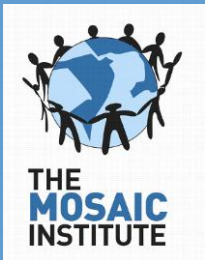


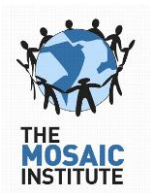
# DIASPORAS@TORONTO

A Conference Report



*Harnessing Canada's diversity for peace – at home and abroad*

*Brought to you by the  
Mosaic Institute  
[www.mosaicinstitute.ca](http://www.mosaicinstitute.ca)*



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## Introduction

Ever since its inception in 2007, the Mosaic Institute has been engaging Canadians from ethnocultural communities with connections to entrenched conflicts overseas in discussions, dialogues and voluntary service projects to advance the cause of peace. One of the facets of our work has been to encourage other Canadians – including actors across government, academe and civil society – to consider ways of harnessing the knowledge, networks and enthusiasm of these citizens to help identify and act upon Canada’s international priorities. Rather than merely providing a beautiful picture of ethnocultural harmony, Canada’s rich diversity can and should be leveraged in service of Canada’s interests around the globe.

It is with that mission and purpose in mind that the Mosaic Institute was honoured to host a one-day conference on May 14, 2013, entitled *Diasporas@Toronto*. With the generous support of the Government of Ontario, we were able to bring together more than 65 people from more than 40 organizations at the Ontario Investment & Trade Centre in downtown Toronto. The timing was intentional: the Toronto event was held to coincide with the annual Global Diaspora Forum (GDF) hosted by the International Diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA) in Washington, D.C.

Yet although the Mosaic Institute was honoured by the invitation from our friends at IdEA, one of the principal reasons we accepted their invitation to host *Diasporas@Toronto* was in order to gather together a critical mass of Canadian organizations and individuals committed to engaging diaspora communities in the identification and achievement of Canada’s global objectives and priorities. By creating this opportunity for organizations to meet and learn from one another - and to “cross-pollinate” across thematic areas of global endeavour such as trade, development and peacebuilding, among others – we hoped to stir a broader discussion about how to enhance and expand existing efforts, and to generate new opportunities for ensuring that Canada’s much-vaunted ethnocultural diversity is embedded and reflected in all that Canadians do in support of their collective interests around the world. As you will read below, we believe we achieved that goal.

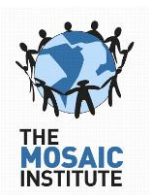
We hope that *Diasporas@Toronto* will be just the starting point of an exciting journey ahead. The Mosaic Institute hopes to build on the ideas and suggestions that emerged from the conference and work with other organizations to harness Canada’s diversity in an efficient, inclusive and meaningful manner across all areas of global affairs.

We hope that you enjoy the following summary of *Diasporas@Toronto*, and that you will consider joining us in our “next steps”.

Respectfully submitted,

John Monahan  
Executive Director  
The Mosaic Institute

Toronto, Ontario  
July 2013



## Background to *Diasporas@Toronto*

On Tuesday, May 14, 2013 the Mosaic Institute hosted the first-ever *Diasporas@Toronto* conference at the Ontario Investment & Trade Centre (OITC) in downtown Toronto. *Diasporas@Toronto* brought together some sixty-five (65) individuals from approximately forty (40) different organizations in the governmental, academic, business, community and not-for-profit sectors to discuss the engagement of diaspora communities in Canada's global affairs. The event was presented with the financial and logistical support of the Government of Ontario.

Living in a country that can lay claim to one of the most diverse populations in the world, Canadians of all backgrounds have the unique opportunity to tap into diaspora networks and determine how enhanced diaspora engagement across civil society can translate into a better Canada and an improved world. *Diasporas@Toronto* represents the springboard for this kind of cross-sector connection, capacity-building and understanding.

The one-day conference was timed to coincide with the Global Diaspora Forum (GDF) in Washington, D.C. GDF is an annual conference organized by the International Diaspora Engagement Alliance ("IdEA"), which in turn was launched by the U.S. State Department in May 2011. It seeks to engage diaspora communities in one of the five (5) following areas: entrepreneurship, volunteerism, philanthropy, diplomacy, and social innovation. IdEA seeks to understand how diaspora communities change political dynamics in their host countries and have the potential to improve their host countries' foreign, economic, business and trade policies.

For 2013, IdEA decided to expand the GDF from solely a Washington-based conference to one with a truly international reach. Accordingly, full-scale, simultaneous conferences were held both in California's "Silicon Valley", and in Dublin, Ireland. On a much smaller scale, because the U.S. State Department was already familiar with our work, the Mosaic Institute was invited to convene *Diasporas@Toronto* as part of this same effort to "go global". Another "*Diasporas@*" event – similar in scale to the one in Toronto - was also held in Miami this year.

U.S. State Department officials have stressed that this international expansion effort should be seen not as an effort to engage actors from states that are generally allied with the United States to collaborate in the promotion of American interests. Rather, U.S. officials responsible for IdEA and the GDF say that they are trying to foster an apolitical global movement whereby the talent, connections, and creativity of diasporic individuals receive greater recognition, and their key role in generating truly global linkages and opportunities is given its due attention.



