

Human rights need aid

for a human rights test that does not conflict with economic development.

So much for the bilateral dimension. Needless to say, there are limits to any donor's capacity for pursuing the bilateral route to aid/rights linkage. For Canada, a middle power at most, the limits are sizable. But economic strength joins with history and geography to create an important Canadian niche on the international front.

The multilateral aid agencies pose a special kind of problem. To put it bluntly, most of them — including United Nations bodies and UN affiliates such as the World Bank — comprise authoritarian as well as democratic governments, and are mandated to address exclusively economic issues. As a result, they scrupulously avoid public involvement with questions of political development. It is easy to understand why human rights have no place on their official agenda.

Multilateral aid not impotent

But this cannot, in the nature of things, be an indictment of multilateral aid. Indeed, the UN-related agencies and the regional development banks, for example, have some impressive credentials: flexibility in types of aid, resources not tied to inefficient suppliers, in-depth technical expertise in many fields, the recipients' confidence generated by a low political profile. Despite their inevitable growing pains, they can reasonably lay claim to a large share of the success stories in aid giving. Furthermore, there can be a world of difference between official policy and unofficial views on human rights. Just because most of the multilateral aid agencies bring rich and poor countries together on a regular basis, they provide countless opportunities for informal discussion of the economic and political facets of aid impact. The Canadian government should be in the vanguard of those emphasizing and re-emphasizing the human rights implications of economic aid specifically and nation building in general.

In the case of at least one of the multilateral agencies — the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, grouping only the Western donor countries plus Japan — Canada should be doing more. We should be urging the integration of human rights criteria into members' development assistance programs. And we should be hosting and promoting a wide variety of gatherings among democratic donors, with a view to exploring the possibilities for joint aid giving linked to respect for human rights.

This is not all. A gentle way of evaluating the Helsinki Accords is to say that "not much was expected and not much was achieved — but little was lost, either" (*The Globe and Mail*, August 5, 1985). In less diplomatic terms, the

Accords are spinning in their tracks. Canada should be searching for new ideas and machinery to bring meaningful progress — not only on Helsinki but also on its badly bruised pioneering predecessor, the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And we should be persistently encouraging the formation of new regional arrangements patterned on the Organization of American States and European Conventions on Human Rights.

Then, too, we should be on the alert for fresh private sector initiatives beamed in the same direction. Perhaps the most interesting recent example was an April 1985 conference attended by citizens of twenty-six developed and developing democratic countries (including Canada, the United States and India). Constituting themselves as an International Committee for a Community of Democracies, the participants called for the establishment of an Association of Democracies at the government level, as well as an affiliated but independent International Institute for Democracy.

The Association would give effect to the conviction that "pluralistic democracies urgently require a forum in which effective arrangements for mutual support, for solving problems among themselves, for the development and protection of democratic systems and for achieving other common objectives can be pursued in a context of shared values and ideals" (*CCD Courier*, July 1985). It is not at all intended to supplant or diminish the United Nations or other vital organizations, but rather to reinforce the international struggle for human rights. As for the Institute, it would conduct research and exchanges of expert views on the problems of developing and sustaining democratic government. This is the type of novel approach that merits the most serious consideration by Canada and by democracies everywhere.

Last words

By this point in the essay, the aid dimension has faded — though it could be nourished by the proposed Association of Democracies. But this is as it should be. Foreign aid is essentially about means, not ends.

My broader concern is fundamental human rights. South Africa, for all its current drama and pathos, is little more than the tip of a global iceberg. My underlying premise is that virtually all men and women, wherever they live and whatever they believe, aspire to be free — free to choose, and free to enrich their own lives — and that moving significantly in this direction will make our planet a more just and peaceful place in the years and decades ahead. Canadians would find ample room for debate on whether such hypotheses are subject to rigorous proof. But how many, among us, would dispute the proposition that we can seek no greater good than universal respect for individual dignity and freedom? □