

Window of Opportunity

The famine has led to a situation in which NGOs have been given unprecedented access into North Korea to help alleviate the suffering caused by the food shortage. Given that North Korea is an insular society which does not tend to trust outsiders, this access can be seen as a "compassionate window of opportunity" for Canada and the rest of the world. Used wisely and judiciously, this could be seen as an opportunity to gain insight into the political and economic situation in North Korea. However, this is a long process which has its roots in lower level human contact.

To this point, some change is in evidence. For example, only 18 months ago it was made nearly impossible to take pictures while traveling through North Korea; however, currently, with the exception of military operations, it is possible to do so unimpeded.

It is also possible that greater insight into North Korea can be gained through international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which require economic transparency in return for financial aid.

Diplomatic Methods

To date, the Canadian NGOs have been the Canadian "diplomats" in North Korea via UNDP programs. While they have done a good job of engaging North Koreans at the lower level, it is considered essential that the policy level be brought in to ensure that effective change occurs.

Too often it is felt that issues can only be handled by the Great Powers. However, development and security issues in South East Asia are not the exclusive domain of the Great Powers - Canada has a role to play.

The lack of diplomatic relations with North Korea is not effective for the current scenario. The opportunities for access to the system are available, and Canada should take advantage of all possible avenues for change. China and Cuba were offered as examples of countries with whom Canada has managed to maintain unique relations separate from the Great Powers.

It was seen as necessary for Canada to remove North Korea from the "area of control list" with regard to import/export sanctions. This would help free CIDA dollars which are currently prohibited from being used to aid North Korea.

A major psychological barrier between North Koreans and Canadians is the fact that we are, technically, still enemies. A peace treaty to replace the current armistice would go a long way toward the opening of North Korean society. Canada should be involved in the achievement of this goal.