## Key Objectives of Diasporas@Toronto

The key objectives of the May 14 event were the following:

1. To raise awareness about the pivotal and often-overlooked potential of diasporic Canadians to help achieve Canada's foreign policy goals as they relate to such areas as trade & investment, international development, peace building, human rights, and more;
2. To build and reinforce strategic, multi-thematic networks of Canadians from government, business, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based associations, academe and others with a shared interest in and/or expertise in the engagement of diasporic Canadians in the definition and achievement of Canada's global priorities;
3. To identify and expand awareness of "best practices" – all of them "Made in Canada" – from individuals and organizations that have already achieved success in engaging diasporic Canadians in the identification, pursuit and achievement of Canada's global interests and objectives; and
4. To lay the groundwork for an ongoing, comprehensive, national strategy – inspired by but distinct from the IdEA initiative in the United States – to systematically engage Canadians from diaspora communities in the identification, pursuit and achievement of Canada's global interests and objectives.



## Content of Diasporas@Toronto

The day was effectively a triptych, divided into three (3) principal parts. As described below, these were an introductory session and “viewing party” of the opening plenary session of the GDF in Washington, D.C.; a series of presentations of “best practices” by Canadian organizations actively studying or involved in the engagement of diasporic Canadians to promote Canadian global interests; and a facilitated “brainstorming” session to gather feedback and recommendations regarding appropriate “next steps” for improving the way in which diasporas are involved in the determination and implementation of Canada’s global priorities. Each of these segments is described in more detail below:

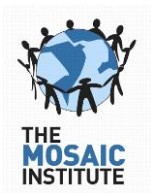
### Part 1: Introduction & Virtual Participation in the GDF

The day began with words of welcome and a presentation about the context and objectives for the day by the Mosaic Institute’s Executive Director, John Monahan.

This was followed by a live video link-up to the GDF conference in Washington, D.C., where Thomas Debass, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary of State's Office of Global Partnerships, publicly saluted the Mosaic Institute and those other organizations and individuals gathered for *Diasporas@Toronto*. Mr. Debass then introduced the day’s opening keynote speaker, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment, Robert Hormats. Mr. Hormats’ address stressed the largely-untapped potential of diaspora communities in the United States to help enhance the economic prospects and the quality of life for all Americans.

Mr. Hormats’ speech was followed with a live address in Toronto by Mosaic’s co-Founder and Chairman, Vahan Kololian, who shared the story of his own personal involvement, as a member of Canada’s Armenian diaspora, in efforts to improve relations between Armenia and Turkey. As a businessman, a philanthropist and a “peacemaker”, Mr. Kololian challenged all those present to assess their own individual capacities to leverage their global connections in the service of peace and pluralism.





## Part 2: Presentation of Canadian “Best Practices”

For many, the highlight of *Diasporas@Toronto* was a series of brief, “TED Talk”-inspired 15-minute presentations by Canadians from diasporic communities or organizations working with diasporic communities whose initiatives demonstrate global-mindedness, creativity and success, and that constitute “best practices” for the engagement of diverse communities in global affairs. Presentations (summaries of which are attached to this report as **APPENDIX 1**) related to one or more of the following areas, *inter alia*:

- entrepreneurship;
- volunteerism;
- philanthropy;
- trade;
- development;
- diplomacy;
- peacebuilding;
- security; and
- social innovation.



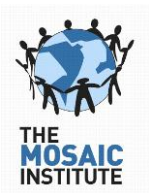
Maurice Bitran presenting the work of the Mowat Centre.

## Part 3: Strategic Brainstorming Session

After a networking luncheon, conference attendees participated in a facilitated “brainstorming” session to identify key priorities and proposals for how best to advance the Canadian discussion regarding the enhanced and expanded engagement of diaspora communities and Canadians of all ethnocultural backgrounds in the determination, prioritization and achievement of Canada’s international objectives. This discussion was intended to focus in part on the prospective roles for governments, both federal and provincial, to play in formalizing such a movement. The potential adoption of the U.S. State Department’s IDEA initiative by the Government of Canada, per DFAIT and/or other federal departments or agencies, was among the items discussed.

A more comprehensive summary of this “brainstorming” session, including the recommendations emerging from it, can be found in **APPENDIX 2**.





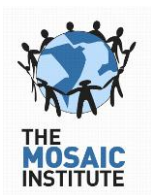
## Audience

Participation at the May 14<sup>th</sup> event was by invitation only. Lists of prospective invitees were compiled by the Mosaic Institute, with additional suggestions offered by several other organizations and individuals. The Mosaic Institute sought an audience of no more than seventy (70) mid-level to senior-level representatives from government, academe and “civil society” organizations. In the end, approximately 65 individuals attended the event, representing the following types of organizations:

- Ontario-based employers with global business development agendas focused on non-U.S. markets;
- Canadian business associations from high-priority sectors that are doing business with non-U.S. markets;
- Ethno-specific business organizations that are engaging diasporic Canadians and their communities in an effort to expand business opportunities and open new markets for Canadian made goods and services;
- University programs focused on diaspora and transnational studies;
- Non-governmental organizations whose work involves the engagement of diasporic Canadians in various aspects of Canadian foreign policy;
- A select number of outstanding Canadians from diaspora communities who have initiated their own globally-focused projects that demonstrate entrepreneurship, volunteerism, philanthropy, diplomacy, or social innovation;
- Representatives from departments and agencies of the Government of Canada with a demonstrated interest in the enhanced engagement of Canadians in various aspects of Canada’s foreign affairs, including DFAIT, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and Public Safety Canada, *inter alia*; and
- Representatives from departments and agencies of the Government of Ontario with a demonstrated interest in the enhanced engagement of Ontarians in various aspects of Ontario’s global affairs and/or the enhanced engagement of diasporic communities in public affairs, including the Ministries of Economic Development, Trade and Employment; Citizenship and Immigration; and the Attorney-General.

