

Former prime minister Campbell says Gorbachev continues to reshape history -- and the climate

Kim Campbell, Canwest News Service

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In the past few weeks, there have been many media reports celebrating the fall 20 years ago of the Berlin Wall -- the physical manifestation of the divide and hostility between East and West.

All these reports acknowledged the central role played by Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader who introduced the word "glasnost" into the global lexicon.

He also helped end the Cold War and eliminate the spectre of mutual nuclear destruction that had hung over our hemisphere since the end of the Second World War.

I had the pleasure of meeting Gorbachev in mid-1990, when he made a brief visit to Ottawa with his then-foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze.

As a cabinet minister, I was included in the events where he spoke and, as a former "sovietologist," I was struck by the change he represented.

Little did we guess at that time that the breakup of the Soviet Union was imminent and would send Shevardnadze back to his native Georgia, and send Gorbachev into political oblivion when the country over which he presided ceased to exist.

It is all the more interesting and remarkable then that Gorbachev is today not merely a man of historical significance, but a man who continues to shape history with his world-changing ways.

When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, Gorbachev remained on the world stage.

Gorbachev was a central figure at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and shortly thereafter founded Green Cross International, a global network of environmental NGOs addressing issues at the nexus of environment and conflict.

Today Green Cross, under Gorbachev's leadership, has grown to more than 30 national member organizations, active on every continent.

In states of the former Soviet Union, this means working with the Global Partnership -- a G8 project launched at Kananaskis in which Canada is a significant player -- to clean up old weapons sites and facilities.

And in the Middle East it means working to resolve conflicts around shared water resources.

<http://www2.canada.com/theprovince/news/editorial/story.html?id=2f096567-0139-496e-b8d6-bdba854631c8&p=2>

In South America, Green Cross works to minimize the environmental impact of mining projects.

And in Ukraine and Belarus, it works with children who are still affected by the Chernobyl disaster of 23 years ago.

The Gorbachev Foundation, the first real "think-tank" in modern Russia, deals with Russian and global issues around peace and security, development, the environment and democracy in Eastern Europe.

I again came to know Gorbachev in the late 1990s, when I was invited to be a fellow of an American-based foundation that also bears his name.

Through this organization, Gorbachev became a founding member of the Club of Madrid, whose members, former presidents and prime ministers, work to promote democratic values and leadership.

Gorbachev's latest venture combines all of these elements, bringing together his work on the environment with the Green Cross, with climate-change projects of the Club of Madrid, the Club of Rome and his fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureates to form the Climate Change Task Force.

This involves engaging world leaders and experts in an effort to push for real progress on climate change at the Copenhagen conference next month, and to engage civil society in the challenge to deal with the effects of climate change.

This past month, Gorbachev has been doing what he does best, working the world leaders' circuit selling climate change.

At 78, that is quite a breathtaking agenda.

Like so many others who have been encouraged and motivated by his energy and warmth, I have been proud to work with Gorbachev over the years.

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, Mikhail Gorbachev continues to challenge the world to change, and always for the better.

B.C.-born Kim Campbell is a former prime minister of Canada. She is also on the National Council of Green Cross Canada.