and networks. The Commission on Environmental Cooperation has developed useful data and networks useful to civil society organisations; this experience should be shared (K.Mayrand, Symposium on Trade and Sustainability).*

*Will there be an exhibit #Connecting the Americas@? (AUCC).* Mr. Lortie explained that the Government had planned to rent a space but it is very costly and also, part of the reason was to showcase our expertise in connectivity to the Leaders but their tight agenda will prevent them from appreciating the exhibit.

### **Civil Society Consultations:**

*For civil society to have relevant contributions, timely and relevant information needs to be made available (FOCAL).* Mr. Lortie responded that the paper on Strengthening Democracy has not been completed; that it is difficult to make promises because situation is evolving in region and also it is not only a Canadian paper. These information exchange sessions are useful because they allow us, among other things, to share a great deal of information.

*How can civil society organisations register to the OAS? Is it real or show? (National Council of Women of Canada).* Amb. Boehm said that it is real: guidelines were approved last year and applications are being received. When he opened his Special Committee meetings to civil society to discuss Summit issues, the roof did not cave in; it is a gradual process but it is engaged. He gave the example of the dialogue table in Peru where the Government, the opposition and the civil society organisations were involved.

*How will the Canadian Delegation to the Summit be formed (AUCC):* Mr. Lortie said it would include the PM, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and maybe one other minister depending on the focus of the discussions, and advisors.