The Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) is an independent, non-governmental organization dedicated to deepening and strengthening Canada’s relations with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean through policy discussion and analysis. FOCAL’s mission is to develop a greater understanding of important hemispheric issues and to help build a stronger community of the Americas
II FOCAL FORUM OF HEMISPHERIC EXPERTS
MEETING REPORT
June 8, 2001, Ottawa, Canada

PARTICIPANTS


MEETING BACKGROUND

FOCAL convened an advisory group of leading thinkers and experts on hemispheric issues on June 8, 2001. The event was a follow-up to an inaugural meeting held in July 2000 that allowed participants to expand their networks and analyze key trends in the Americas.

The objective of the 2001 Forum was to take stock of Canada's foreign policy towards the hemisphere after the Third Summit of the Americas held in Quebec City in April 2001. The meeting sought to sustain momentum on key issues addressed at the Summit, and to outline future policy priorities for Canada in the region. Over fifty participants from Canada, the United States and Latin America took part in the meeting, representing regional and international institutions, academia, non-governmental organizations, the business community, Canadian government agencies, the media, and FOCAL's staff and Board of Directors.

The meeting's discussions focused on issues considered particularly relevant for Canada in the post-Summit period, touching on both its multilateral and bilateral engagements in the hemisphere. Four principal themes were addressed: Defending Democracy in the Hemisphere, Growth and Development, Canada-Mexico Relations, and Canada-Brazil Relations.
MEETING SUMMARY

Session 1: Defending Democracy in the Hemisphere

While democratic norms have made important gains throughout the Americas during the past two decades, participants expressed real concern over a number of growing obstacles to deepening democracy that have taken hold in many countries of the region. Ruptures of the democratic order (i.e. through conventional military coup d'états) remain unlikely, but a number of more 'subtle' threats to democracy have become the target of a renewed push to defend democracy at the regional level. Such threats include the suspension of constitutions by executive leaders, the closing of legislative bodies and the termination of elected officials' offices, violations of judicial independence, the restraint of civil society, media and opposition activities, and military interference in domestic policy-making.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter

A point of departure for the session was the Inter-American Democratic Charter discussed by foreign ministers at the June 2001 General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) in San José, Costa Rica. The Charter initiative was born out of the Quebec City Summit Declaration, which states "any unconstitutional alteration or interruption of the democratic order constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to the participation of a given state in the Summit process". Its purpose is to establish an institutional mechanism to promote and enforce basic democratic norms in OAS member states. Participants in the FOCAL Forum stressed the importance of the Charter going beyond existing mechanisms within the OAS (i.e. Resolution 1080, which focuses on overt breaches of the democratic order), and giving the defense of democracy in the hemisphere real 'teeth' to enforce a wider range of democratic practices.

Unfortunately, progress on the Democratic Charter at the San José meeting was undermined by a lack of leadership and inadequate consultation with certain member states (particularly in the Caribbean), and in the end only a draft Charter was passed. Within the draft Charter itself, the apparent absence of a new mechanism to go beyond current initiatives was a source of disappointment. While the draft does provide an element of clarity and coherence to existing initiatives on democracy, the lack of an explicit link to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) or even to the Summit process itself was lamented as a step back from earlier commitments. Some participants disagreed, saying that the Quebec City Summit had already made a connection between democracy and summity, and that a linkage in the Charter was not crucial. Still, critics questioned whether democracy could be defended effectively without clear institutional mechanisms or without a direct tie to the driving force behind Inter-American integration, namely the FTAA. In terms of enforcing an eventual Charter, many felt that economic sanctions were not a realistic option, and instead endorsed a strategy of public pressure at the regional level on member states where democracy is at risk.

Another point of concern was the Charter draft's failure to define what constitutes an "alteration or interruption" of the democratic order as introduced in the Declaration of Quebec. Some participants were less preoccupied, warning that precise definitions would fail to reflect the diversity of political systems in the region and compromise the OAS's flexibility to respond to
crises. Others, however, feared that continuing ambiguity would only serve to weaken the OAS's capacity to defend basic democratic norms, particularly the more subtle threats to democracy discussed earlier.

One positive element of the draft Democratic Charter was its strong recommendation that civil society groups be consulted in the negotiation process, thereby opening the door to a deepened role for non-governmental groups in the future. Participants suggested that civil society organizations should take a leading role in reporting and sharing information on political developments in the region, including the implementation of democracy-related Summit action items.

