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Cultural Diversity: A New International Instrument

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Cultural Diversity: A New International Instrument

Thank you Mme. Chairman

I am very pleased to be with you here this morning. H el ene Gosselin (Assistant Deputy Minister, International and Intergovernmental Affairs at Canadian Heritage) was unfortunately called to travel out of the country on international sports business this past weekend, and so she could not be here this morning.

I am however, very happy to have the opportunity to provide a contribution to this discussion with this impressive panel - which includes some of my colleagues in cultural diversity. I would like to do two things with the time allotted to me this morning:

Share with you the federal government's views on the emerging international cultural diversity agenda, and our strategic approach

And secondly, discuss Canada's efforts to collaborate internationally towards a new international instrument on cultural diversity.

Context: Globalization and Cultural Diversity

The logical, first place to start is "What do we mean by cultural diversity"?

In an increasingly global world, our diversity expresses who we are. The knowledge of our differences makes us stronger people and unites as a society.

In the context of the international agenda, cultural diversity is about more than content or media that we speak often about in Canada but also -

values and identity
freedom of expression and choice
pluralism of ideas
human development
access, participation and prosperity
languages, histories, and traditions

Cultural diversity is a human resources which inspires creativity and drives innovation and progress.

It would be wonderful to be able to say here today that Canada was the first to see the integral importance of cultural diversity to prosperity, participation, and development. However, a variety of international fora have recognized the importance of cultural diversity to social, economic and political agendas going back a number of years:

UNESCO Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development “Our Creative Diversity” (1995)

UNESCO’s Stockholm Action Plan identified “cultural policy as one of the key components of endogenous and sustainable development” (1998)

UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001)

La francophonie - conclusions of Experts Group in 1999, and Declaration of Cultural Ministers in 2001

Cultural diversity has also been recognized in non-cultural fora such as -

G8 - Koln and Birmingham Communiques (98-99) - links to quality of life

World Bank - 1999 - Culture and sustainable development

OSCE - 1999 Istanbul Summit link to conflict resolution (linked to quality of life, conflict resolution, human security).

However, this recognition of the importance of cultural diversity has yet to lead to concerted action to realize / maximize the contribution of cultural diversity for social and economic development.

What would it mean to realize this potential of cultural diversity?

It would mean:

ensuring that all cultures have the means to express their voices and opinions in a changing world;

achieving a balance between:

- the need participate fully in the global environment (policy making, trade economic space, cultural expression) and

- embracing global citizenship and strengthening national and local identities;

ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of the opportunities and benefits for all (between developed and developing countries, and within countries).

Canada’s efforts in the international arena have this as their objective: international action to realize the potential of cultural diversity.

Central to the concept of globalization are information and communications technologies, economic integration (including industry consolidation in the cultural sector), trade liberalization, and the knowledge-based society.

Globalization is creating a context in which our ability to nurture differences in all aspects of cultural expression has never been as promising as it is today. These trends offer incredible opportunities for creativity, sharing and learning, participation, and development.

At the same time, globalization presents the potential risks of:

- a widening gap between technology “haves” and “have nots”;
- concentration of control over content in fewer and fewer hands; and
- an effectively unilingual global dialogue on the Internet.

These risks will become reality if the global exchange of information and ideas is unequally distributed and overwhelming to smaller or local cultures.

Trade liberalization is one of the most talked about issues associated with globalization. Canada, perhaps more than many countries, is “globalized” in this respect; it depends on trade for prosperity and benefits from open markets around the world, and a rules-based environment that ensures certainty.

However, existing global trade rules are governed primarily by economic principles and the current international rules based environment is challenging the ability of some traditional cultural policy tools to achieve national objectives. Over 100 countries supported the 1998 UNESCO Stockholm Action Plan which recognized that cultural products are not like other goods and services. The lessons learned from recent multilateral events like the MAI and Seattle show us that social, cultural and environmental agendas are of fundamental importance to global governance.

Canada’s Cultural Policy Objectives

To look briefly at Canada and the impact of globalization on our ability to pursue our cultural policy objectives....

Our cultural policy model is already one of openness based on:

- freedom of choice for consumers
- freedom of expression for creators
- using a range of policy instruments and a mix of partnerships

Our objectives - with government as direct provider, patron, and referee are -

- to ensure Canadian choices and to connect Canadians to the diverse Canadian experience by:
 - supporting artists, creators and innovators
 - building capacity
 - connecting Canadians to each other and the world
 - focusing on young Canadians

In the context of globalization, these principles and objectives remain valid. However, the policy instruments may need to adapt to changes in the domestic and international environment.

So, bearing mind both the positive potential of globalization, and the need for, and our commitment to, a diversity of expression, the Canadian government concluded that real global cultural diversity will not be sustained by the forces of the market or the evolution of technology alone. We need a new international approach to cultural diversity which will maximize the benefits of openness and ensure diversity of expression.

