

Human Rights — Child Labour

QUESTION

What is Canada's position on trading with countries that abuse child labour? Why won't Canada adopt measures similar to those recently adopted in the United States banning imports of goods made by forced or indentured labour?

SUGGESTED REPLY

- The economic exploitation of children is a fundamental violation of international human rights. Canada is working with other governments, the private sector and international institutions and NGOs to change these conditions.
- Child labour is a complex problem rooted mainly in extreme poverty. Easy solutions such as trade enforcement measures can do more harm than good to those people we want to help. Simply putting children out of work, which could very well be the effect of punitive measures such as limiting the importation of certain products made with child labour, risks displacing these workers into even worse situations, such as prostitution. It also ignores the plight of the vast majority of child labourers in developing countries who are employed in the domestic and informal sectors.
- This is why Canada approaches child labour issues through cooperation based on reducing poverty and meeting human needs. When family income rises and poverty is alleviated, children no longer need to work to provide income for the family.
- The Canadian government is committed to providing 25 per cent of Canada's international development assistance to basic human needs. CIDA had allocated 35.5 per cent of its budget to this priority in 1997.
- Canada is looking for ways to translate public concern about abusive child labour practices into actions that help improve the lives of children who are otherwise deprived of the right to education and a secure childhood.
- In April 1997, Minister Axworthy announced the creation of the Child Labour Challenge Fund to support Canadian private sector initiatives aimed at addressing exploitive child labour internationally through projects, such as the development of voluntary guidelines, codes of conduct and consumer labelling practices.