**Democracy from the Bottom Up**

Participants also discussed the importance of promoting democracy at the grassroots level. Critics of an over-emphasis on institutions claimed that democracy depended primarily on citizen engagement and mobilization. While others were quick to suggest that a democratic citizenry cannot be created without basic institutions and rules in place, participants generally acknowledged the importance of both approaches.

Speakers noted that while Latin American and Caribbean countries may have the formal frameworks of democracy (i.e. relatively free and fair elections and basic democratic institutions), a 'culture of democracy' is largely absent in many countries. Many citizens do not feel as though they are equal members of society, and participants spoke of a general "crisis of trust" in public institutions. Rather than being a force for democracy, public institutions in much of the region have instead hurt social cohesion and encouraged corruption. A greater access to information and political decision-making for civil society groups was seen as a step towards further developing a democratic culture.

At the same time, others questioned the value of the term 'democratic culture', suggesting that it could imply a transplantation of arbitrary values that ignored cultural diversity. Instead, many stressed social and economic exclusion as the greatest obstacles to deepening democracy. They argued that democracy could not be developed effectively in the region without reducing poverty, improving education and healthcare, fighting unemployment, and decreasing the gap between rich and poor. It was suggested that democracy is "more an effect than a cause", and is often merely a reflection of a country's social and economic conditions. Relevant to this discussion were concerns raised over the nature of economic reform programs undertaken in the region, which some participants felt had undermined inclusion and citizen solidarity.

One point of agreement was that all efforts to deepen democracy, from hemispheric initiatives to grassroots mobilization, require domestic political will. Without it, legislation becomes no more than words on paper, and civil society cannot gain meaningful access to policy-making mechanisms. Other points raised included the importance of creating open economies and encouraging small and medium-sized enterprises as a means to empower citizens, as well as establishing efficient labour market institutions to give workers a greater voice in policy-making. Also mentioned during the session, but not discussed in detail, were the role of local governments in developing more participatory political systems, the importance of political
parties for citizen representation, and the need for strong opposition groups to ensure government accountability and transparency.

Canada's Role

Participants were quick to note Canada's important contribution to the promotion of democracy in the hemisphere since it joined the OAS in 1990. Many called on Canada to assume a stronger role in the coming years, building on its successful leadership during the OAS mission to Peru in 2000. Speakers noted that democracy is intimately linked to Canada's own hemispheric interests, including the promotion of strong regional institutions along with favourable trade and investment environments, and encouraged Canada to include democratic norms and practices in its international assistance programming.

It was also felt that Canada's own political system, while far from perfect, could serve as a useful example and source of information to other countries of the hemisphere. Indeed, many felt that Canada's greatest contribution to the region is its example, particularly the coexistence of democracy with an open economic system and state-led social policies. Participants encouraged exchanges between Canadian and Latin American government officials, civil society organizations, academics, etc., to share information and to promote regional cooperation on democracy.

Finally, some participants felt that Canada should take a leading role in promoting the link between trade and democracy advanced by regional leaders during the Quebec City Summit. As the anti-free trade movement continues to grow, leaders must address concerns about the coexistence of free trade agreements and democratic governance. Otherwise, the Summit process and regional integration initiatives will likely be viewed with growing cynicism and opposition in Canada and throughout the region.

Session 2: Growth and Development

The meeting's second session focused on strategies to achieve development and prosperity in the hemisphere. Participants acknowledged that efforts to improve basic living conditions through economic openness and international trade over the past decade have generally been unsuccessful. Economic growth has been less than expected, while poverty and socio-economic inequalities remain extremely high throughout the region. The Forum's discussion served to
examine the shortcomings of recent development policies, as well as to consider strategies to foster greater equity in the region.

Economic Growth and the Washington Consensus

In what was described as the "Washington Consensus illusion" participants assessed the economic liberalization reforms promoted throughout the region over the past decade, reforms that have largely failed to generate expected levels of development. Advocates of the reforms stressed their success in modernizing economies and promoting modest growth, and faulted a lack of political will to complete the full reform packages. They argued that economic growth continues to be the main priority for the hemisphere, simply because countries do not have the necessary financial resources to implement social policies to decrease poverty. Others, however, claimed that the general priorities of the Washington Consensus were flawed, or at least misinterpreted, and that development thinking in the region had to be fundamentally re-examined.

