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Managing Conflict Necessary to Navigating the Future

Ottawa – A report released today by Canadian Policy Research Networks says that Canada's social fabric is becoming frayed, and that fostering social cohesion will be a key strategy to mend society's loose ends.

As an increasingly diverse nation, Canada's values are changing. At the same time, many of its citizens are living in poverty. Without paid work, they are becoming disillusioned with the multiple false starts of a staggering economy. According to *Mapping Social Cohesion: The State of Canadian Research*, menacing signs in economic and political arenas lead to basic questions about how to foster a tolerant and democratic society. Efforts to strengthen social cohesion through shared values and commitment to a community is one strategy to adapt to the ongoing transformation. Other strategies include building social capital or strengthening the social economy through the non-profit sector.

"The concept of social cohesion is more a journey than a destination," says Canadian Policy Research Networks President Judith Maxwell. "This study is very much a map for policy and academic communities, meant to guide meaningful discussions, build bridges and discover new ways of navigating the conflicts," she says.

In writing the report, research associate Jane Jenson, a professor of political science at the University of Montreal, traced the evolution of social cohesion through Canadian and international literature to provide a historical perspective. As the report points out, this is not the first time that philosophers of social contracts have paid heed to social cohesion. With rapid social change, especially where diversity has threatened peoples' ability to live together peacefully, academic and policy communities have addressed social cohesion.

According to Ms. Jenson, "social cohesion evokes an image of consensus, of avoiding conflict. Instead, we should think of social cohesion as the result of a society successfully managing conflict without making it worse."

With the social and political strains that have been felt throughout this era of globalization, discussions have again turned to issues of order, stability and cohesion. The report clarifies contemporary thoughts on social cohesion, identifies gaps in the current debate, and maps out a future research agenda.

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CPRN is a national not-for-profit research institute whose mission is to create knowledge and lead public debate on social and economic issues important to the well-being of Canadians, in order to help build a more just, prosperous and caring society.

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