

the Seychelles, the Central African Republic and Togo.

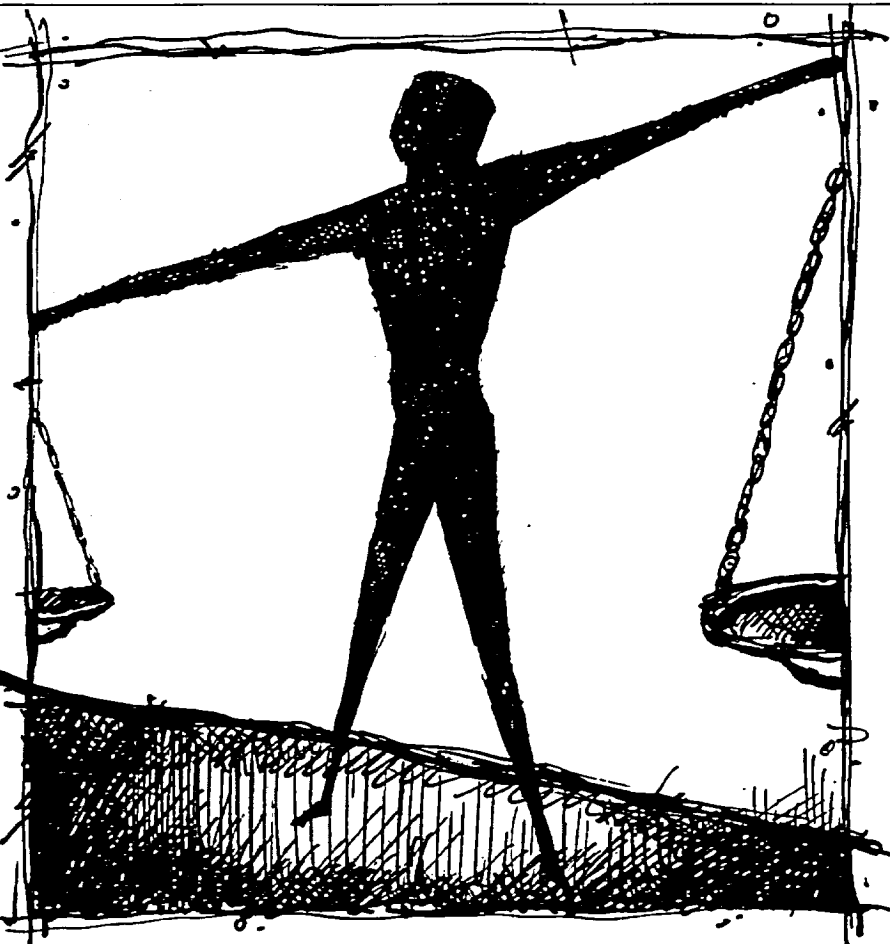
Canada is making a special contribution to support human rights and democracy in member countries of La Francophonie. It set up a special office in ACCT to handle requests for information. The office also helps organize elections and write constitutions, operate electoral observer missions and provide training.

In 1993, a seminar was held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, to launch a special project: a network of legal aid and counseling centres for women in francophone Africa. Canada funded these projects through ACCT. Some 80 participants from 20 countries attended the seminar. They discussed ways of running counseling centres, and methods of explaining the law to the public.

The first two centres are in Benin and Cameroon. While there are women lawyers in those countries, many women don't know their legal rights, are afraid to exercise them, or can't afford to hire a lawyer. For example, a woman may find when her father dies that her brothers claim she has no right to inherit anything because she is a woman. The counseling centres will help women — and men — understand their rights.

Encouraging democracy is an important task. But, prior to the 1989 Dakar summit, Amnesty International published a report listing human rights abuses in several French-speaking countries. Accusations included torture, imprisonment for political opinions and restrictions on religious activities. Summit leaders agreed to address the issue of human rights at Dakar. There was unanimous support for a resolution on human rights, put forward by Canada.

At the 1991 Chailot Summit, human rights dominated discussions behind closed doors.



Then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney wanted the international community to give economic aid only to countries which have good human rights records. This proposal did not get approval. Finally, the leaders signed a Declaration of Human Rights and Democratization which left it up to each nation "to determine the roads that will appropriately strengthen its democratic institutions."

Chailot Summit participants also voted to adopt economic sanctions against Haiti. The military overthrew and exiled Haiti's democratically elected president, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in September 1991. Many other international organizations, such as the Organization of American States and the United Nations, have also condemned the Haitian military leaders and banned trade with the nation.

So far, the military leaders have snubbed these international efforts to restore Father Aristide to power.

In 1993, the Haitian situation arose again. Summit leaders meeting in Mauritius strengthened their resolve to try to bring democracy to this impoverished country. French President François Mitterand told delegates: "This takeover by violent minority groups who intervene to prevent the establishment of democratic institutions in Haiti is unbearable."

Summit participants also passed a resolution that condemned nations which abuse human rights, but did not mention any countries by name, as the Canadian delegation had hoped.

These efforts to deal with the sensitive issue of human rights show that La Francophonie wants to be an important player on the international stage.