

It includes our work in El Salvador where we have initiated a social reconstruction program. It will carry out a number of projects to strengthen democratic processes, human rights, and the condition of women as well as help integrate back into society those who have been involved in the fighting and others who have been displaced by it.

Our aid program also plays an important role in the protection of human rights. The purpose of Canada's development assistance is to promote sustainable development in developing countries. A priority of our aid program is to increase respect for human rights and to promote democracy and better governance. In almost all situations, it is possible to take a constructive approach by supporting the work of governments, NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and international organizations to build respect for human rights.

But, in some cases, it is not possible. In some cases, we must seriously consider the value of assistance to regimes that do not respect the rights of their own citizens.

Those who are more concerned with the size of their military arsenal than with the welfare of their people cannot expect to receive international aid without conditions.

We are also discussing with our allies and friends - such as Japan and others with large ODA [Official Development Assistance] budgets - ways to act together to assertively bring home the message and encourage certain recipient countries to get their priorities right.

Our goal is not to punish countries, and thereby punish innocent populations, whose governments abuse human rights.

Our goal is to change the behaviour of those governments.

I want to compliment the work of all Canadian NGOs in their work for the cause of human rights. As a bilingual country with an NGO community that has strong links to both English- and French-speaking countries, we have a special role to play in areas such as Africa, which contains many of the countries with the greatest need.

We also encourage activities of NGOs and other institutions to build linkages on their own where, at times, we are not able to. The International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development is an excellent example of an organization that is making a real difference in the world. Another example is the Canadian Human Rights Commission, which is helping in the development of similar commissions in other countries.