A New International Instrument On Cultural Diversity

The federal government first articulated its commitment to “develop a new approach internationally to support the diversity of cultural expression in countries around the world” in the Speech from the Throne in 1999. This commitment was based on the work of the House of Commons Standing Committees on Canadian Heritage and Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and most interestingly, the cultural industries Sectoral Advisory Group on International Trade (a group of private sector leaders which advises the Minister of International Trade) which all agreed that Canada was at a crossroads in the relationship between cultural policies and international agreements on trade and investment.

They recommended a new approach to cultural trade, reaffirming the importance of our cultural diversity and the ability of each country to ensure that its own stories and experiences will be available to both its own citizens and the rest of the world.

In October 1999, the Government of Canada announced its intent to pursue a new international instrument on cultural diversity which would set out clear ground rules for the maintenance of policies that promote culture while respecting the rules of the international trading system and ensuring markets for cultural exports. The new instrument would also recognize the importance of cultural diversity issues to international social and economic development.

The Canadian government further stated its intention to continue to seek the maximum flexibility in international agreements to pursue its cultural policy objectives pending negotiation of a new instrument. This commitment was restated in our initial position for the current GATS negotiations.

This has been our international agenda for the past two years. We identified challenges at two levels:

First is the need to build domestic and international support for cultural diversity as a priority objective, and to articulate a common understanding of what we are talking about, what we want to achieve, and what we want the world to look like (a common vision, principles, and objectives). Some key interests for Canada in a multilateral commitment include that:

- cultural goods and services play a broader role in our societies than that of simple commodities;

- cultural diversity recognizes both openness to diverse cultural influences and the importance of promoting local content;

- cultural diversity plays an important role in social cohesion, economic prosperity, and human security; and

- governments have a key role to play in preserving and promoting cultural diversity.

Second is the need to mobilize that support toward action - toward action for a new instrument on cultural diversity - alliances and strategic partnerships within and between governments, international organizations, private sector actors, and NGOs.

International Action

Canada has not by any means been alone in this agenda. Over the past few years, the importance of cultural diversity to social and economic development - and in some cases the need for a new instrument - has been recognized by a range of organizations including:

- intergovernmental fora (G8 Okinawa, UNESCO, La francophonie, the Council of Europe, Hemispheric Summit)
- parliamentarians (Inter-parliamentary Union)
- Associations in the cultural milieu (e.g., Coalition for Cultural Diversity which hosted an international meeting in September 2001 which seems to have been a catalyst for action in a number of countries)
- NGOs - e.g., the International Network for Cultural Diversity

Of particular interest is the International Network on Cultural Policy (INCP) which is among the international cultural organizations actively discussing the issue of cultural diversity. The INCP is an informal international Ministerial-level body to build increased awareness and support for cultural diversity in an era of globalization and technological change.

In September 2001, INCP Ministers at the annual meeting in Lucerne endorsed the scope and

framework of an international instrument on cultural diversity and called for a draft text for consideration at the next Ministerial in South Africa to be held in October 2002. Canada is chairing the working group of some 15 countries, including key hemispheric partners like Mexico and Colombia among others, working to meet that deadline.

Western hemispheric leaders also recently recognized the importance of cultural diversity in the declaration and action plan of the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. They called for deepened hemispheric dialogue at the ministerial, official and civil society levels on the economic and social value of cultural diversity in the hemisphere.

As part of the implementation of the Summit Action Plan, in cooperation with the OAS, Canada hosted an experts seminar on cultural diversity issues in March 2002 in Vancouver. Some 20 country representatives, academics, cultural associations, and NGOs debated the issues of cultural diversity over two days at this forum. Topics ranged from the participation of all peoples, to training, to cultural heritage, to much else. A key topic, which generated perhaps most discussion, was the role of cultural industries in the development and sustaining of a diversity of cultural expression, and their role in social and economic development. The next step in this process will be a Ministerial meeting in Colombia July 2002.

A strong dialogue for action has begun. Fora like this conference, with experts from across the hemisphere and elsewhere, are important to deepen and further debate and discussion on cultural diversity - and the international action to be taken.

Conclusions

While recognizing the challenges, Canada embraces the opportunities of globalization - we see cultural diversity and globalization as mutually supportive concepts.

Cultural diversity is not about building walls. It is about encouraging openness while recognizing the importance of the production of, and respect for diverse cultural content.

The current global environment requires a global approach and if we get it right as a global community it will be about achieving a balance between all nations participating fully within the global community while ensuring our individual voices can be heard and internal diversity flourishes.

We believe that a New International Instrument on Cultural Diversity will be a key tool in getting it right.

Thank you.