

4. What are the implications of involving civil society in these initiatives? Why, when, how?

After reports from small groups, the international resource people commented on the outcomes of the exercise. Mr. Hamilton reviewed some of the suggestions which had emerged during Session 4.

During the discussion of follow-up it was suggested that the CHRF use the results of the meeting to prepare a set of draft recommendations for Canadian stakeholders. These have been circulated to the participants for their comments. Once the comments have been received and considered, the recommendations will be included in the final report of the meeting.

Before the Chair closed the meeting, Ms. Selwyn thanked the sponsors, the resource people and the staff of the CHRC and CHRF for their contributions to the success of the meeting.

Conclusions of the Round Table:

There was a broad consensus amongst the participants that Canada should continue its engagement with national institutions and that these activities should become a priority alongside existing efforts to strengthen the rule of law, democratic institutions and civil society. There was recognition that, despite the enormous potential of national institutions, they were only one part of the solution to improving human rights protection. It was noted that to be effective national institutions require a flourishing civil society, and strong non-governmental human rights organizations in particular. Canadian stakeholders, and the DFAIT and CIDA in particular, should develop policies which balance the need to support national institutions with other ongoing initiatives to support and strengthen human rights. It should be also noted that Canadian involvement overseas will also provide experiences which can be applied to improve our own human rights promotion and protection machinery.

Working with national institutions can also provide opportunities to bridge the gap which often exists between civil society and the government. Wherever possible, the participants agreed that it was advisable to involve civil society in initiatives with national institutions. While it is not always possible to include NGOs in every aspect of a programme, Canadian stakeholders should develop contacts with NGOs in Canada and in the country in question who can contribute to the success of these initiatives. While the involvement of civil society can sometimes complicate activities, more often, it is likely to contribute to the success of such initiatives.

Because it was acknowledged that national institutions are sometimes created by governments to distract international attention from serious violations, it was suggested that the Canadian government and other stakeholders develop criteria for engagement with national institutions. Such criteria should take into account the mandate of the institution, its independence and effectiveness as well as the availability of appropriate Canadian resources and skills. Similarly, since the nature of a national institution can evolve with changes in appointees, it is also important to have criteria for disengagement and be prepared to disengage should a national institution lose its