

The Policy Questions

1. To what extent, and by what measures, should Canadians promote and protect human rights in the region?

Canadians are justifiably offended, often disturbed, by the human-rights abuses committed (or merely tolerated) by some Asia-Pacific governments. The military hijacking of an attempted democracy in Burma, the Indonesian government's brutality in East Timor, the comprehensive and continuing denial of legal and political rights in China, the exploitation of children and women—these and other evils arouse in Canadians a natural impulse to do something helpful. But what, exactly?

Some people argue strenuously for action by the Canadian government in these cases: for withholding aid, cancelling export credits and other financing, even for stopping all trade if possible. They hold such measures to be a true reflection of Canadian values, or a universal moral obligation, or a duty under international law, and usually some mix of these different imperatives. Actions like these are often decided by governments in the end—but not always; increasingly, companies and others in the private sector are debating and developing codes of conduct intended to punish corruption and other abuses, or simply to avoid complicity in them. Advocates for measures of this kind believe they can sometimes improve foreign-government behaviour, or even alter the nature of political systems. They also point to the security dimension: Human-rights abuses, especially against ethnic and economic minorities, violate the “human security” of the victims and jeopardize international peace and