

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

APEC HIGH LEVEL MEETING
on
HUMAN CAPACITY BUILDING

CANADIAN DELEGATION REPORT

Beijing, China
May 15-16, 2001

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The APEC High Level Meeting on Human Capacity Building for the New Economy took place in Beijing, May 15-16, after a day of preparatory meetings. If not reaching initial extremely lofty hopes of the organizers, the meeting was indeed high level, being opened by President Jiang and the Sultan of Brunei, who also attended a dinner, and being closed by Vice Premier Qian Qichen, and attended by delegations led, in general, by Ministers or deputies, and attracting senior academics and business people, either as members of delegations or presenters. While billed as seeking interactive, informal exchange, the meeting was in fact quite formal, and, given ceremonial needs, and numbers of speakers, the scope for participation proved quite limited. Of the 15 hours of meeting over two days, only 5 were available for delegations to speak, no doubt leaving many wondering why such large delegations were encouraged to come. However, many who did speak were in fact quite interesting, and many delegates found the informal opportunities for networking, dialogue, project/business development worth the time and effort, even if their participation in the meetings was more limited than foreseen.

Led by HRDC DM Claire Morris, Candel included: provincial representation through CMEC; senior leaders from the ACCC and AUCC; the president of University College of Cape Breton; the Vice President of Holland College in PEI; Vice President of the Conference Board; as well as officials from HRDC, CIDA, Industry Canada and DFAIT. The Canadian Labour Congress representative at the last minute was not able to attend. HRDC team also used occasion for a bilateral meeting and signing of a workplan with China, senior level bilateral discussions with Australia and New Zealand, as well participation in an informal meeting of the APEC HRD Working Group.

The opening ceremony at the Great Hall of the People proved to be a substantive event. The Sultan made some useful general remarks about the need to encourage creativity and innovation, increasing the benefits derived from open markets, and the developmental potential of new information technology. For his part, Pres Jiang tackled the issues in some depth, often in close coincidence with Canadian positions voiced later in the day. Expressing deep concern about the "brain drain", Jiang spoke of "irrational and unjust phenomena ... in international competition for talents" and outlined five points to guide APEC human capacity building work:

- i) HRD should be a priority in APEC work for which resources from all quarters should be mobilized. (The reference to all quarters implies an openness to cooperation with other groups)
- ii) the need for lifelong learning systems with education as its foundation. Through policy guidance and media influence, a social environment should be created in which teachers are respected, education is valued, and learning stressed
- iii) increase information network usage and use it as a vehicle for learning, paying attention to the needs of disadvantaged groups and developed economies should help narrow "digital divide";

iv) foster innovation, paying particular attention to cultivate young talent, partly through effective incentives; and

v) within APEC, increase personnel exchanges and foster "a multi-level, multi-form cooperation mechanism". While unclear in some respects, we fully expect Chinese officials to build on these views in APEC fora in the months leading to the Shanghai Leaders' meeting in October.

Candel was active both in the formal discussion and behind the scenes in formulating the Beijing Initiative, and effective, if the extent our views are reflected is any measure. Organizers appreciated fact that Canada was one of only three economies to have submitted written comments on the first draft of the Beijing Initiative. In her statement, Ms. Morris set out key features of the Canadian approach to human capacity development in the knowledge economy: ensuring that economic and social policies reinforce each other; development of policies and instruments to foster innovation and inclusion; the effort to develop a culture of lifelong learning, and the elements of the evolving Canadian infrastructure to deliver this, emphasizing in particular the provincial responsibility for primary and secondary education and the high quality they deliver; our commitment to the engagement of all stakeholders, including labor; and Canadian connectedness policies which are succeeding in providing wide access to global cyberways. Jacqueline Scott, head of the Expert Panel on Skills and President of University College Cape Breton set out Canadian strategies for ICT diffusion through partnerships such as CANARIE and SchoolNet. ACCC President Gerry Brown spoke about Canadian mechanisms for governmental cooperation with stakeholders, outlining in particular the functioning of the Sector Council system. Insight and experience from Canada, as an economy that is making headway on the challenges preoccupying the meeting were clearly appreciated.

Behind the scenes Candel had a lot to do with enabling the completion of a Beijing Initiative that could command agreement. This was largely due to the efforts of Charles Barrett of the Conference Board, who due to the confidence reposed in him by the organizers was asked by the organizers to work as part of a small group to reshape a flawed initial draft. Canada's comments on the initial draft addressed some of those flaws, which included no reference to the appropriate policy environment, no reference to gender equity, a narrow view of inclusiveness; a focus on workplace training to the virtual exclusion of education, and an a large and indiscriminate list of project ideas . Upshot of Barrett and his band's efforts was to package all the project ideas in a separate document of lesser stature, and to confine the Beijing Initiative to defining the context and challenge and articulating key principles to guide future work. Virtually all we sought was included: policies to foster innovation and entrepreneurship, promote a wide distribution of the opportunities of the new economy, education as the foundation of lifelong learning, equal access and opportunity for women, engagement with all relevant stakeholders, and the diffusion of ICT through the appropriate regulatory regime and measures to enhance access and public confidence. Digital divide issues and opportunities feature prominently as well, reflecting widely expressed concern about widening gaps among economies and between the skilled and less skilled. A specific reference to labor was not attainable, although we, Hong Kong, Singapore, and New Zealand repeatedly referred to the interest and role of labour on these issues.

The Beijing Initiative, although expressed at a high level of generality, contains many of the right signals and will no doubt find its way to Shanghai. Nevertheless, the path for concrete

follow-up action within APEC is not clear. The reality is that APEC's stovepipe sectoral structures have not in the past responded well to cross-cutting challenges, while the necessary involvement of non-traditional stakeholders presents an additional cultural challenge. There is nevertheless an opportunity to use the present burst of political profile to the human capacity building agenda, which will be reinforced in Shanghai, to define a specific capacity building concrete program or project which could lever external resources and around which to engage non-traditional stakeholders.

Canadian Delegation
APEC High Level Meeting on Human Capacity Building
For the New Economy
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