

Country-Specific Questions: Cuba, Canadian Praise

QUESTION

Why does Canada continue to defend Cuba?

SUGGESTED REPLY

- Canada's policy towards Cuba is realistic. It does not overlook problems in Cuban society. We are concerned, for example, at the continued lack of respect for the civil and political rights of Cuba's citizens. There is clearly an overall absence of due process and of freedom of expression, assembly and association. We have openly expressed our criticism of this, and our concern about arrests of individuals engaged in human rights activities.
- Canada's long-term objective in Cuba is a peaceful evolution to a fully functioning civil society and an open economy. Canada's policy of constructive engagement is designed to provide Cuba with the kind of assistance and support that will be needed if a peaceful transition is to occur.
- A major step forward in this regard was the signing of the Canada-Cuba Joint Declaration in January 1997. This declaration identifies areas in which the two countries have agreed to work together, including human rights. The declaration is unprecedented; for the first time, the Cubans have committed themselves publicly to work with a western country on human rights and good governance.
- Implementation of the Canada-Cuba Joint Declaration is proceeding reasonably well. Cuba is living up to the agreements, and there has been progress in most areas. But the declaration is a work in progress. It does not signal immediate fundamental change, and it is not a complete package. It sets the agenda.