

**eDiscussion Summary on Canadian Culture and Know-How Abroad**  
**Policy Research Division, Foreign Affairs Canada**  
**May 23, 2005**

From April 4 to May 7, 2005, Canadians were invited to share their thoughts through the Canadian International Policy site on the promotion of Canadian Culture and Know-How Abroad. A series of video interviews with various experts on the topic were hosted on the site to help stimulate and inform the debate. Participants included academics, students, members of the NGO community and two non-Canadians.

Participants agreed on the importance of showcasing Canadian culture and know-how abroad, issuing several recommendations for how the government might better assist in this.

Below is a summary of some of the major questions, disagreements and recommendations that emerged during the debate:

**Canadian Culture**

*"We cannot be one-dimensional when it comes to cultural diversity. Canadian identity is diverse and the policies and approach that Canada undertakes must be multifaceted to reflect diversity."*

Participants underscored the need for a varied approach to showcasing Canadian culture and know-how abroad. The diversity of Canadian culture and expertise was highlighted by participants who described Canada as an urban, bilingual, multicultural and technologically advanced society. Canada's proximity to the United States was also seen as a defining element of Canadian culture.

**Canadian intervention abroad**

*"All sorts of practices reflect our values. When we send peacekeepers abroad they reflect our values. They don't just reflect this at the surface level in terms of where and when we send them. How we choose to respond also reflects our cultural values."*

Two participants lamented what they saw as the decline of Canadian influence over the past decade. They argued that Canada was missing key opportunities to assist in peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts in several countries. It was felt that this type of involvement would allow other countries to benefit from Canadian expertise. While there was some disagreement over whether Canadian intervention always requires a UN mandate, participants generally agreed that Canada's involvement in external conflicts is a critical part of the promotion of Canadian know-how abroad.

**Promoting and supporting Canadian culture**

*"One of Canada's biggest challenges is to find the balance between access to culture from around the world while maintaining a thriving domestic cultural industry."*

One foreign participant commented that the Canadian government must domestically promote Canadian culture so that Canadians themselves view it as worthy of exportation. This participant observed a lack of enthusiasm and confidence amongst Canadians regarding influence abroad. Yet, Canadian participants in the eDiscussion were decidedly optimistic about Canada's capacity to play a significant role internationally. Many felt that Canadian culture and expertise could benefit other countries and that their promotion should therefore be a driving force of Canadian foreign policy.

The need for Canada to support our cultural industry and artists while avoiding excessive protectionism was discussed by one participant. According to this individual, more robust government programs to support this goal would help to counter the predominance of American cultural products and help promote Canadian culture in the US.

### **International and inter-departmental partnerships**

*"I was interested to the degree to which the Department of Foreign Affairs could be challenged to think differently [...] I suggested that if DFAIT were serious then this would in part require significant inter-departmental collaboration in order to generate the money required to undertake this challenge in a serious manner."*

Two participants expressed a desire to see FAC think and act outside of the traditional paradigm with regard to promoting Canadian culture and expertise abroad. Several options were proposed, including the establishment of multinational partnerships to create television channels dedicated to showcasing the cultures of participant countries. One participant also suggested the creation of a multi-departmental initiative to create an internet site aimed at promoting these same themes.

### **Facilitating cultural exchanges**

*"We must not view the promotion of this "talent" [Canadian know-how] as one-sided. Rather, we must promote the circulation of talents and ideas."*

There was general agreement that Canadians have much to gain from cultural exchanges. One participant charged that, despite its multicultural character, Canada has much to do to ensure a good understanding of other cultures amongst Canadian citizens. Participants advocated more robust government programs to facilitate academic exchanges, international internships and other means of allowing Canadians to live and work abroad.

### **Foreign Affairs reply to summary**

The above summary of views presented during the eDiscussion on Showcasing Canadian Culture and Know-how Abroad has been received within Foreign Affairs Canada and is currently being reviewed by policy planners.

Their response will be posted on the Canadian International Policy site in the coming weeks. It will provide Canadians with reactions to the summarized ideas and background information on relevant Canadian initiatives and approaches.