

Introduction

Representatives from disability organizations and independent researchers have been exploring the role of disability issues in Canadian foreign policy in order to expand the thinking in the area. The two papers are the result of the research and roundtable discussion that took place in June. Clearly Canadians have played a major role in contributing to international issues promoting the rights of disabled people. In 1980 a world wide disability rights movement Disabled Peoples' International emerged from the World Congress of Rehabilitation International held in Winnipeg, Canada. Canadians played a major leadership role in the organization and influencing United Nations policy concerning disability issues. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded the development of the grass roots movement as did development agencies like the Mennonite Central Committee.

A paradigm shift took place in the early 1980's that recognized disabled people as citizens with rights and not only clients of social services. While Canada has played a major role in developing and promoting the human rights framework it has not included it in its own foreign policy. This document provides an historical perspective of disability issues and an analysis how Canadian foreign policy dealt with disability.

The two papers have a slightly different focus. "Future Directions in Pursuing International Disability Issues" provides an historical perspective on disability issues in Canada and internationally. It analyzes some of the themes that emerge and makes some recommendations for future action. "Less Than Equal: Disability and Canadian Foreign Policy" provides a critical analysis of Canadian foreign policy and how it has or has not included disability issues.

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