

Given that Canadian involvement in this area is increasing, the CHRF organized this meeting so that the interested Canadian stakeholders would have the opportunity to discuss Canada's involvement in supporting national human rights institutions overseas. The roundtable offered the first opportunity for many of these stakeholders to come together as a group to examine Canada's experience with national institutions. The collective experience of the participants provided an excellent opportunity to contribute to the development of Canada's foreign policy in this new area of the international struggle for human rights.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

The specific objectives of the round table were:

1. To promote a joint reflection on the capacity of national human rights institutions to promote and protect human rights in developing countries.
2. To provide a forum for Canadian NGOs, human rights institutions and government agencies to share their experiences in working with national human rights institutions in developing countries.
3. To draw lessons which can help shape future Canadian involvement in this area, both in terms of policy development and actual programme interventions.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

The round table took place on 5 and 6 March 1998 in the boardroom of the CHRC. During the course of the day-and-a-half, there were over thirty participants (see Annex A for list of participants).

The Opening Session included welcoming remarks from Ms. Ruth Selwyn, Executive Director of the CHRF and Ms. Michelle Falardeau-Ramsay, Chief Commissioner of the CHRC. Mr. Steve Lee, Director of the CCFPD, thanked the organizers and explained how he hoped the results of the meeting would contribute to the process of formulating Canadian foreign policy on human rights. As the last speaker during the opening session, Mr. Ian Hamilton, Director of the CHRF's National Institutions Programme, provided an overview of the objectives and agenda for the meeting.

During Session 1 entitled, *Issues of Concern to Canadians*, the participants explored some of the issues which are crucial in working with national institutions from the Canadian perspective. The session was chaired by Ms. Pearl Eliadis, Director of Policy at the OHRC. Papers were presented by Mr. Yves Lafontaine, President of the CHRF, and Ms. Iris Almeida, Director of Programmes at the ICHRDD. These papers raised a number of issues, including the importance of assessing national institutions and their needs before engaging with them, the need to provide appropriate assistance and the crucial role that civil society can play in ensuring the success of these initiatives.

Session 2, chaired by Ms Eliadis, was entitled *Challenges Facing National Institutions Overseas*, and was also chaired by Ms. Eliadis. The session began with presentations