

**International Conference on Federalism  
Mont-Tremblant, October 1999**

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**Session 9) Plenary: Youth Report**

**YOUTH RAPPOREUR'S REPORT**

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Honoured guests, dear participants,

As Mr. Voscherau told you, my name is Marie-France Pelletier. I am an Acadian from New Brunswick, member of a minority group which is managing to thrive and develop within a federalist context in Canada.

I have been given the daunting task of reporting on the views and opinions of a very diverse group of delegates that compose the youth delegation. At the youth plenary session yesterday, discussions were lively, intelligent and wide-ranging. It is now my task to try to bottle the effervescence shown by those 87 delegates in a 15-minute presentation.

As one of my colleagues confided at the end of the session, "When I heard that you were going to give the youth report, I thought you were very lucky. Now I'm not so sure."

To tell the truth, at 2:00 this morning, as I finished the first draft of my speech, I wasn't so sure either. But I'll do my best to convey the ideas as accurately as possible.

It is also my task, unplanned and unexpected, to speak for women at this Conference. As almost all the youth participants lamented, women were pretty much absent from the general plenary and roundtable panels. It's an unfortunate omission which will certainly be rectified in the future.

I'd like to take a few moments to describe the discussion process in the youth plenary. The participants split up into 11 discussion groups, with approximately eight people per group. They were asked to discuss these four questions:

- What are the critical issues federal governments will have to face in the future?
- Which issues should decision-makers and politicians consider as priorities?
- Which important issues were not addressed at this Conference?
- How will you apply what you have learned at this Conference to your country or

your community?

The discussions were very lively, as you have probably already guessed.

## **CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE FUTURE**

The participants identified a certain number of issues and challenges federal systems will have to face in the future. They pointed out the following, among other things:

- It will be important to show more recognition for national identities, minority groups, and particularly Aboriginal groups, within federations. Ideally, these groups should be assured of participation, or at the very least consultation, in the negotiation of international agreements or in decision-making processes at a national level.
- It is also important to recognize that federalist states must have the necessary powers to act in the public interest, but that it is also necessary to have common economic development strategies and national standards to ensure socio-economic equity at the level of the federation as a whole. Above all, it is essential to establish a balance between federal and provincial rights and responsibilities.
- Federal systems will also have to determine how they can flourish in the context of globalization.
- As I alluded to earlier, it was felt that equal partnerships between government, civil society and the economy must be established. Many in civil society are marginalized and there is a need to accommodate national groups, pluralism and tolerance in federal systems.
- There will have to be a redefinition of a minimum core of principles any federal system should meet. These core principles should address the issue of human rights and how to ensure their development and protection within the federalist system.
- Federations need to identify mechanisms to share burdens and balance the interest of rich and poor regions. They will have to find ways for social policy and equalization transfers to foster development and not dependency.
- Federations will also have to examine the use of different models of democracy within their borders, like direct involvement, through referendums for instance, or representational involvement.

## **PRIORITIES FOR POLITICIANS AND POLICY MAKERS**

When discussions revolve around priorities for politicians and decision-makers, themes inevitably become interwoven. So these are the priorities participants came up with:

- Federations should examine the role of multinationals. Globalization has a

human face and federations must bear these interests in mind as well.

- Federations should foster symmetry in economic development.
- Federations should address the widening of disparities across cultural, social and racial lines and they should ensure equality within members of their federal system.
- In the era of globalization, federations must protect the political participation of individual citizens and groups. They must strive to explain federalist principles to citizens outside the political class. In other words, they must make federalism and its principles less an affair of the political elite.
- Some federations will have the task of rebuilding their countries and ensuring reconciliation after de-colonization.
- It was also suggested that federal systems should take a step back and re-examine their devolution of powers systematically every 10 years.
- Federations will also have to constantly bear in mind issues of human rights such as education, social welfare, and security.

## **ISSUES NOT ADDRESSED AT THE CONFERENCE**

In the spirit of constructive criticism, participants identified a certain amount of issues that were not addressed at this Conference. These issues and views could well be considered in the elaboration of future conferences:

- A certain number of terms should be defined at the outset of the Conference. In this case, it would have been beneficial to find a common definition for federalism and for globalization so that everyone can share common concepts.
- Many youth participants felt that future conferences should strive to be less western and northern focused. Future conferences should include issues and discussions relevant to the South. Therefore, more discussion of new and evolving federations is needed. Young and old federations can face different challenges. In young federations, for instance, elimination of corruption is a major issue.
- It was also felt that discussions were sometimes too isolated to problems faced by individual countries instead of providing a consolidated view of federalism, not just in one's own country, but in comparison with other countries.
- There could also be a discussion of failed federations and the pitfalls of federalism. What happens when a federation breaks down?
- As I eluded to earlier, there should not only be more women panelists, but discussions could also be held on the impact of federal structures on gender participation.
- Many participants feel the need to address the redefinition of environmental issues and policies.
- What is sovereignty and how is it defined in federated and non-federated states?
- What is the role of the judiciary in federalism?
- Discussions could be held on supranational organizations such as EU and

NAFTA, for example. Perhaps these could be seen as examples of real world federalism.

- And, last but not least, there must be discussion on the role of youth within federations.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR THE LESSONS LEARNED**

Youth participants were unanimous in the belief that they have benefited from participating in this Conference.

This Conference has broadened our views. We have learned of problems in Canada and in other countries. We will be able to apply the information and experiences of other countries to our own. And many of us have been able to put our countries' challenges into perspective. Our challenges may not be as serious compared to threats of civil war, for instance.

Participants were also very mindful that we are gatekeepers. We must distribute what we've learned at home and we will do so by either:

- Making contributions through academia, the civil service and community groups.
- Organizing conferences on federalism and organizing informal discussion groups of people active in political parties and who are representative of all national groups.
- Bringing back educational programs in our countries, possibly with resources from the Forum.
- And simply by boiling it down to the local level within student unions, at the community level, and in our relationships between the different levels of government.

For example, when we decided to form a youth association in my province, we studied all the applicable models available. We ended up choosing to unite in the form of a federation because it is the model which offered us the greatest opportunity to bring together the different types of youth groups in existence, and to give them an equal voice within our organization. That is the type of concrete application that can result from our experience at this Conference.

In conclusion, I am going to allow myself to make a personal commentary. I would like to add that this Conference has been extremely beneficial to me. A little over three months ago I started a job as social policy advisor to a newly elected government, filled with good intentions for improving the lot of our province in the context of a federation which, I hope, will be strong, united, but most of all, respectful of all its components.

This week's exchanges and discussions will be of invaluable help to me in my job,

and I feel very privileged to have been able to be a part of them.

At this point I would like to take the time to thank the organizers of the Conference, as well as the numerous volunteers who contributed to the success of this gathering.

Now, as most of you return to your home country, the youth participants will be heading to Ottawa for the second part of their program. That's where we will be applying all the principles we have just learned in an intergovernmental conference simulation, designed by Professor Jonathan Rose of Queens University in Ontario.

That's it for the youth report. I could have added a thousand and one more things, but I hope that my presentation has at least conveyed the key points of our youth discussions and viewpoints.

Thank you again. I wish you a good finish to this Conference.

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