



Inter-State Council Secretariat
Government of India
Ministry of Home Affairs



Forum of
Federations

The Fourth International Conference on Federalism

Background

In March 2005, at the Third International Conference on Federalism at Brussels, Minister of State Shri Prithviraj Chavan on behalf of the government of India invited the Fourth International Conference on Federalism to India in 2007. Subsequently, the Forum of Federations was invited to cooperate with the Inter-State Council Secretariat, Government of India in the planning and organization of the 2007 conference in New Delhi.

The timing of the conference in India is appropriate since it coincides with the Diamond Jubilee of India's independence.

Past International Conferences

The Forum of Federations was established by Canada as the secretariat for the First International Conference on Federalism held at Mt.Tremblant in October 1999. In light of separatist tendencies during the mid-1990s, the need for an international forum where federal countries could exchange ideas and information, compare their experiences, and devise new solutions to common problems was profound. This conference provided the first opportunity for experts and practitioners from around the world to ponder the relevance of Federalism in an Age of Globalization.

Following the success of the Mt.Tremblant conference, the Swiss government invited the Second International Conference to be held in Switzerland. A joint initiative by the Federal and cantonal authorities, the Second International Conference was held in August 2002 at St.Gallen under the title Federalism in a Changing World: Learning from each other. Building on the Canadian conference, the Swiss sought for the first time to organize the event around issues and questions along thematic lines. A comprehensive conference methodology for shared learning was developed and, participant engagement and dialogue at the center of this conference.

At the conclusion of the Swiss conference, Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt announced that Belgium would host the next one. The Third International Conference on Federalism conference was held in March 2005 at Brussels under the title Federalism: Turning diversity into harmony, sharing best practices. The Conference was timed to coincide with a series of events aiming to celebrate the 175th anniversary of Belgium's independence, and the 25th anniversary of federalism in the country.

Plenary speakers at these conferences have included world leaders such as President Bill Clinton (USA), President Ousegun Obasanjo (Nigeria), President Johannes Rau (Germany), Prime Minister Jean Chrétien (Canada), Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel (Austria), James Wolfensohn (World Bank), among others. Furthermore, the number of countries represented in doubled from forty at Mt.Tremblant to eighty at Brussels.

There were several common elements running through each conference. All conferences were designed to address the needs of those involved in practice of federalism at all levels. All created a neutral and safe space for free discussion. All fostered a sense of community among participants, forged by a shared interest in federalism. All offered an opportunity to network and share in a variety of ways. All reflected, in some way, the particular culture and personality of the host country.



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The proceedings of published the conclusion of each conference provided a link to the next conference. And finally, the Forum of Federations worked closely with each country to offer assistance on content and organizational matters, as well a share information and knowledge gained from the lessons of organizing successive conferences.

Fourth International Conference on Federalism

Following the Indian government's decision to invite the Fourth International Conference on Federalism to India, the Forum and the Inter-State Council Secretariat (ISCS) concluded a memorandum of understanding to work collaboratively as co-organizers of the conference. The memorandum covers content preparation, organizational matters and the development of a conference communication package, including the development of a conference website and a distinctive logo for the conference in the tradition of past conferences and encapsulates the spirit of India.

Content Preparation

The ISCS has taken the lead in setting up two committees – Academic and Executive – to assist in the content preparation and organizational aspects of the conference. The Forum of Federations is represented on both along with other departments of relevant departments of the government of India.

The conference will be based on four broad themes, which are of broad interest internationally, allowing countries to learn from each other, and showcase India's considerable achievements in federalism. The themes identified include Building and Accommodating Diversity, Emerging Issues in Fiscal Federalism, Interaction in a federal system and Local Government and Federal Systems.

Each theme is developed by a panel of theme coordinators consisting of two Indian and two international experts. These experts represent constitute some of the leading authorities on different aspects of federalism in India and worldwide. The theme coordinators will write overview papers for each theme as well as identify three sub-themes for discussion at the conference.

Content development is facilitated through two pre-conference work sessions for theme coordinators and sub-theme paper writers. This ensures that all discussion papers for the conference are thoroughly reviewed before being circulated to conference delegates.

The first of these events was the Coordinators' Work Session where each theme was developed and refined, sub-themes are identified in April 2006. The theme coordinators were then responsible for identifying sub-theme experts. These experts identify questions, issues and cases for discussion at the main conference. The draft theme and sub-theme will be peer reviewed at a Pre-Conference between 21st and 23rd February 2006. This allows for any revisions to be made before the papers are finally circulated as discussion papers to conference delegates

Therefore, prior to the main conference each conference delegate will have access to a complete set of background material either in print or via the conference website. The website is also the primary public portal for conference information and will host press releases, updates and interactive registration capabilities.



Methodology

The sub-themes form the basis of work sessions at the main conference. A distinctive conference methodology aims for a conference that is as interactive as possible and provide as many delegates with a role to play during the work sessions. With four themes and three sub themes per theme, twelve work sessions can be run on each day of the conference.

The work of each work session will be based around the discussion of a country case or an issue. These cases are presented by more than one person so as to capture the diversity of perspectives. These presentations then form the basis of discussions at the work sessions. It will be the task of each work session chair to strictly moderate the discussion and ensure that as many delegates as possible are able to contribute to the discussion. Finally each work session will be concluded a summing up of lessons learnt by a discussant.

The work sessions are designed to be meaningful and inclusive such that they reflect the views of politicians, civil servants, academics, young professionals and other members of civil society. This is all the more important because the conference is designed to be practitioner oriented.

Themes and Subthemes

The following subthemes were identified during the Coordinators' Work Session in New Delhi.

1.0 Building on and Accommodating Diversities

- 1.1 Nation Building and Diversity
- 1.2 Autonomy and Diversity
- 1.3 Managing Conflicts of Diversity

2.0 Emerging Issues in Fiscal Federalism

- 2.1 Assignment System in Federations
- 2.2 Resolving Fiscal Conflicts
- 2.3 Regional Equity

3.0 Interaction in a federal system

- 3.1 Anticipating and handling tension and conflict
- 3.2 Techniques, structures and processes
- 3.3 Accountability and transparency

4.0 Local Government and Federal Systems

- 4.1 Enhancement of democracy through empowerment of disadvantaged groups.
- 4.2 Functioning of local governments and their relationship with upper levels of government
- 4.3 Governance of Megacities in federal orders