Canadian report a resource for global democracy

August 31, 2000 – Citizens around the world want to rewrite the rules of democracy, says a new report from the Commonwealth Foundation. In the complex dance of governance, citizens want to be equal partners with governments. And for both partners in the dance, there's an often-steep learning curve.

Learning to Engage: Experiences With Civic Engagement in Canada is Canada's contribution to the Commonwealth Foundation's *Civil Society in the New Millennium* project, a joint exploration by more than 40 Commonwealth countries of ways to strengthen democracy and people-centred development in the new millennium.

Written by Miriam Wyman, David Shulman and Laurie Ham, the report details six uniquely Canadian experiences in citizen-government relations, experiences that resonate on an international scale. From immigration, Medicare and indigenous land claims to toxic waste, bank mergers and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, Canadians and their governments are carving out – with varying degrees of success – ways to engage with each other on issues that lie at the crux of civil society.

But the report isn't simply descriptive. Nor is it limited to a Canadian audience.

"*Learning to Engage* is meant as a tool for citizens – and governments, for that matter – around the world to use to build space for deliberation, discussion, and debate," says Shulman, Director of the Democracy Education Network. "It addresses issues that have an enormous impact on the day-to-day lives of citizens everywhere, and articulates the first, concrete actions towards rebuilding trust and partnership between citizens and governments."

Citizens are disenchanted with a perceived narrowing of the space for public discussion, says Wyman, while multinational corporations and international financial organizations wield increasing amounts of power.

"Recent events – like the demonstrations in Seattle at the World Trade Organization meeting, the APEC pepper-spray scandal in Vancouver, protests against the IMF in Washington – tell us that citizens don't have productive ways to deal with government and other decisionmaking bodies. Instead, frustrations build. *Learning to Engage* suggests strategies for governments and citizens to work more effectively together."

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"We are seeing the emergence of a global democracy movement to balance a global capital movement," says Colin Ball, Director of the Commonwealth Foundation. Further plans to promote global democracy are in the works. Based on recommendations from the *Civil Society* project, the Commonwealth Foundation has initiated the *Citizens and Governance Programme*, designed to generate, support, and learn from practical initiatives by citizens and their associations in order to advance healthy civil society and good governance. In Canada, *Learning to Engage* has been supported by the Canadian Policy Research Networks, a national, not-for-profit research institute with a strong record of research in citizen engagement. CPRN's mission is to create knowledge and lead public debate on social and economic issues important to the well-being of Canadians.

You can access or download a copy of the document by clicking here.

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