

Welcoming Remarks at the Forum

“Democracy in the Americas: Are Canadians and Latin Americans on the same wavelength?”

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Bonjour! C’est un immense plaisir pour nous de vous accueillir au Centre de recherches pour le développement international – le CRDI. L’événement de cet après-midi est organisé en collaboration avec nos collègues de l’ACDI.

D’ailleurs, ils se joignent à moi pour vous souhaiter la bienvenue et surtout pour vous remercier d’avoir choisi de vous joindre à nous cet après-midi pour traiter des grandes questions entourant la démocratie en Amérique. Nous sommes vraiment choyés d’avoir avec nous Madame Marta Lagos de Santiago (Chili), Madame Donna Nixon d’Ottawa, et Monsieur Christopher Sabatini de New York. À travers leurs présentations ils nous aideront à mieux saisir les grands enjeux de la démocratie en Amérique et à mieux comprendre ce que les citoyens de notre grande région en pensent. Ma collègue, Madame Suzanne Laporte, vice-présidente de la direction générale des Amériques de l’ACDI, vous présentera nos panelistes avec plus de détails dans quelques minutes.

I am especially pleased that this event is taking place so close to the summer meeting of our Board of Governors next week, because it means that our regional directors, including Dr. Federico Burone, are here with us. Federico is IDRC’s Regional Director for the Latin America and Caribbean region and is IDRC’s representative in the region. Today’s presentations will be very useful to him in assessing our future programming in the region.

IDRC has been supporting research projects in the region right from its creation in 1970. Initially, much of IDRC’s work in the region was carried out on an individual country basis, as the region evolved from a series of military and dictatorial governments to emerging democracies. IDRC’s support was instrumental, during the darkest years of the military regimes, in preserving spaces for independent and critical thinking. Some IDRC-supported groups (for example, in Chile) eventually became key players in the economic policy process during successful democratic transitions.

During the period of military dictatorships of the Southern Cone in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, IDRC—with other donors—helped social scientists maintain their research and teaching in economic policy, education, and issues of urban and rural development.

When transitions began, the work of these researchers contributed to the hard course of democratization—preserving pluralism and informing new policies. Indeed, recipients of IDRC grants in some cases assumed senior posts in post-dictatorship governments. In a 2006 interview, an advisor to the Chilean President attributed Chile's successful economic policies after the transition to democracy to research that had been supported by IDRC years earlier. On numerous occasions, individuals associated with IDRC have gone on to become heads of government or senior officials including Presidents Ricardo Lagos of Chile and Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil and Finance Minister Alejandro Foxley of Chile. We like to believe that their years of working with IDRC have influenced them in becoming strong advocates of the role of knowledge and research in building and maintaining healthy democracies.

Although today IDRC increasingly works through global and regional networks of academic, non-governmental, private, and public-sector research institutions, contributing to building healthy democracies and reducing poverty remain the focus of our work. The same objectives guide our partners such as the Latin American Trade Network and the Mercosur Economic Research Network. Through their work they provide evidence-based research as a basis for sound public policy and legislation, which is crucial to maintaining sound democracies.

In collaboration with CIDA, through the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas, we develop strategic networks and support innovative technology initiatives to narrow the digital divide in the Americas. Projects supported by ICA have empowered local communities through the use of information and communication technologies in the areas of health, education, and e-government, and by helping citizens to exercise their democratic rights.

In fact, our projects have involved many different groups. Recently, IDRC supported researchers in Brazil to engage youth on democracy. Using a deliberative polling methodology developed by the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN, which is located right here on the sixth floor), the researchers conducted dialogues – focus groups – with young people in each of Brazil's metropolitan areas. The dialogues dealt with the future of their country and, most importantly, the young people's role in the country's democratic process.

Last year, with the support of IDRC's regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean, our research partners took the results of these consultations to numerous public forums and to the media throughout the country. This engaged many stakeholders – the media, civil society, universities, municipal and provincial governments, and the federal government. In the end, many of the findings that emanated from these dialogues found their way into Brazil's new Youth Policy.

Inspired by the success of the Brazilian experience, CPRN held its first *National Dialogue and Summit for Young Canadians* soon after.

Je terminerai aujourd'hui en disant que la recherche dans les pays en développement peut favoriser l'essor de la démocratie, et ce, de plusieurs façons. La recherche est propice à la libre investigation et au débat. La liberté d'expression, la liberté de recherche et un débat ouvert sont les fondements d'une démocratie vivace. La liberté d'exécuter des travaux, d'en publier les résultats et de les exposer au débat public sans crainte de représailles en dit long sur l'état de la démocratie et des droits de la personne dans un pays. La liberté d'expression et la liberté de recherche sont également déterminantes pour stimuler l'innovation dont toute société a besoin pour favoriser son développement et sa croissance à long terme. Une société ne peut tirer pleinement partie des technologies conçues à l'étranger à moins d'avoir ses propres capacités de recherche.

La recherche élargit l'éventail de solutions concrètes face à des problèmes persistants. En effet, la recherche met davantage de solutions concrètes à la disposition des citoyens, des organismes et des responsables des politiques. La recherche fait ressortir les compromis nécessaires et la complexité des problèmes, et elle met au jour des perspectives différentes. La recherche inspire le débat et aide les citoyens à bien examiner les questions difficiles. La recherche alimente l'innovation.

Comme vous voyez les travaux du CRDI sont vastes, mais je m'arrête ici car vous êtes venus écouter nos panelistes. Alors je cède la parole à madame Laporte.

Merci!