Critics of the Washington Consensus stressed the negative impact of the reforms on the capacity of the state to function as a force for equity and development. The streamlining of the state and rapid economic de-regulation was deemed to have undermined the state's ability to distribute the benefits of trade and growth, while raising unemployment and weakening education and healthcare systems. Weak taxation systems were also cited as key barriers to development, as states have been unable, and often unwilling, to introduce or enforce progressive tax systems. As the privileged in most countries of the region continue to avoid paying income tax, states suffer from a lack of resources and inequities continue to rise.

Domestic Barriers: Education, Discrimination and the Need for Policy Coherence

A general consensus from the Forum was that improved education systems throughout the region must be an integral part of any future development strategy. Compared to many other developing regions, education systems in Latin America and the Caribbean remain badly underdeveloped and continue to serve as a force for social and economic inequality. Resources are concentrated at secondary and tertiary levels of education that are only accessible to a relatively elite group of students, while primary schooling for the masses have been largely neglected. In most countries of the region, dropout rates remain extremely high; teachers are underpaid and under trained, and educational facilities are in poor condition.

Participants were unanimous in condemning the lack of follow-up to the 1998 Summit of the Americas in Santiago, Chile, where education was the dominant agenda theme. While some faulted the lack of initiative taken by regional institutions, most felt that domestic leaders had not proven a genuine commitment to improving education standards. Beyond a lack of domestic funding for education, other problems include rampant corruption within education systems and the lack of oversight mechanisms to enforce basic standards and fiscal accountability.

Civil society organizations were deemed to have a critical role in promoting education reforms in the future. Community groups must interact with educators and school administrators to promote real change, including the establishment of evaluation mechanisms and future education
strategies. Others stressed the importance of education for economic growth and investment promotion, and felt that the private sector should be included in efforts to improve the productivity of the workforce, including the use of information technology. At the same time, many warned against the privatization of education and the possibility of expanding gaps between rich and poor.

Another central obstacle to reducing poverty and inequality is the continuing discrimination that characterizes many Latin American and Caribbean societies. Over bias against women, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples are widespread throughout the Americas, but it has yet to be addressed in an effective manner at the regional level. Most countries still lack basic legislation to protect minorities and vulnerable groups, and participants stressed the need to focus on the issue at future regional meetings.

The lack of coherent policy-making by domestic governments has also undermined development efforts in most countries of the region. Participants described the serious disconnect that often exists between various government agencies, as well as between regional commitments and actual domestic policy. The need for a greater dialogue on policy-making, including consultation between government officials and civil society groups, was stressed. Civil society groups should also take a leading role in ensuring that government commitments are carried through, including Summit initiatives.

Regional Cooperation

Participants identified a number of priorities for regional actors to improve the development opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean. As a starting point, developed countries were encouraged to open their own markets to exports from their developing neighbours. Policies such as agricultural subsidies and price supports in rich markets were seen as a key obstacle to development. Participants also suggested that Latin American countries must be relieved of their external debt burden. Particularly for the more impoverished nations of the region, investment in critical social programs is undermined by the need to pay off heavy debts to international creditors. Finally, the need to design a process of regional economic integration that enables states to address social exclusion was stressed. Participants advocated a greater link between Summit trade and anti-poverty initiatives in order to form a more coordinated development strategy for the region.

While not discussed in great detail, the Forum also addressed the issue of a development fund for the hemisphere, possibly modeled on initiatives within the European Union. Most were somewhat pessimistic about the prospects of developing such a fund given the lack of political will to create a community similar to Europe's. The long-term efforts needed to prepare countries to join such a fund are also unlikely to be undertaken in the near future.

Canada's Role

Given Canada's limited international assistance budget, participants discussed the need for a focused and concerted development policy towards the region. A key priority that emerged from the session was clearly education. Others included technical cooperation with local communities,
strategies to fight discrimination, and a commitment to help reduce external debts. In general, participants felt that Canada's engagement should prioritize the involvement of regional institutions in the elaboration of coherent development policies for the region. An integral part of this engagement must be to ensure that the Summit of the Americas agenda is linked to international assistance programming.

A final note on Canada's regional engagement touched on the increasing disconnect felt by Caribbean countries, particularly the English-speaking states, toward regional processes. While larger Latin American countries continue to take most of the regional spotlight, speakers described a number of explosive issues emerging in many Caribbean countries, including rising crime, declining social programs, and growing disillusionment with public institutions. Amid a growing power vacuum in this fragile sub-region, money launderers and drug smugglers have gained increasing influence. Given its ties to both the Caribbean (through the Commonwealth) and Latin America, Canada has a key role to play in bridging the gap between the hemisphere's sub-regions, and in ensuring that hemispheric policies include the Caribbean's dominant concerns.

