

38. HUMAN RIGHTS AND CANADIAN AID POLICY

BACKGROUND

The idea of explicitly linking countries' human rights practices and their pursuit of democracy to foreign aid was first articulated in a 1987 report by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). However, this year the Canadian government has articulated the policy more firmly and in a more public manner than previously. Prime Minister Mulroney spoke of this link at two major summit meetings: the Commonwealth Heads of State meeting and the Francophonie meeting. The theme has also been picked up by Secretary of State for External Affairs, Barbara McDougall, and Monique Landry, the Minister for External Relations. Reflecting this new attention, the issue was the subject of a special debate in the House of Commons.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the issue, as it has been discussed by the government and in the House of Commons.

CURRENT CANADIAN POSITION

At the meeting of Commonwealth heads of state in October 1991, Prime Minister Mulroney raised the question of linking aid to respect for human rights to a mixed reception. In his speech to the meeting Mulroney stated:

For Canada, the future course is clear: we shall be increasingly channelling our development assistance to those countries that show respect for the fundamental rights and individual freedoms of their people. Canada will not subsidize repression and the stifling of democracy.¹

Although there was some support for these views from other states such as Britain and Australia, not all states felt it was the time to begin a debate on the issue. The final declaration of the meeting included a commitment to concentrate on, as part of a long list of priorities, on human rights.

¹ Office of the Prime Minister. "Notes for a Speech by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Global Report: World Political Overview," 16 October 1991: 2.