

Canada's government has proclaimed that it "is firmly committed to integrating human rights fully into the broad sweep of Canada's external relations."⁽⁶⁾ This Sub-Committee is assessing the implementation of this commitment, and will make recommendations for improving its fulfillment. Toward that end, this Interim Report will provide an introductory overview of the positions taken by non-governmental human rights proponents and by government policymakers in the areas we intend to explore, areas that are central to Canada's credibility as a champion of human rights.

2. OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (ODA) AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Canadian government has expressed acceptance of the idea that in cases of systematic, gross and persistent violations of human rights, it would, as a matter of policy, reduce or deny government-to-government ODA and channel aid through non-governmental organizations. Similar approaches were recommended between 1977 and 1987 by a number of academic writers, non-governmental organizations, individual Members of Parliament and parliamentary committees.⁽⁷⁾

Another principle on which there is harmony between governmental and other voices is that aid should be used as a positive instrument in support of efforts towards human rights progress, and not just as something to be diverted or denied in response to persistent violations by aid-recipient countries. Surely, that is one philosophical underpinning of the new International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.⁽⁸⁾ The government has stated its agreement with human rights specialists about institutional methods of incorporating human rights into foreign policy and practice, such as provision of human rights training for foreign service officers at External Affairs and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the creation of a human rights unit at CIDA. Perhaps research by this Committee would reveal ways to improve the implementation of the aforementioned initiatives. The task we have currently set for ourselves, however, is to focus on areas where there remain wider differences of opinion among concerned actors. Two of these in the ODA domain are addressed here:

1. The Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade, as well as non-governmental thinkers, has asked for clear human rights criteria to be applied openly and consistently when Canada assesses aid programs, and a number of scholars have illustrated how such standards might be applied in practice.⁽⁹⁾ The government has rejected the concept of pre-determined assessment criteria based on the relative human rights performance of countries, but has indicated that this will be one factor in deciding if a country will be a major aid recipient.⁽¹⁰⁾