Session 3: Canada-Mexico Relations and Trilateralism

The arrival of President Vicente Fox and the end of a 71-year period of one-party rule has signaled a series of important changes in Mexico. Coupled with a maturing North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and a new US President who has prioritized engagement with Mexico, the potential for deepened relations between the countries of North American is real. In Canada, there is optimism that diplomatic relations with Mexico could deepen significantly in the years to come.

Maturing Bilateral Relations

Canada-Mexico relations have expanded in recent years as a result of NAFTA and growing trade levels, but speakers noted a significant rise in bilateral activity since the arrival of President Vicente Fox in 2001. Canada was relatively quick in responding to the recent changes in Mexico, and Canadian officials have gained new access to high-level decision makers in that country. Canada has also offered timely support to the new Mexican government on a number of fronts, including its negotiations with Zapatista rebels. At the same time, Mexico seems to have gained a new interest in Canada with respect to issues including federalism, tax systems, civil service reform and government transparency.

On the policy front, Canada's engagement with Mexico has matured and become increasingly multi-dimensional. While NAFTA was clearly the driving force behind earlier relations, a new range of actors in Canada, including labour unions, environmental activists and indigenous groups have gained an increasing influence over Canadian policy. Human rights, environmental protection and democratization have now become key issues in Canada's bilateral engagement, forcing policy makers to integrate trade and social issues. By 1999, over 50 bilateral agreements across a variety of sectors had been signed by the two countries.
Continuing Concerns in Mexico and Priorities for Canada

While democracy in Mexico has received a significant shot in the arm over the past year, the challenges ahead are many. Areas of continuing concern include high levels of corruption, drug trafficking, the weakness of the judicial system, the persistence of authoritarian practices in many local areas, and extreme poverty and inequality. Over 40 million Mexicans are estimated to be living in poverty, 18 million of them in extreme poverty, and the gap between rich and poor has widened in recent years. Participants raised concern over the absence of a coherent strategy to fight poverty within Fox's many plans for the country. Also integral to any effort to improve social services in Mexico is progressive tax reform. Although a priority for the Fox administration, tax reform proposals have been opposed by Congress and remain unpopular with much of the Mexican population.

While the arrival of Vicente Fox sent a wave of euphoria through the country and much of the international community, participants noted that expectations may be too high for the new administration. Speakers stressed that key elements of Canadian policy towards Mexico must be patience, realism and a willingness to offer support over the long run. It was stressed that trade and democracy must continue to be linked in Canadian policy, thereby keeping all key actors in Canada engaged in the relationship. Participants also encouraged Canada to pressure for a prioritization of social issues in Mexico. From a more pragmatic view, others noted that Canada requires Mexico's cooperation on a number of fronts, including reforms to the NAFTA (i.e. Chapter 11). For its part, Canada could offer specific expertise and assistance in areas such as provincial-federal relations - a rising issue of importance in Mexico.

North American Trilateralism

President Fox's arrival has also signaled a new era in North American trilateral relations, and the new President has suggested a wide range of areas for future cooperation. However, participants generally felt that a number of these, including the free flow of populations and the creation of trilateral institutions, are simply too ambitious. Should the focus remain on such major long-term visions that may be unrealistic under present conditions, overall trilateral relations could falter. The need for smaller, more pragmatic and concrete steps was stressed. President Fox has also suggested a development fund to be administered through the existing North American Development Bank (a US-Mexico bilateral institution), but a number of concerns, including the efficiency of the existing institution, were raised by participants.
The discussion also identified a number of continuing obstacles to deepened trilateral relations. While President Fox has clearly signaled a new and more open era in Mexican foreign policy, it will likely take time before Mexico's traditional stance of non-interventionism is softened. For Canada, a real concern is getting its voice heard. Mexico's policy is clearly focused on the US, while the US' preoccupation with illegal immigration and drug trafficking is obviously much different than Canada's policy priorities in Mexico. Although some observers have stressed a growing competition between Canada and Mexico on a number of fronts, participants generally felt that this should not impact cooperation.

