Some people argue (considering the humble amounts in Canadian development aid budgets) that Canada's best contribution is to promote more trade and investment; rising prosperity, they say, provides developing countries with both the capacity and the incentive to introduce and enforce sustainable-development policies. Selling environment-friendly goods and technology represents a more specific kind of contribution.

There is a thick literature on the links between trade and the environment. Some environmentalists have argued that freer trade (as promoted in APEC) militates against environmental protection. Free-market believers incline to the argument that trade policy is one thing, environment policy another. But even in APEC, environmental questions are receiving more ministerial time these days. A program of "sustainable cities," intended to remedy some of the ills of Asian urbanization, is on the agenda of APEC's November summit in Vancouver. Is this another case for corporate codes of conduct? What other environmental threats should the Canadian government address in Asia-Pacific? What are the costs it ought to accept?

More to be said, more to be done. . .

No paper of this kind could lay claim to all the answers, or even all the questions. But the point here is to open discussion, not to close it down. The intention is to foster a debate in which Canadians can form reasoned judgments, and give direction to their government.

Canada is a small country by Asia-Pacific standards, with limited power to act on its own or influence others. But there is no disputing that what happens in Asia-Pacific can have acute and lasting consequences for Canadians. So it comes to this: How best can Canadians, through their government and otherwise, collaborate with Asia-Pacific people to advance Canadian objectives--prosperity, security, and the projection of Canadian values?

One course might be through institution-building. Canadians participate in the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Is there a need for a similar institution in Asia-Pacific? Or are the Asian traditions of discreet bilateralism enough to secure peace and resolve conflicts? Does ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), with its ancillary meetings and groupings, represent a sort of security arrangement in the making? Or do Canada's institution-building interests reflect an old Eurocentrism out of place in Asia?

Another course of Canadian involvement might consist in some redefinition of what concerns us. If the terminology of "human rights" inspires suspicion in Asian government circles, maybe Canadians would get closer to the same ends by speaking and acting in terms of "human security." It's a far-reaching phrase that has already turned up in Canadian ministerial speeches, and directs attention where many think it belongs: not to the security of states and governments, but to the safety and livelihoods of people and communities--their environment, their economic security and freedom from exploitation and persecution, their participation in their own government.