

'Human security' focus of foreign policy: Axworthy

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OTTAWA — Canada is not in a position to apply economic sanctions against Sudan, but there is still a possibility of stopping the war, according to Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy.

Speaking at a recent roundtable on religious persecution held at the Lester B. Pearson building, Axworthy outlined Canada's position, and described efforts to alleviate suffering in Sudan as well as in other war-torn countries around the world.

"Protecting and advancing freedom of religion is an intrinsic part of Canada's human security agency, and in our changing global context, this is more urgent rather than less urgent," said Axworthy.

"Canada has been reshaping its foreign policy to reflect the increasing human dimension of global peace and security. Many of the

challenges we face as a global community, from violent conflict to newer threats — illicit drugs, terrorism or environmental degradation — have a more direct impact on the daily lives of ordinary people."

"Human security is providing both the focus and the impetus for global action. As a result, Canada has been taking a more human-centred approach to global relations in the initiatives we take, the themes we pursue and the methods we use."

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, he said, is prepared to devote resources to exploring ways in which "information technology as well as improved networking, better reporting and enhanced information gathering, can all be developed and used more specifically as instruments to promote religious freedom."

The roundtable, attended by academics, government officials and representatives of a wide variety of

religious groups, was organized by the religious and interreligious affairs committee of Canadian Jewish Congress, with support from the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, the Department of Foreign Affairs.

"A tremendous turnout from so many different communities, all under one umbrella, was in itself an eye-opener for many people," said Rabbi Reuven Bulka, chair of the committee and of the roundtable.

There were representatives of religious groups who said they had previously felt isolated, and were unaware that other groups were dealing with similar concerns.

According to Ron Singer, conference coordinator, many participants thanked Congress for providing an opportunity to meet and work with each other. "It was a great step in building a coalition," said Singer.

Paul Marshall, senior fellow at the Centre for Religious Freedom,



Lloyd Axworthy

Freedom House, Washington, D.C., discussed Canadian Policy Alternatives for Promoting Religious Freedom.

Panelists who led a discussion on Case Studies in Religious Per-

secution were Susanne Tamas, speaking on the Baha'i in Iran; Ronald Schwartz, on Buddhists in Tibet; and Mel Middleton, on Christians in Sudan.

As a result of the meeting, a report will be submitted to the government.

Reluctant to call the roundtable a success until its results are known, Rabbi Bulka said, "We don't delude ourselves into thinking that the problems will be solved overnight. We know what happens when people stand by idly."

He is, however, optimistic that "we could have a very powerful voice in trying to get rid of the scourge that is affecting the entire world."