**Energy: The Engine for Future Relations?**

A consensus from the meeting was that the energy sector offers a key opportunity for trilateral integration, as well as a new priority for Canada-Mexico bilateral cooperation. Given the recent energy crises in the region, the importance of a coherent regional energy policy, including regulatory frameworks, has become evident. Participants encouraged Canadian policy-makers to engage proactively with Mexico given the countries' similar concerns. While President Fox has proposed a continental energy pact, speakers felt that such a pact would likely meet resistance in both the US and the Mexican Congresses, as well as in Canada where energy remains under provincial jurisdiction. Although the structure of an eventual regional partnership on energy was a matter of uncertainty, participants felt that Canada should take a strong leadership role in driving relations in this sector in the years to come. As the above graph shows, Canadian exports of conventional petroleum products to the US are significant and growing.

**Session 4: Canada-Brazil Relations**

While Canada-Mexico relations seem to have entered a new era of potential cooperation, things could not be more different in terms of Canada's relations with Brazil. Canada's recent ban of Brazilian beef and the ongoing trade dispute over aircraft subsidies brought bilateral relations to their lowest point in history in 2001. Both countries seem intent on condemning the actions of the other, and neither side appears prepared to back down. Before things deteriorate further and Canada's image in South America's most influential country gets any worse, the need for a new Canadian policy towards Brazil is critical.
Changing Perceptions

Although most Canadians remain relatively uninformed about Brazil, participants stressed the importance of the country for Canada's foreign policy interests in the region. Brazil is the second-leading investment destination among developing countries after China, and is already home to $6 billion in Canadian investment (over twice the level in Mexico). It boasts a large and sophisticated consumer base while also offering a key entry point to the Mercosur common market. Further, Brazil represents an important potential diplomatic partner as a 'middle power' with similar interests to Canada on issues including regional multilateralism and the 'human security' agenda.

Canada’s Trade With Brazil

While most speakers felt that both sides share the blame for the ongoing aircraft dispute, participants expressed frustration with what was described as a somewhat careless attitude by Canadian officials in dealing with Brazil. There was a real fear that recent tensions could damage bilateral relations for some time to come, and that a trade war could develop with devastating results for Canadian companies active in Brazil. Participants argued for a softening of rhetoric on the aircraft dispute in view of the overall importance of bilateral relations. Some also felt that Canadian leaders must work to understand Brazil's unique culture (and language), and to recognize the sophistication of its political system and foreign policy priorities.

Building a New Bilateral Relationship

Although a resolution to the aircraft dispute itself would certainly ease tensions, an end to the dispute in the near future is unlikely given the domestic political importance of the two companies in question. As a result, other aspects of the bilateral relationship must be prioritized. As a starting point, speakers argued for the creation a cross-sectoral dialogue on Canada-Brazil relations among policy analysts, academics, non-governmental organizations, business leaders, government officials, and even members of the Brazilian and Portuguese communities in Canada. This dialogue should then be extended to counterpart organizations and leaders in Brazil to discuss possible avenues for improved relations.
At the diplomatic level, multilateral institutions offer a key ground for cooperation, as both countries have an interest in containing unilateral policies in the region and promoting integration. Working through the OAS and other multilateral agencies, the two countries could benefit from numerous common priorities and strengths, and it was noted that there has been important diplomatic cooperation at the international level in recent years. Some suggested that Canada could support Brazil's aspirations to emerge as South America's leader as a gesture of good will, although others feared this could damage relations with countries like Argentina and Chile.

Speakers noted that Canada's image in Brazil has been seriously damaged by the recent disputes and the ensuing public demonstrations. While Brazilians may know very little about Canada, what they have heard is largely negative. At the diplomatic level, Canada has often been seen as no more than an extension of the US by Brazilian officials and has thus been the object of a certain level of distrust. To change these images, Canada should make concerted efforts to promote its culture in Brazil and to change the misperceptions of its own policies and priorities. Inter-cultural exchanges and institutional linkages would help to build a stronger link between the two populations. At the same time, Canada has gained a positive reputation in some areas, including human rights, public security, local governance and volunteerism. Partnerships in these areas must be extended and further prioritized to improve overall relations and perceptions.

Although participants were generally optimistic that the relationship could be turned around with concerted efforts on both sides, a variety of additional concerns may undermine an effective diplomatic partnership with Brazil. Political uncertainty is on the rise as President Cardoso finishes his final term in office, and the current administration has relatively little room to maneuver. Domestic concerns have also taken precedent given a number of serious economic and institutional problems that continue to undermine development. Other areas of concern for Canada are Brazil's opposition to a NAFTA-led regional integration process, and the likely possibility that the next president will not favour FTAA negotiations.