A full list of participating organizations, as well as those who expressed interest but sent regrets, is attached to this report as **APPENDIX 3**.





## Summary of Participants' Ideas

The interchange of ideas between and among actors involved in different areas of global affairs – including trade, development, security, human rights, and others – is both extremely rare and extremely valuable. The “cross-pollination” of ideas for effective engagement of diaspora communities is extremely beneficial not only because of the transferability of many of these ideas from one thematic area to another, but also because of the potential for cooperation and collaboration that identifies itself through such discussions. Given that members of diaspora communities in Canada are themselves multi-faceted with many concurrent interests, it only stands to reason that creating opportunities to facilitate their engagement in more than one area of global pursuit at a time can be a very strategic option to pursue.

The *Diasporas@Toronto* event was specifically designed to allow for a significant amount of time to be devoted to the exchange of ideas between and among conference participants, both formally and informally. Over the course of the day, a number of ideas were raised and explored for better leveraging the knowledge, networks and interests of Canada’s diverse ethnocultural communities to enhance Canada’s ability to identify and achieve its global objectives. Canada, as the world’s most multicultural and committedly diverse country, should have better mechanisms for engaging its diasporic citizens in discussions and initiatives designed to identify and achieve its strategic international goals. These ideas were given particular (though non-exclusive) attention during the Strategic Brainstorming session that concluded the conference, which is described in more detail in **APPENDIX 2**.

In the meantime, the following is a brief summary of respondents’ feedback and ideas that were offered throughout the course of the *Diasporas@Toronto* event:

- Canada and Canadians should create and encourage many more opportunities for organizations and individuals from diaspora communities or working with them to come together to learn from each other and promote “cross-pollination” of actors involved in different thematic areas of global affairs. Although Canada has the most diverse population in the world, we are not making full use of our diversity to inform and achieve Canada’s global objectives – nor maximizing our potential to demonstrate the full virtues of pluralism to a sceptical world – unless and until we create meaningful opportunities to engage all Canadians in discussions about foreign affairs.
- One-off events like *Diasporas@Toronto*, while important and helpful, are not sufficient to create a more integrated, broad-based approach to the engagement of Canada’s diaspora communities in global affairs. Rather, a more sustained organization to promote the engagement of diaspora communities in global affairs should be created. Such an organization should involve NGOs, individual companies, community associations, academe and government, among others, involved in a wide variety of thematic areas of global affairs – including, but not limited to, trade, development, security, peacebuilding and human rights – and should ideally be national in scope.



- In tandem with a national umbrella organization (see above), relevant organizations would also benefit from the creation of an online “information hub” where they could gather virtually for training, share their own and learn from others’ diaspora-focused initiatives and opportunities, access “best practice” toolkits, and, ultimately, better communicate and collaborate with each other in pursuit of common goals.
- There is an essential role for government to play in facilitating and supporting the engagement of diaspora communities in the identification, enhancement and pursuit of global objectives. Any national umbrella organizations of virtual networks that are created (see above) should have the support and/or the active membership of both the federal government and provincial governments. The Government of Canada, in particular, given its enumerated responsibility for Canada’s foreign policy (including defence and security, bilateral diplomacy, international development assistance, etc.) and its shared responsibilities with the Provinces in such areas as trade, investment attraction and immigration policy, could have a major, positive influence as a convener of opportunities for a much broader swath of Canadian society to become actively engaged in discussions about Canada’s role in the world. Apart from providing a source for rich input into Canada’s official foreign policy, this engagement by the Government of Canada would enable officials to coordinate their own efforts with those of civil society and diaspora organizations. As an important side benefit, it would also contribute to a greater sense of “community” and social cohesion among those individuals, communities and organizations involved in such an initiative.

## Evaluation

Attendees at *Diasporas@Toronto* were asked to evaluate various aspects of the conference. Their written responses (response rate: 50%) showed an average approval rating of 87.5% for the day.

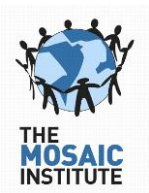
In addition, anecdotal feedback from both attendees and presenters has been almost uniformly positive. Several have communicated with us to emphasize their interest in being made aware of, and becoming involved, pursuing the “next steps” that will emerge from the day. In particular, almost to a person, attendees expressed their interest in becoming an active participant in a coordinated, national network of individuals and organizations focused on enhancing the engagement of diaspora communities in Canadian global affairs.



