

## News BRIEFS

### CANADA RATIFIES MAJOR INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Canada ratified two major international agreements in July: the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. Foreign Affairs Minister Axworthy deposited Canada's instruments of ratification at the United Nations in New York on July 7.

Canada is the first country to introduce comprehensive legislation (the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act) incorporating the provisions of the ICC Statute into Canadian law. The ICC will be the first permanent international tribunal having jurisdiction over the most serious crimes known to humankind: genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. As of mid-July, the ICC Statute had been signed by 98 states and ratified by 14. It will enter into force once it has been ratified by 60 states.

Mr. Axworthy has appointed a Special Adviser for the ICC: Irwin Cotler, Member of Parliament for Mount Royal. A former law professor at McGill University, Mr. Cotler is an internationally recognized expert on human rights and humanitarian law. He will help design a strategy to promote widespread ratification of the ICC.

The Optional Protocol on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict sets new international standards. Most notably, it requires states to ensure that no one under the age of 18 takes a direct part in hostilities.

"Canada has been a driving force behind the creation of the International Criminal Court and the negotiation of the Optional Protocol," said Mr. Axworthy. "These two agreements will play an important role in advancing human security by ensuring that those who have committed crimes against humanity do not escape justice, and by protecting children, the most vulnerable victims of armed conflict."

### NEW POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR THE NORTH

A new policy framework entitled *The Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy* has been unveiled by Minister Axworthy. The document outlines Canada's foreign policy objectives in northern and circumpolar affairs.

The Minister announced that \$10 million will be allocated over the next five years to implement the policy. Specifically, the funds will: support the Arctic Council and its Canadian permanent participants; help establish the University of the Arctic; contribute to Canadian and circumpolar policy research networks; assist Canada in collaborating with Russia to address its northern challenges; and promote sustainable development across the circumpolar region through the pursuit of economic and trade opportunities.

International Co-operation Minister Maria Minna announced an additional \$5 million contribution to an ongoing project that seeks to help Russia's northern Indigenous peoples play a more effective role in their long-term development.

"This policy framework builds on Canada's commitment to partnership with northern peoples and our circumpolar neighbours, to address issues of common concern and responsibility," said Mr. Axworthy. "The North is now a central part of our foreign policy."

### CANADA RECOGNIZES NORTH KOREA

After a meeting with North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun in Bangkok in late July, Minister Axworthy announced that Canada formally recognizes the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as "a state and member of the international community." Discussions are now under way on the establishment of diplomatic relations and, eventually, on the opening of embassies in both countries.

"For some time now, the DPRK has been reaching out to the international community and attempting to increase the number of countries with which it has

foreign relations," said Mr. Axworthy. "Canada welcomes this initiative and intends to assist the DPRK to integrate itself into international affairs."

The Bangkok meeting was the first-ever ministerial-level encounter between the Canadian and DPRK governments. The process of formalizing bilateral relations was initiated by the Government of Canada in 1998, when Mr. Axworthy endorsed an approach of more active engagement with North Korea. Since then, contacts between the two countries have been conducted through the Canadian Embassy in Beijing.

Canadian NGOs have been active in North Korea from the mid-1990s, when the international community became aware of extreme food shortages in that country. Since 1997, the Canadian International Development Agency has also made humanitarian food aid donations to the DPRK through the United Nations' World Food Programme and Canadian NGOs. Total Canadian assistance to date is over \$30 million.

### CANADIAN FUNDING CREATES VIRTUAL CLEARINGHOUSE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Last June in Windsor, at the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, Minister Axworthy announced an Internet connectivity initiative. This has rapidly produced results: a Web-based worldwide Virtual Clearinghouse on Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs ([www.atod.org](http://www.atod.org)).

Managed by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, the Virtual Clearinghouse identifies and links credible, timely and accurate Internet sources of information. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has provided \$250 000 to fund the project—an essential service in the ongoing battle against substance abuse. ●

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