

Security Council determines that a particular situation constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Unilateral boycotts — though costly to the country imposing them — have no significant impact. Even universal boycotts may not improve a human rights situation. And I do not believe that the operations of the international financial institutions should be disrupted by political considerations. To do so would undermine their very foundations and the important role they are destined to play in the North-South dialogue. Furthermore, in simple, practical terms, no two or three countries — let alone 154 countries — would be able to devise a common list of human rights offenders sufficiently guilty to merit denying them international support.

Aid programs

Development assistance programs, too, cannot be started and stopped in response to specific negative or positive developments. These programs have a gestation of a number of years. And our aid objectives are to direct assistance to the poorest people in the poorest countries. Thus, to terminate aid to these people because of their government's abusive practices would result in their being doubly penalized. Canada does, however, take account of broad human rights considerations when we determine to which countries Canadian aid will be directed. Both the need of the country and the readiness of its government to deliver assistance to its neediest populations are important factors in determining eligibility for aid. In addition, we exclude from consideration that tiny number of countries whose government's excesses have resulted in social breakdown as occurred in Uganda under Idi Amin.

Obviously, to respond to a human rights problem, we must first ensure that we know the facts. The government receives with interest the comments of important Canadian and international non-governmental organizations. In fact, we have instituted annual consultations with them. We also have other sources of information, including reports from our embassies and exchanges of views with governments of dozens of countries of various political perspectives. We take note particular of the views of countries in the regions in which problems occur.

Within the Department of External Affairs there is a division which co-ordinates and harmonizes our responses in international human rights. But in our bilateral relationships, human rights considerations are factored in at the desk level in the geographic divisions of the department.

Expressing concern

Regularly, we make known our concerns and those of Canadians about human rights problems to the governments responsible — through our representatives in their capitals and through their representatives in Ottawa. When our bilateral relationship is strong, our views may gain a hearing; when it is weak, they have little impact. When many other governments express similar views, the impact will be greater.

Sometimes we make our concerns public, but more frequently we do not. Why? Not because our conviction is weak. Rather, we have found that our views are likely to have a more positive impact when expressed in terms of humanitarian concern and of our wish to resolve a serious impediment to the normal evolution and potential development of bilateral relations.