## Next Steps

Inspired by the participants and the discussion at the *Diasporas@Toronto* event, the Mosaic Institute intends to take the following “next steps” before the end of 2013, *inter alia*:

1. Meet with relevant government officials to discuss prospective opportunities for government involvement in the creation of a national organization and/or web-based platform for the exchange of “best practices” and a general enhancement of the involvement by diaspora communities in Canadian global affairs.
2. Explore potential funding opportunities to enable the creation and sustainability of efforts to develop a national network of individuals and organizations interested in the engagement of diaspora communities in Canadian global affairs.
3. Convene an initial working meeting of key stakeholders to create a strategic timetable for the creation of a Canada-wide diaspora information hub and network.

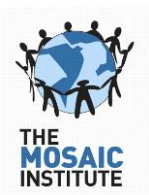


# APPENDIX 1

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## Selected Canadian “Best Practices” re Diaspora Engagement in Global Affairs

The following is a summary of the “best practice” presentations that were given and the organizations that presented them during the *Diasporas@Toronto* event. They portray approaches to the engagement of Canadians from diaspora communities in the identification and pursuit of Canada’s global priorities across a range of substantive theme areas, including trade, development, human rights, and more. Please note that neither the inclusion of any of these presentations on the *Diasporas@Toronto* agenda nor the exclusion of any others is meant to imply that this is a definitive and exhaustive list of *all* those Canadian “best practices” for the engagement of diaspora communities in global affairs. However, it is intended to provide a helpful and inspiring “snapshot” of the breadth and variety of ways in which Canadians of diverse ethnocultural backgrounds are already working to enrich Canada’s engagement with the rest of the world. **Please also note that these summaries represent the impressions of the Mosaic Institute, rather than the words of the presenting organizations themselves.**



(1) ‘Diaspora Nation’ – Mobilizing Diaspora Networks Study; Economic Development (incl. Trade)

<http://www.mowatcentre.ca/>

**Presenters:** **Maurice Bitran**, Ontario Visiting Fellow in Residence, School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto  
**Serene Tan**, Policy Associate, Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation

*The Mowat Centre is an independent, non-partisan think tank. It conducts research on federal policy that will have an impact on Ontario’s prosperity, and proposes recommendations on how to address the most challenging policy problems facing Canada. It has seven research streams and two research hubs: Ontario’s Economy; Fiscal Federalism; Shifting Gears: Government Transformation; Employment Insurance & Income Support; Immigration; Democratic Institutions & Intergovernmental Relations; Cities; Research Hubs: MowatENERGY; and MowatNFP.*

The Mowat Institute for Policy Innovation at the University of Toronto has undertaken a major research project to explore “diaspora networks”: whether and how, in the global, interconnected, post-internet world, immigrant communities in Ontario connected to international networks of shared identity are in a position to play a significant role in helping to enrich the Ontario economy. However, although Mowat’s research to date suggests that diaspora networks are potentially important for Ontario’s growth, it also appears that the potential of such networks, where they exist, is largely untapped and unrecognized. Given the appropriate conditions, research suggests that such networks could play a significantly larger role in the provincial and national economies.

Mowat’s presentation explored how existing networks contribute to the Ontario economy and influence one other; what existing policies may hinder their broader participation in the economy, and what new policies, approaches, or “best practices” may facilitate the realization of their potential. Mowat suggests that one way to enhance diaspora network participation in the economy would be to develop coordinating mechanisms that would allow diaspora networks to learn from each other and adopt “best practices”. Diaspora Networks should also be encouraged to play a larger role in inbound and outbound trade missions, enhancing economic ties with their home countries.

In essence, Mowat’s innovative research is offering a new, yet to be realized “best practice” whereby global diaspora networks contribute to provincial, national, and international prosperity through their enhanced participation in the economies of host and home countries. The Mowat Centre’s original applied research initiatives could have a very positive impact on how we conceive and implement policy at all levels of government.

**Key Idea:** *Identify and work collaboratively with Canada-based members of global diaspora networks to help them realize their economic potential to enrich the Ontario and Canadian economies through more expansive and systematic engagement with global economic players.*



## (2) One Child – Children’s Rights and Philanthropy

<http://onechild.ca/>

**Presenter:** Cheryl Perera, Founder, OneChild

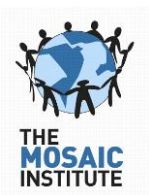
*OneChild is a youth-led organization that works to protect children from all forms of exploitation. OneChild engages in public education campaigns and advocacy initiatives, in addition to prevention, rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration efforts. It harnesses the power of youth to lead the action against child sex slavery, to create a world where children are free from exploitation and free to reach their potential as contributing members of society.*

Cheryl Perera gave an inspiring but sobering presentation about her personal commitment to ending the scourge of child sex trafficking and slavery, with a particular focus on South and Southeast Asia. Cheryl’s family comes from Sri Lanka, and that is where her personal journey into activism began. There, when she was still a young teenager herself, she saw first-hand the impact of child sex trafficking, and took part in a “sting” operation with local police in order to capture sexual criminals preying upon some of the most vulnerable children in Sri Lanka. As she became more and more focused on this issue she founded OneChild. Through that organization, she and others rescue children from lives of sexual exploitation and encourage the pursuit of those who would exploit them. Among her many accomplishments, she has raised funds to build a school in the Philippines to provide refuge and rehabilitation for victims of childhood sexual slavery.

