A New Social Model for Canada – A Citizens' Perspective

Friday, June 4, 2004 – Canada's "social architecture" is out of step with new social realities. It's time to reassess our critical social needs and the way we choose to meet them.

New research from CPRN addresses the challenge of redesigning Canada's social model to accord with an ageing society, new family structures, changing immigration patterns and the distribution of income and work in the knowledge economy.

The eighth of the *Social Architecture Papers* from CPRN's Family Network, is based on the premise that "citizens' values must be incorporated into the framing and design characteristics of a new social architecture."

And just what are those values today?

Mary Pat MacKinnon, Director of CPRN's Public Involvement Network, answers that question in ***Citizens' Values and the Canadian Social Architecture: Evidence from Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future***. To do so, she draws on the results of last year's *Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future*. More than 400 participants in ten day-long dialogues from coast to coast grappled with the economic and social changes of the past 50 years and their implications for the roles of governments, businesses, citizens and communities in ensuring the well-being of Canadians.

In the process, they reached a remarkable consensus on a number of core values they saw as distinctively Canadian:

- *Shared community*: despite regional, language, cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic differences, citizens found they had many shared values that reinforced their feelings of attachment to their shared community of Canada.
- *Equality and justice*: citizens believe each person should be respected, valued and treated equally – which means providing equal opportunity for all regardless of race, creed, gender or social position, and creating chances for people born with or experiencing disadvantages.

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- *Respect for diversity*: valuing ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity and lifestyle choices, as long as they are consistent with overarching principles, like equality.
- *Mutual responsibility*: individuals have a responsibility and a right to contribute to society and, in return, each of us can expect to be supported in making that contribution.
- *Accountability*: institutions, private and public, are expected to be ethical in their behaviour, honest in action and word, transparent in their actions and responsible for wrong doing and mistakes.
- *Engaged democracy*: citizens are calling for a larger role in the democratic process and more meaningful opportunities to connect with decision-makers on issues that affect their collective quality of life.

MacKinnon details what these values imply for a new social architecture in terms of access to quality education and training, participation and rewards in the labour market, the design and delivery of community-based programs and the tension between international economic integration and independent social policy.

With regard to who should be responsible for what, citizens continue to see governments as performing important social and economic functions. While their economic functions are smaller, their social role is reshaped and their environmental and public safety roles have expanded. The roles of citizens, communities and the private sector have been significantly enhanced.

"What is needed, in their view," says MacKinnnon, "is a partnership approach that values and balances the contributions each actor can bring to the table. To do otherwise would squander the very advantages that Canada possesses: well-functioning civil society, markets and governments."

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