

Last November, the Sri Lankan authorities issued a situation report on the current human rights situation in the country. While the report purports to address the many concerns articulated by interested NGOs and governments, it still falls short of performance levels expected of and agreed to by the Sri Lankan government at UNCHR in February 1993. The report indicates that the "Government acknowledges the gravity of the human rights problem in the country in the terrorist context" and goes on to claim that normalcy prevails in areas other than the northeast. However, the government recently introduced two measures that seem to counter to the trend towards improving the situation: one is the change to the Emergency Regulation (since then again modified in the face of national and international indignation) that could have adverse implications for freedom of expression and of the press; the other is the Ordinance governing NGOs which, depending on its interpretation, has the potential of curtailing their activities.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada is convinced that a lasting peace in the northeast, which acknowledges the aspirations of Tamils, Muslims and the Sinhalese minority, can only be achieved by negotiation and dialogue. Canada regularly calls on the protagonists in the conflict to strive towards a political settlement through the introduction of confidence-building measures.

In the case of Sri Lanka, Canada has established a direct linkage between human rights performance and development assistance. Government-to-government assistance has been scaled back dramatically, while support for social and economic development through NGOs has been enlarged. A substantial and increasing proportion of Canadian assistance is devoted specifically to human rights and good governance projects, and relief for conflict victims.

Canada has also brought the issue of human rights violations in Sri Lanka to the attention of the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly. Canada took the lead in negotiating Chairman's statements at the last two sessions of the UNCHR. Those statements, which were adopted by consensus, committed Sri Lanka to implementing the recommendations of the UN Working Group on Disappearances and admitting the Group back to Sri Lanka to monitor and observe progress. For its part, the Canadian High Commission in Sri Lanka actively follows key human rights cases, and has attended court proceedings in the Embilipitiya case to demonstrate solidarity with the victims. As well, representations at all levels are made at every opportunity.

As long as the civil war continues, Canada will not issue permits for the export of military equipment to the Sri Lankan armed forces. Canada is prepared to offer its good offices and services in order to advance negotiations and peace efforts between both parties to the conflict, provided that parties explicitly request such services and demonstrate a clear commitment to reaching a solution.

10

11

12