Cheryl spoke of how OneChild engages young Canadians from various cultural backgrounds and child survivors around the world in a global partnership to promote policy reform and to provide assistance, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society for victims of sex trafficking. Cheryl discussed, among other projects, the new Canadian coalition with the International Bureau for Children’s Rights (IBCR) and Plan Canada, which is committed to combating child sex tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Although OneChild does not target diaspora youth exclusively, its mission to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and directly involve youth in its efforts is a relevant “best practice” for diaspora engagement because its approach can be applied to other global challenges. Cheryl’s personal journey into activism – one rooted in self-education and an unwavering commitment to pursuing an ideal regardless of the practical challenges involved – is in itself a “best practice” for aspiring “global citizens”. At the organization level, OneChild’s accessible toolkits for its various campaigns exemplify how best to empower youth in contributing meaningfully to global social and political issues. Young Canadians seeking to effect change at the local and global level are able to use OneChild’s resources to lead school campaigns, educate themselves about the issue, learn how to fundraise, and start a school chapter. OneChild’s approach – education first, action second – empowers youth to make meaningful contributions to a cause they care about, a valuable “best practice” that should be a model for other organizations seeking to involve diasporic youth in global affairs.

**Key Idea:** *Do not be held back by lack of resources or infrastructure. Make a personal commitment to a cause that inspires you, learn all you can about that issue, and then take action to effect positive change, either at home or abroad. If your idea and approach are valid, resources will find you.*



### (3) Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security – Peacebuilding & Security

<http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/ns/ccrs/index-eng.aspx>

**Presenter:** Charlene Larose, Director, Citizen Engagement, Public Safety Canada

*The Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security brings together diverse Canadians and the Government of Canada in an ongoing dialogue about national security issues as they manifest in a diverse and pluralistic society, with the end goal of providing timely and effective advice to the Ministers of Public Safety and Justice on the impact of national security policies and programs on communities. The program allows policy-makers and informed community members to discuss issues related to national security, and potential policy and program responses. This initiative fosters a symbiotic relationship between government and diasporic, ethno-cultural communities. Fifteen members are appointed to the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security by the Ministers. Each member serves a two-year term. Individuals are selected on the basis of their knowledge of security issues, dedication to upholding Canada's commitment to pluralism, and experience in working with diverse communities.*

In her presentation, Charlene Larose spoke of how the Government of Canada benefits from the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security by making policymakers aware of cultural sensitivities and by providing them with an increased understanding of community concerns as they relate to national security. Likewise, the inclusive, collaborative approach of the initiative empowers participant communities to have a positive impact on their communities and better understand the security policies of the Government of Canada.

One of the notable facets of the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security is that its appointees are encouraged to speak their minds and to express views regarding Canada's security-related policies and practices that may not always align with those of the government. This has helped to generate goodwill and respect towards the Roundtable on the part of certain constituencies that might otherwise have dismissed its relevance.

This model of government engagement with Canada's diverse communities might represent a possible template for government involvement in diaspora engagement in global affairs. Canada's diaspora populations, its unique embrace of multiculturalism and its staunch commitment to pluralism together could comprise a rich resource for the Government of Canada in its development of global affairs-related policy. The Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security demonstrates the value of and potential role for government in meeting with and listening to diverse communities in order to ensure the development of nuanced, enlightened policies that respond to the concerns of all Canadians in a culturally-sensitive manner. It also reinforces the value of enlisting the support and participation of diaspora community members in order to inform the policies relevant to Canada's role in the world. Policies could be enhanced substantively, and citizens can see themselves as partners with government in helping to address some of the world's most pressing challenges, rather than being bystanders.

**Key Idea:** *Effective diaspora engagement initiatives including the Government of Canada and diaspora communities are characterized by inclusion, collaboration, cultural-sensitivity, and openness to different ideas.*





#### (4) TiE Toronto – Entrepreneurship

<https://toronto.tie.org/>

**Presenter:** Craig Brown, President, TiE Toronto

*At its formation several years ago, TiE stood for “The Indus Entrepreneurs”. Since then, however, it has evolved to stand for “Talent, Ideas, and Enterprise”. Dedicated to the virtuous cycle of wealth creation and giving back to the community, TiE’s focus is on generating and nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs. TiE achieves its mission by providing aspiring entrepreneurs access to mentoring, networking, and education through its various programs, including the TiE Institute, an initiative that offers dynamic courses, and the Entrepreneurial Forum, which brings in high-level speakers. TiE was founded in 1982 in Silicon Valley by a group of entrepreneurs and business professionals with roots in the Indian subcontinent. It has since become a global non-profit organization with 8,500+ members from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.*

Craig Brown discussed how TiE uses engagement, communication, and a shared platform for collaboration to train and support emerging entrepreneurs. TiE’s “best practice” emphasizes the importance and power of an international network of people with a common goal (creating a climate conducive to innovative entrepreneurship) and the value of providing young entrepreneurs with the tools and connections to make their business ideas a reality. As an example of such mentoring opportunities, Craig discussed an upcoming TiE Institute course on social entrepreneurship, a seven-month course open to any young Canadian interested in learning more about the field, speaking with professionals, and developing the necessary skills to translate their ideas into action.

