



# FOCAL

Canadian Foundation for the Americas

Fondation canadienne pour les Amériques

Fundación Canadiense para las Américas

Fundação Canadense para as Américas

## The Summit of the Americas in Focus

### Third Meeting: Briefing Session with Peter Boehm

1 Nicholas Street, Suite 1200, Ottawa

October 18, 2005

On October 18, 2005, FOCAL invited civil society organisations (CSOs) to join Mr. Peter Boehm, Assistant Deputy Minister, North America and the Personal Representative of the Prime Minister for the IV Summit of the Americas, to discuss the most recent developments and the anticipated outcomes of the upcoming Summit of the Americas to be held in Mar del Plata, Argentina on November 4-5. Mr. Boehm provided an update on recent progress, including the consultations between the Canadian government and domestic stakeholders, Canada's priorities for this Summit and the status of negotiations among the 34 participating countries. The second part of the session was devoted to questions from CSO representatives on Summit themes and process.

#### Canada in the Summit of the Americas Process

Peter Boehm began by outlining the efforts of the government of Canada to promote openness and transparency in its approach to Summits of the Americas, noting the clear improvement in participation since the first Summit in 1994 in Miami. In the preparation for this IV Summit, Canadian government officials have heard and considered recommendations from civil society organizations, the private sector, indigenous groups and the provinces in areas of jurisdiction relevant to the Summit, such as labour, education and health. The ministries of Labour and Human Resources were also closely involved in formal negotiations providing expertise on Summit theme: Creating Jobs to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance. Mr. Boehm's view is that an inclusive process is crucial and underscored the need for final Summit documents to be the product of fair consideration of input from Indigenous Peoples and civil society. Mr Boehm reminded the audience that Canada has been strong supporter of the Indigenous Peoples Summit and sees the private sector as a key element of the Summit Process.

Mr. Boehm explained that Summits of the Americas continue to be the most productive regional space for Canada in the context of the increasing number of regional forums, as it brings together the most countries in the hemisphere (34) and includes Canada's most important regional economic and political partner, the United States. He affirmed the importance of Summits and other inter-American institutions for Canada and hemispheric relations and urged leaders meeting in Mar del Plata to express the same faith and not give in to Summit fatigue or "*cumbritis*". Mr. Boehm noted FOCAL's work in promoting the next Summit and concurred that identifying the host of the V Summit is an important outcome of the upcoming Summit, and central to achieving results in the implementation IV Summit mandates.

#### The Summit and Inter-American Relations

Placing Summits in the context of Inter-American relations, Mr. Boehm mentioned that the last decade has seen the development of ideological and north-south divisions among member states. These divisions have arisen as a result of government changes in countries of the hemisphere and of the events of September 11, 2001, which led to changes in US policy and engagement with the region. Mr Boehm acknowledged that such disagreements between member states have posed a challenge to successful Summit negotiations and that consensus has also become

more difficult to achieve due to the increasing number of issues on the Summit agenda and the heightened attention paid to security and terrorism.

### **Negotiations: Canadian Goals and Priorities**

Canada's main objective in the current Summit negotiations is to continue to advance the agenda established at the Quebec City Summit in 2001, while also developing a regional plan for timely global issues such as climate change and health, diseases and pandemics. Canada aims to achieve a "balanced agenda" of hemispheric commitments on governance, human rights, prosperity and equity. Haiti is at the centre of its preoccupations and Canadian negotiators are pushing member states to issue a collective statement of solidarity, peace and security and a commitment to foster and strengthen democratic institutions in Haiti. Canada has also been a supporter of a move towards a Free Trade Zone of the Americas (FTAA), which has witnessed setbacks. Mr Boehm reassured the audience that Canada speaks actively on matters of transparency and gender, which one participant deemed to have been neglected in the latest version of the Plan of Action. Thus far Canada feels the main advances in the negotiations have been in the area of labour and Mr. Boehm listed specific actionable items that Canada considers priorities for inclusion in the Plan of Action with respect to this central theme:

- Labour policies that address specific needs of Indigenous Peoples.
- Integration of a gender perspective in labour policy.
- Attention and resources devoted to micro and small enterprises.
- Efforts made to foster public-private partnerships.
- Education and professional training.
- An Inter-American Development Bank whose objectives and activities are more in synch with those of the OAS and the Summit.

Mr. Boehm confirmed that the Declaration of Mar del Plata is almost complete but that more work needs to be done on the Plan of Action. Mr Boehm remarked that a tendency exists for countries to each come to the table with different issues and priorities, making the process time consuming. A special meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) is scheduled for October 28-31 where member states will meet to complete the Plan of Action.

### **Question Period**

Participants expressed concern about the FTAA and one individual asked whether the diverging interests of countries of the region could be reconciled. Mr Boehm said he expects a renewed commitment to the FTAA in the future, but warned that a completion of FTAA talks may not come for several years. When asked whether Canada should continue to promote the FTAA in light of such challenges, Mr. Boehm observed that an overwhelming percentage of Canada's GDP that comes from trade (43%) and stressed the need for the FTAA to remain on the agenda. He nonetheless recognized the need for caution in the way we promote trade and dispute-settlement mechanisms.

When asked about Canada's commitment to the Summit process, Mr Boehm explained that an attempt is being made to maintain the momentum around Summits of the Americas in the face of Ibero-American Summit and other regional initiatives.

On civil society participation, it was suggested that the consultation process be made more transparent by tracking civil society input and committing to a timely release of documents. Mr Boehm agreed that an inventory of Canadian civil society contributions could potentially become part of the Canadian government consultation process, but informed participants that this would not become possible until after the Mar del Plat Summit. Another question tackled the effectiveness of civil society forums and asked for suggestions to increase the impact of these regional consultations on negotiators. Mr Boehm spoke about the need for balance between presentations and dialogue and for a clear indication of whether CSOs speak to national governments or to the 34 countries collectively. Mr Boehm also suggested that CSOs forward written versions of their recommendations to government representatives in

advance of forums. Participants agreed and reaffirmed the importance of a strong hemispheric process as a driving force for domestic consultation processes, especially in countries where that process is weak.

When asked if it would be possible for Canadian CSOs to meet with Prime Minister Paul Martin, Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Pettigrew and the Canadian delegation as a group in Mar del Plata, Peter Boehm indicated that the request for a meeting had been made.

Mr Boehm concluded the session by offering to hold a post-mortem consultation with CSOs in order to take a critical look at final Summit documents and identify steps forward to the next Summit.

The session adjourned at 3:00pm.