Meeting Conclusions and the Role of FOCAL

While Canada's involvement in the hemisphere has grown exponentially over the past ten years, particularly through its participation in Inter-American regional processes, financial and human resources directed towards the region are still relatively low. As a result, Canada's policy towards the Americas must set clear priorities to have a maximum impact with limited means.

Future regional policies must also take stock of successes and disappointments to date. Canada's greatest foreign policy achievement in the Americas has likely been its role in advancing regional multilateral cooperation, particularly the promotion democracy as a key hemispheric priority. At the bilateral level, Canada's deepening relations with Mexico over the past decade are a significant success and evident across a variety of sectors, including trade, educational partnerships, and civil society networks. At the same time, participants felt that a continuing challenge for Canada was to set coherent and coordinated foreign and development policies towards the region. In this way, Canada's interests in the region and its own values should be linked to achieve clear objectives. It was also suggested that multilateral efforts must not lead to
the neglect of key bilateral relationships. Deteriorating relations with Brazil, widely viewed to be the greatest failure of Canadian foreign policy in the region, are a case in point.

In some ways, the discussions symbolized a change in tone from the great optimism throughout the region at the time of Canada's entry into the Inter-American community in 1990. A number of sobering realities have re-opened what were thought to be older debates and issues in the region, including the defense of democracy, shortcomings of development policy, and threats to regional integration. Still, participants stressed the importance of sustaining Canada's regional engagement. As an open and relatively vulnerable economy, Canada must continue its efforts to reduce global vulnerability by supporting regional institutions and encouraging countries to pool sovereignty for longer-term mutual goals. Canada also has important economic interests in the region, including the promotion of exports and securing investment opportunities. Further, Latin America offers Canadians across the country a unique opportunity for cultural exchange.

Participants were optimistic that Canada also represents an important regional partner for Latin American and Caribbean countries. Beyond cooperation within regional institutions, Canada offers a source of information and experience on a variety of issues, including building democratic norms and practices, public sector reform, federal-state relations, sustainable development and the transition from a natural resource-based economy to high technology. Some participants noted that many Latin American and Caribbean countries have only recently discovered what Canada has to offer as a regional partner, and that opportunities for cooperation will only deepen in the coming years.

**FOCAL's Contribution**

Although the meeting concentrated on a limited number of key issues and foreign policy objectives for Canada in the Americas, a number of key priorities emerged from the discussions. Several implied an important role for FOCAL and its partner organizations in promoting Canadian engagement in the region, including:

- **Sustaining the focus on the Americas in Canada after the Summit of the Americas.** While some post-Summit fatigue may be inevitable, a focused effort to follow-up on Summit initiatives is critical to make progress on key Canadian foreign policy objectives, as well as to raise the credibility of the Summit process and regional integration in the eyes of Canadians.

- **Promoting coherent and focused Canadian foreign and development policies towards the Americas.** FOCAL should continue to take the lead in building a network of experts and organizations to address the key issues facing Canada as a member of the Americas. This network should aim to support cooperation among different agencies of the Canadian government, as well as among leading Canadian experts and non-governmental organizations focused on the region.

- **Building civil society partnerships and mechanisms to promote democracy in the region.** As the meeting's discussion suggested, civil society groups have a key role to play in sharing information and analysis on political developments in the region to promote basic democratic
norms and practices. FOCAL could assist in the development of a network of civil society organizations committed to multilateral cooperation on democracy in the region.

• **Re-examining trilateral relations and partnerships in North America.** Given the rapid changes brought about by NAFTA, population movements and political and economic decentralization, the trilateral relationship requires a new set of mechanisms and institutions that go beyond what exists at the regional level. FOCAL should convene Canadian, US and Mexican leaders and experts to consider the evolution of this relationship and strategies to develop appropriate responses to key issues. Such discussions could eventually be extended to Caribbean and Central American countries as well.

• **Promote dialogue and institutional linkages to improve and deepen Canada-Brazil relations.** As discussed during the final session of the meeting, avenues of cooperation must be explored to reverse the downward spiral in relations between the two countries. FOCAL has a key role to play in bringing Canadian experts together to consider future policy objectives towards Brazil, as well as to foster cooperation and dialogue with Brazilian institutions and leaders.