TiE represents a “best practice” for diaspora engagement in global affairs because of its evolution from a small consortium of South Asian professionals supporting emerging South Asian entrepreneurs to a global network of members from all backgrounds nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs. Moreover, TiE’s emphasis on cross-sector engagement - uniting policy makers, entrepreneurs, investors, and professional service providers - in pursuit of improving the environment for entrepreneurs demonstrates the value and importance of bringing together different fields to advance a mutually beneficial goal. Future diaspora engagement initiatives that focus on global affairs can emulate TiE’s inclusive, cross-sector approach.

**Key Idea:** *Support Canadians of all backgrounds in their professional development and connect them to national and international networks of business leaders. Engaging members of a specific ethnocultural community, if done properly, can lead to a broad engagement with multiple communities of Canadians who define themselves not just by their ethnocultural origins, but also by their common commitment to the advancement of Canadian interests.*



## (5) BuildChange – Inter-Community Peacebuilding & Development

<http://www.buildchange.ca/>

**Presenters: Haran Aruliah; Ahila Poologaindran; Hafsa Zarook**

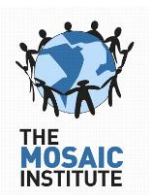
*BuildChange is a loose consortium of young Canadians of Tamil, Sinhalese, and Muslim Sri Lankan background who came together after their experience together in the Mosaic Institute’s Young Canadians’ Peace Dialogue on Sri Lanka, which took place from 2009 to 2011. The Dialogue combined peace-focused inter-community dialogue with collaborative community service projects. It manifested the values of good Canadian and global citizenship with the aim of bringing young Canadians of Tamil, Sinhalese, and Muslim Sri Lankan together to engage in constructive dialogue about the issues that divide these communities and to better understand Canada’s core commitment to pluralism and peace.*

*The participants of the Dialogue who later formed the core BuildChange group are now working together to demonstrate the virtues of the Canadian model of pluralism to the war-affected people of Sri Lanka through the completion of development projects to help those same people rebuild their lives. The BuildChange team committed to engaging individuals from diasporic communities in a meaningful process of dialogue with the aim of overcoming historic animosities and fostering a commitment to global citizenship. In July 2012, BuildChange travelled to Sri Lanka’s Vanni region to see the fruits of their labour; the team had raised some \$25,000 to build wells for war-affected families. The trip was an opportunity to conduct due diligence on their development project and meet with civil society leaders, parliamentarians and others in an effort to engage with relevant stakeholders. After returning to Canada, the group assembled its observations and recommendations into a comprehensive report, which it was invited to present to representatives from DFATD, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and the Privy Council Office, among other government departments, at a series of meetings in Ottawa. More recently, the group has been consulted by senior Canadian officials regarding Canada’s participation in the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), which is scheduled to be held in Colombo in November of 2013.*

BuildChange speakers discussed their model of engagement, whereby “safe spaces” are created to encourage individuals from communities historically in conflict to speak candidly and respectfully about global and local challenges to peace. Their presentation focused on the peace building work of BuildChange with Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim Sri Lankan communities in Canada and Sri Lanka.

BuildChange offers a unique model of diaspora engagement in promoting peace at home and abroad; young adults work shoulder-to-shoulder with whom they perceive to be their traditional adversary in pursuit of a humanitarian goal. The emphasis on collaboration, respect, and inclusion promoted by BuildChange’s community service project represents a manifestation of the universal values of human rights and peace. As such, it is an effective form of diaspora engagement in global affairs; it builds social cohesion within Canada and demonstrates the effectiveness of Canada’s model of pluralism to divided societies around the world.

**Key Idea:** *Diaspora engagement through constructive, respectful dialogue and globally-minded community service projects can promote reconciliation and strengthen social cohesion both in Canada and overseas.*



## (6) Cuso International – Volunteerism

<http://cusointernational.org/volunteer>

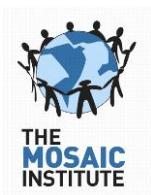
**Presenter: Barbara Hogan**, Director of International Volunteering

*Cuso International is an international development organization based in Ottawa that works to reduce poverty and inequality. Skilled volunteers of all ages share their expertise and perspectives, working with local groups in countries around the world on projects that promote long-term development. Cuso International promotes and supports a range of volunteering programs and initiatives, and currently has initiatives in the following countries: Ethiopia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Guyana, Jamaica, Peru, Kenya, and the Philippines. Cuso is the only Canadian organization recognized by the International Diaspora Engagement Alliance as a “best practice” for its diaspora engagement through volunteerism.*

Cuso’s volunteer programs emphasize the exportation of skills in order to empower communities in need to tackle inequality and poverty. Cuso volunteers work with local partners to build “social infrastructure” – individual-level skills and institutional-level capacity. Volunteers are thus Cuso’s key resource in fulfilling its development mission, and diasporic volunteers play a significant role. Cuso International’s Diaspora for Development initiative, supported by USAID and Accenture, engages diasporas in volunteering to help reduce human resources gaps in developing countries. The focus of the program is primarily designed to engage individuals with entrepreneurial or business expertise in efforts to develop local business capacity in their country of origin.

