

an indispensable component of each of these values, particularly with the qualitative change in information technology in recent years.

Here then is an opportunity where official foreign policy initiatives and programs, working in tandem with civil society, can substantially advance the cause of free expression. Moreover, speaking practically, at a time of scarce available resources, it is an area where costs are relatively modest. U

Canada brings a unique set of skills, competencies and values to its international work on freedom of expression. It has a reputation for thoughtful global positions that are unpretentious and unthreatening; federal institutions with relevant expertise: CBC, Radio Canada International, IDRC, the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, the CRTC, CIDA, Elections Canada, and others; a two-tiered broadcasting system, public and private; public policies and legal frameworks that have relevance to the situation of countries abroad; a plethora of NGO's and professional associations with the experience, commitment and know-how to promote free expression; a commitment to minority languages and cultural diversities, phenomena that are a source of great tension in many countries—the list is long indeed.

To it should be added one further item that makes it a potential player here: Canada's strength in the field of knowledge-based activities and its capacity to use knowledge for the advancement of democratic and human rights. In that sense, the need to defend and promote free expression should be understood to be a leading component of the values side, as opposed to the commercial side, of Canada's expertise in information- and knowledge-based activities, with both a rights agenda and a capacity-building agenda.

On this basis, we have identified the following issues that are relevant to the Canadian government's foreign policy and programs while involving the participation of non-governmental groups:

1. Protecting freedom of expression on the Internet.

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The Internet has become a revolutionary communications tool, history's first truly free medium. It is a unique phenomenon, different in kind from traditional broadcast mass media in that every Internet user is also a publisher with the capacity to reach millions of others at a very low cost. Its singularity lies in providing quick and inexpensive information, encouraging discussion rather than violence, and empowering ordinary citizens. In the least developed countries, this new