

Government Response to the Report of the Parliamentary Task Force on North-South Relations

On May 23, 1980, by an Order of Reference, the House of Commons established a Parliamentary Task Force on North-South Relations. The Task Force was composed of members of all political parties represented in Parliament. Herbert Breau (Lib., Gloucester) was appointed chairman. The other members were Douglas Roche (P.C., Edmonton South), Maurice Dupras (Lib., LaBelle), Bob Ogle (N.D.P., Saskatoon East), Girve Fretz (P.C., Erie), Douglas Frith (Lib., Sudbury), and Jim Schroder (Lib., Guelph).

The mandate of the Task Force, as set forth in the Order of Reference, was to:

recommend practical and concrete steps that Canada can take to contribute to the success of matters being negotiated in several international fora.

The Task Force set about its work through informal discussions at the United Nations and in Washington, by hearing the presentations of witnesses at public hearings, and through an examination of other written briefs received. The Task Force examined many aspects of North-South relations, including finance and debt, development assistance, food aid and agricultural assistance, energy and trade.

The government is of the view that the success of the Task Force in generating public awareness of North-South issues is of major importance and will lead to increased support for a forward-looking Canadian North-South policy. The Task Force hearings provided a forum for the cross-fertilization of ideas from knowledgeable Canadians with differing views and perspectives. Its reports have stimulated both media and public discussion. Such debate and resultant support is a prerequisite if Canada is to pursue a leadership role in the North-South dialogue, similar to the one recommended by the Task Force.

With regard to the Task Force's specific recommendation that Canada allocate 1% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to encourage the involvement and awareness of Canadians in North-South concerns, the Government recognizes the importance of broadening public interest in this area. The Government intends to give increased priority to the promotion, especially by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), of public awareness and understanding of the problems faced by developing countries. It will continue to examine other methods, and

the appropriate level of funding, that should be established for such activities.

On April 21, 1981 the Task Force presented its final report to Parliament. In addition to its recommendations on specific subjects, the Report contained certain general recommendations relating to such areas as the need for coordination of government policy on North-South issues and the leadership role that devolves upon government. The Government has examined all of the recommendations. It is of the view that the recommendation on government's necessary leadership role, given the unanimity with which the Task Force members supported it, will likely have the most lasting impact of all the Task Force recommendations. The call for Canada to play a "bridge-building" role to reduce the gap between the developed countries and the Third World has encouraged the Government to pursue an active role in fostering a constructive dialogue with developing countries. The Government supports the two-pronged thrust of the Task Force's proposals, namely that Canadian policy on North-South issues should be based on two major principles: the *mutuality of interests* of both North and South in solving global economic problems, and the *humanitarian* need to focus attention and resources on the world's poorest peoples and countries. These concepts will continue to motivate Canada's aid programs and to govern our efforts to search for compromise at international meetings, including the recent Ottawa Summit, the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the North-South Summit as well as in the proposed Global Negotiations.

The Government also concurs with the Task Force's view that coordination of Government policies is needed for a more coherent Canadian North-South policy. Appropriate measures in the policy-making process of the Government are being instituted to promote a more consistent approach. These practices will be reviewed periodically to ensure that North-South implications are taken into account in all relevant Government decisions.

The main recommendations themselves are an important contribution to the development of Canadian policy. They have been taken very seriously by the Government and have been studied carefully with a view to re-evaluating existing policies. Set out below are point by point responses to the main recommendations of the Parliamentary Task Force on North-South Relations.