Cuso’s “best practice” is characterized by a focus on building human capacity in developing countries, in contrast to other volunteer organizations that focus on providing infrastructural or other kinds of support. Human development is essential for communities to emerge from inequality and poverty, and Cuso’s exportation of skills through its volunteer programs demonstrates the importance of human development in empowering individuals to effect change and sustain their communities.

**Key Idea:** *Diaspora members can volunteer their time and skills with communities in need, contributing to long-term human development while gaining a global perspective on development issues. Their prior knowledge of local cultural and other sensitivities can prove very helpful to the achievement of success in local development projects.*



## (7) Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) – Development & Governance

<http://www.cigionline.org/>

**Presenter:** Margaret Walton-Roberts, Director, International Migration Research Centre, Wilfred Laurier University

*CIGI is an independent, non-partisan think tank. It conducts research and promotes policy debates relating to issues of international governance. Its programming focuses on four areas: the global economy; global security; the environment and energy; and global development.*

Margaret Walton-Roberts presented on her current research regarding CIGI's "Diasporas, Development and Governance in the Global South" initiative. This project explores the influence of diasporas on governance in the Global South, be it through investment, finance, citizenship, philanthropy, second-generation engagement, voting and representation, and international relations. The project consists of three parts: a critical examination of efforts by international organizations and governments to facilitate development in the Global South through engagement with diasporas; the identification of new trends and "best practices" in diaspora engagement; and the current and potential role of migrant diasporas in Canada in the economic, social and political development of the Global South. The case studies include: Asia-India, Iran, Vietnam; Africa-S. Africa, Morocco, Somalia; and Latin America- Mexico, Brazil, Uruguay.

The project aims to enhance our understanding of how diasporas can contribute to development and to determine the optimal mechanisms for engagement of diasporas in policy formulation. It underscores the value and importance of high-quality, well-funded research to explore and identify innovative and ground-breaking opportunities for diaspora engagement in global affairs. On May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013, CIGI hosted a Diasporas, Development and Global South conference, which brought together eminent academics and policy-makers from around the world to engage in discussions about the possibilities of involving international and Canadian diasporas in development. Enabling Canadian researchers to learn from different, international perspectives will lead to richer development policies going forward. Moreover, such research and activities can also be pivotal in bringing policymakers and policy influencers from outside government together to address how diaspora communities can best be mobilized to tackle urgent development challenges abroad.

**Key Idea:** *Convene gatherings that bring together policy-influencers from all over the world and from various fields of expertise to engage in an exchange of ideas. Raise awareness in the policymaking community about the capacity of diasporas to influence development in the Global South.*



## APPENDIX 2

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### Strategic “Brainstorming” Session

The following is a summary of the strategic “brainstorming” session held towards the end of the *Diasporas@Toronto* event. This session sought to address diaspora engagement from two distinct domains: civil society and government. Helen Tewolde<sup>1</sup> and Patrick Johnston<sup>2</sup>, two expert facilitators with vast experience with diaspora engagement and public policy, moderated the session. Below are the questions posed during the brainstorm and the responses offered by participants.

#### QUESTION #1:

**What measures are required to initiate, deepen or mobilize the diaspora engagement of civil society, business, academic and other groups?**

- *How can various civil society diaspora groups collaborate/network more effectively?*
- *What kinds of capacity-building opportunities for diaspora engagement (i.e. within diaspora groups and/or civil society and businesses that engage diasporas) might be useful to maximize impact?*
- *What other groups, associations or networks, in Canada or internationally, need to be involved in diaspora engagement efforts?*

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Tewolde has over 10 years of experience in the design, development and implementation of public-policy oriented initiatives focused on capacity-building in the education and employment sectors with particular expertise in authentic public and community engagement and multi-sectoral collaborative leadership. She has contributed to various publications and initiatives related to the role of diasporas in local and international development and Canadian foreign policy. She contributed a case study on Canada’s Eritrean diaspora to the report “Tapping Our Potential: Diaspora Communities and Canadian Foreign Policy”, which was published by the Mosaic Institute and the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Johnston is Principal of BOREALIS Advisors, a consultancy working with philanthropists, foundations and charities. Patrick has served as Chief Executive of a range of organizations including the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (now ImagineCanada), the Canadian Council on Social Development and the National Anti-Poverty Organization. While at the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, he initiated a new grant-making program, *Diaspora and Transnational Communities*, that operated from 2004-2011. Some of the foundation’s learnings were captured in the report, “Tapping Our Potential: Diaspora Communities and Canadian Foreign Policy”, jointly published with the Mosaic Institute in December 2011.



## RESPONSES

Almost unanimously, *Diasporas@Toronto* participants spoke of the need for the creation of both a web-based “information commons” and a physical “network of networks” comprised of organizations and individuals working in diaspora engagement across Canada.

A web-based information hub would serve to connect people and projects and to educate and train those interested in diaspora engagement and capacity building. A few groups involved in the strategic brainstorming session expressed trepidation about the creation of such an information commons without it first having a clearly-defined purpose. Overall, however, participants felt that such a collection of information about which organizations in Canada are currently engaging diasporas in various aspects of global affairs, and what they are actually doing, would be helpful for both governmental and non-governmental actors, and would facilitate the broader engagement of diaspora community members in both the identification and pursuit of Canada’s global interests across multiple thematic areas.

