

The status of women in India remains poor, notwithstanding extensive legal protection. While a deeply-rooted social problem, there are signs, however, that it is being addressed more seriously at the political level. "Dowry deaths," in which wives are killed by their husbands' families, remain a widespread crime, which often goes unpunished. India has not yet ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Child labour is the main challenge to children's rights in India. Although child labour is in violation of Indian constitutional provisions, the 44 million children who work in India are evidence of the gap between legislation and implementation, caused by poverty and traditional social structures. India has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has promised to eliminate child labour in hazardous industries by 2000 and all forms of exploitative child labour by 2010. Progressive legislation on the rights of the disabled was passed in 1995, but has yet to be implemented.

India's **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)**, established in 1993, has continued to grow in influence, to demonstrate a willingness to investigate controversial cases, and to urge the government to correct human rights abuse, while expanding human rights education and awareness. It works with the active NGO sector in India with which it is acquiring more credibility. A number of states have also established their own human rights commissions (eg, Punjab, Kashmir, West Bengal) which work with the NHRC. The National Minorities Commission has also become a more active and influential actor, most recently investigating and reporting on anti-Christian violence.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada maintains a **dialogue on human rights** with the Indian Government, both at the national and state levels. Canadian representatives are in regular contact with relevant Indian authorities, to discuss both the general human rights situation and specific concerns. Most recently, for example, the High Commission in Delhi raised concerns about attacks on Christians in Gujarat and elsewhere.

Canada is working with the Indian Government, other governments, the private sector, NGOs and international institutions to improve the human rights situation in India. Through the **Governance Support Fund, the Gender Equity Fund, and the Child Development Fund** Canada provides funding to Indian NGOs to assist their efforts in the human rights field. The NHRC/Canadian Human Rights Commission partnership strengthens the capacity of the NHRC and other Indian institutions to promote and protect human rights.