

On the other hand, Canada will not make a positive difference when it acts like it did last year with respect to China and Indonesia. Last year, as a result of Chinese bullying, Canada stopped co-sponsoring the China resolution at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, declaring that in its place, it had concluded a bilateral human rights agreement with China.

We had no problem with the bilateral agreement but could not accept that it should replace and supersede multilateral action through the United Nations. Both could have been done. If the bilateral agreement proved to be successful, then in due course the UNCHR resolution could have been dropped. It seems to me we put the cart before the horse - and at the same time undermined an important multilateral, international process. There is considerable evidence to suggest that in this case, trade was given a higher priority than human rights.

Canada was not alone in this sinister policy switch - but it is interesting to note that little Denmark which did not switch, which sponsored the China resolution, and continued to condemn China, in fact increased its trade with China during the ensuing year.

In "Canada in the World" (1995), which is the most recent comprehensive foreign policy statement made by the Canadian government, it is stated: "Canada is not an island: if the rights of people abroad are not protected, Canadians will ultimately feel the effects at home. They understand that our economic and security interests are served by the widest possible respect for the environment, human rights, participatory government, free markets and the rule of law. Where these are observed, there is a greater prospect of stability and prosperity - where they are not, of uncertainty and poverty. Their observance, therefore, is both an end in itself and a means to achieving other priority objectives."

"A priority field of international concern and action for Canadians has been and remains that of human rights. The government regards respect for human rights not only as a fundamental value, but also as a crucial element in the development of stable, democratic and prosperous societies at peace with each other".

When Mr. Axworthy was appointed Minister in 1996, he said that "respect for human rights is a critical component of the Canadian identity and it must play an important role in our foreign policy agenda".

So it is very clear in the government's declared policy that human rights should be a high priority in our foreign policy. However, policies are often easier said than done - and as pointed out, our record is mixed.

The other way Canada can make a difference is by supporting the work of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD) and the network of approximately 40 human rights NGOs in Canada. The ICHRDD was established by Parliament in 1988 with a mandate to defend and promote the rights set out in the International Bill of Rights, including economic and social rights. Parliament's purpose in establishing the Centre was to have an independent institution which would continue to raise and advance these issues, free from the pressure of commercial and other extraneous interests. The Centre pursues this mandate through advocacy and capacity building in partnership with civil society in the most vulnerable and victimized countries. Because our