

bodies. The existence of this problem has been admitted for some years, but very little action has been taken to correct it. Vietnam's judicial system, though the country is a signatory to the Convention of the Rights of the Children, affords children no special protection. With the deterioration of the health and education systems (a high percentage of families have to pay to send their children to primary schools), especially in the rural areas, more and more children are becoming disadvantaged. With generalized poverty, there has been an upsurge in cases of minors being sold into prostitution domestically as well as internationally. Vietnamese persons with disabilities live in very difficult conditions, although traditional family structures continue to serve the needs of those with mild disabilities.

The cumulative effect of ten years of "*doi moi*," or "renovation," has been felt most in terms of **expanded economic rights**. As the country converts to a market economy, the living standard of the vast majority of its people has improved even though the per-capita Gross Domestic Product is still only US\$300. It is still too soon to gauge the effects of the introduction of a Civil Code, which is intended in part to offset the lack of protection for individuals in the economy. Riots have broken out in some provinces as rural residents increasing use violence to demonstrate their discontent with the growing disparities in the distribution of the economic benefits of progress and the increasingly rampant corruption of local authorities and in party and government ranks. Though one hears more and more statements from leaders deploring corruption, there is nothing to indicate that the battle against this scourge is actually under way.

**Political and religious persecution** in particular continue to warrant the concern of the international community. The many persons still incarcerated for expressing their political opinions and religious beliefs have today become symbolic of Vietnam's disrespect for human rights. Two presidential amnesties in the fall of 1998 freed a total of nearly 8,000 prisoners who included only a dozen prisoners of conscience, since such detainees are viewed as common-law prisoners. The **United Nations Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance**, Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, undertook a mission to Vietnam in October 1998. However, Mr. Amor was unable to freely conduct all the interviews he had expected to for reasons explained in his report, which is to be submitted in Geneva in March 1999. In the meantime, a large number of writers, journalists, clergymen and anonymous individuals are still imprisoned. The **United Nations Commission on Human Rights** has taken no action regarding Vietnam in recent years, and there is nothing to indicate that a resolution might be passed in the foreseeable future.

### CANADIAN POSITION

Canada continues to have concerns about the human rights situation in Vietnam. We have regularly approached the Vietnamese authorities to encourage greater respect for human rights and to convey our views on issues in which we take a special interest. Visiting Canada in October 1998, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Nguyen Manh Cam, met with Lloyd Axworthy, our **Minister of Foreign Affairs**, who reminded his counterpart of Canada's concerns regarding human rights. Similarly, Canada uses the appropriate international forums to voice its concerns arising from the human rights situation in Vietnam.

Scrutinized in the **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** human rights and democratic development review process, this situation was taken into account in developing the ODA program. The current approach is to work with the Government of Vietnam to support administrative and legal reform as well as good governance programs involving public servants, journalists and even peasant farmers.