

Hard power, soft power: Canada in the world. The 2016 MISC conference

Draft prospectus, not for circulation

Preface:

On the eve of Canada's sesquicentennial year, it seems appropriate to take stock once again of Canada's place in the world and in the community of nations. Over the course of the last government, Canada's image and actions around the world have undergone significant changes. Looking back, what have been the effects of these changes? Looking forward, where place do we want for Canada in the world?

More than a quarter-century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Canada's international role is no longer defined in terms of Cold War blocs. Nor, many would argue, are we primarily the nation of peace-keepers so many once imagined. How should Canada position itself internationally? Who are our natural allies? What is the place of middle-powers like Canada in the world's present-day political geography? What is the appropriate balance of hard and soft diplomacy?

In 2016, what is Canada's place in the world?

Suggested themes:

In 2016, what is Canada's image around the world? In Latin America, people pay tribute to our multiculturalism, then criticize our visa policies. Elsewhere, they admire our public health care system but accuse us of being lax on environmental protection. We are known for our diversity but more and more criticized for the condition of indigenous peoples. Is Canada's present-day image clear or confused?

What has driven our foreign policy over the last half-decade? Has the emphasis on trade and economic opportunity come at the expense of other kinds of influence? How are we promoting Canadian values elsewhere in the world? Has cultural diplomacy come to take too much of a back seat?

With no Canadian silicon valley to point to, and with what many consider a floundering high tech sector, are we seen as a place of innovation and fresh thinking in the world? From Netflix to *Breaking Bad*, Canada has contributed little to a global culture which seems more and more unified. Has Canadian culture lost its cool in the world?

Where are our universities in the international landscape? In recent years, Canada and its provinces have signed high-profile agreements with many countries to encourage the flow of students and researchers to Canada and to establish a Canadian presence abroad? Are we losing out again to the UK and US as high education becomes increasingly internationalized?

Issues: "Canada in the World" was the title of the last MISC conference on similar issues. We need a new name.

Structure and planning: Irving Abella has kindly agreed to play a prominent role in an organizing committee, and he and I will put together such a committee over the next few weeks.

Possible partners: the Canada International Council. Forum des Amériques, Oxfam Canada, etc.