

CANADA

MEETING FOR NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS ON IMPROVING FUTURE NATIONAL REPORTING TO THE CSD NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 13-14, 2001 EXCHANGE OF COUNTRY EXPERIENCES IN PREPARING NATIONAL REPORTS

The Process

The Deputy Director of the Environmental Relations Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, is Canada's national focal point for reporting to the CSD.

Upon receipt of the annual questionnaires prepared by the Secretariat of the CSD on the themes to be dealt with by the forthcoming Session, the focal point transmits the questionnaires to the appropriate federal government departments and calls an interdepartmental meeting to discuss the questionnaires. An interdepartmental decision is made on how to deal with the questionnaires.

In the case of the some questionnaires, depending on the theme, one government department is tasked to coordinate the preparation of the answers. In other cases, this task is given to a consultant, with close interdepartmental supervision.

The Experience Since 1997

Canada has chosen to provide answers to relatively few CSD questionnaires since 1997. Given severe budget and staff cuts in the last few years, government officials are generally hard-pressed to carry out their regular responsibilities and meet the existing reporting requirements for the UN system and other international bodies. On this basis, the extra work of preparing a response to CSD questionnaires raises important questions for Canada regarding the cost-effectiveness and utility of the whole exercise. This is particularly true given the detailed nature of the questionnaires.

In addition, as Canada is a federal state, the input of our ten provinces and three territories must be included in the Canadian answers. This need to prepare a coordinated response makes the whole process additionally lengthy and cumbersome. Provincial and territorial officials, who also face budget/staff cuts and coordination challenges, frequently complain about the lack of time provided. As a result, the reports that have been submitted in the past sometimes included only activities at the federal level.

The Way Ahead

Canada would strongly support a review and analysis of how previous annual reports had been utilized in order to determine whether or not responding to the questionnaires has been a useful exercise. If the CSD continues with annual questionnaires, these should, at very least, be considerably simplified. Alternatively, the CSD might discontinue annual questionnaires and invite governments to provide links to web sites where the requested information is available.