Several participants felt that an “opt in” information commons that included access to “best practice” toolkits, a cross-sector database of professionals, and current information on the initiatives being pursued by those professionals and their organizations would promote cooperation among organizations, including with regards to grant applications. It would also help to build the capacity of less well-resourced or inexperienced organizations through their engagement with more established counterparts.

Many of these same rationales were also cited as reasons to create an umbrella organization, or a “network of networks”, within Canada along the same lines as the International Diaspora Engagement Alliance in the United States.

On the assumption that “a rising tide floats all boats,” both the quality and the extent of diaspora engagement in Canadian global affairs would increase as a result of the creation of both a virtual “information commons” and a national umbrella organization (or “network of networks”) to foster greater cross-pollination between and among organizations engaging diaspora members in Canada’s global affairs. These mechanisms would both encourage cross-pollination between and among actors involved in different thematic areas of global affairs, and foster greater interaction between and among organizations of different ages, sizes, structures, and support bases. Particularly with the formal involvement of Canadian government actors (see Question #2, below), Canada could well enhance its success in achieving its global objectives.

**Recommendation # 1:** Create an online information hub where diaspora communities, organizations, and the gamut of civil society can congregate, learn about diaspora-focused initiatives and opportunities, access “best practice” toolkits, and, ultimately, better communicate and collaborate with each other in enhancing diaspora engagement in global affairs.

**Recommendation # 2:** Create an organization that is national in scope that oversees the online information hub and takes on the mantle of facilitating diaspora engagement in global affairs across all sectors.





## QUESTION #2

### What is the most appropriate role for government in supporting diaspora engagement?

- *What are the key priorities for government action?*
- *What are the barriers – financial, attitudinal or other – that impede a more active role by government in diaspora engagement?*

## RESPONSES

The second half of the brainstorming section centred on discussing the potential role of governments in encouraging the engagement of diasporic Canadians in global affairs. A consensus developed around the desire for governments to provide support – financial and otherwise – to both “bottom-up” initiatives developed by individual diaspora communities, and to national, sector-wide initiatives to encourage creative, pro-Canadian responses to a wide variety of global challenges and opportunities.

Some discussants noted that significant distrust exists between certain diaspora communities and government, which may arise in connection to a host of different factors. For instance, some ethnocultural or religious communities may be perceived as having connections to the “wrong side” of a protracted conflict overseas, and to being in tension with the current policies of the federal government as a result. Other communities may have a fraught relationship with government because many of their members came to Canada as refugees or refugee claimants, as opposed to independent immigrants, business immigrants, or even members of the family class. Government actors should acknowledge and work to address these challenges or perceived challenges.

Several participants stressed that in order for any diasporic community to make a meaningful contribution to Canada, it must first feel fully integrated – economically, politically, socially and emotionally – into Canadian life. This was viewed as a shared responsibility of all levels of government. Several others stressed that governments should encourage diaspora engagement initiatives that grow organically from communities, and shy away from creating “top down” initiatives without extensive collaboration.

Generally, all participants felt that the distinct characteristics and needs of different diaspora communities needed to be recognized and taken into consideration by governments when seeking to facilitate their engagement in global affairs. A “one size fits all” approach will not work.

**Recommendation # 3:** The optimal role for governments to play in promoting the engagement of Canada’s diaspora communities in global affairs is one of supporter and facilitator. Governments – both federal and provincial - should bolster community-based initiatives and work to build trust and expand communication with diaspora populations in order to nurture mutually rewarding relationships with respect to various international issues and pursuits. While they must tailor their efforts to the distinct needs of different communities, governments should also support efforts to enable smaller, less-established communities to learn from and build capacity with the help of more-established ones.





## APPENDIX 3

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### List of Attendees and Interested Parties

The following is a list of all those organizations represented at *Diasporas@Toronto*, as well as those unable to participate that took the time to express their interest in the event:

BuildChange	Roma Community Centre
Canada Colombia Chamber of Commerce	Samara Canada
Canada Pakistan Business Council	Scotiabank
Canadian Arab Institute	Speak Sudan
Canadian Business Development House	Strategic Counsel, The
Canadian Centre for Diversity	TiE Toronto
Canadian Council for International Cooperation	University of Ottawa
Canadian Council of Churches	Women's Legal Education and Action Fund
Centre for International Governance Innovation	World University Service of Canada
Centre for Israel & Jewish Affairs	
Couchiching Institute, The	
Cuso International	
Darfur Association of Canada	
Dejinta Beesha	
Dezign Change	
Girls20Summit	
Innoversity	
Institute for Diaspora Research and Engagement	
International Development Research Centre	
Latin Project Management Network	
MaRS	
McMaster University	
Mitacs	
Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation	
Nova Scotia Business Inc.	
OneChild	
Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration	
Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment	
Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General	
Ontario Multicultural Health Applied Research Network	
Plan Canada	

*The Mosaic Institute wishes to thank the Government of Ontario for its support of the Diasporas@Toronto initiative.*



A Conference Report