

Human Rights and Trade

Policy context

1. Although it is generally acknowledged that Canada should support good human rights practices in countries with which it has trade and investment relations, there are *immediate questions* that complicate policy development. These include: what are core human rights, or core labour standards? How do we define collective rights as distinct from individual rights?
2. There are variations in views and positions on the roles of capital and government in relation to human rights. Nevertheless, we can seek steps to introduce some measure of *accountability* of both corporations and government to the public that will enhance human rights compliance. The current interest in codes and labels reflects this search for accountability mechanisms.
3. Can Canadian companies *project Canadian values* if we cannot define a Canadian company? For example, in the mining sector some "Canadian" companies active internationally have no exploration or production in Canada.
4. If the Canadian government is to exert *greater influence* in international human rights, some say it needs to examine strategies to avoid charges of extra-territoriality or cultural imperialism. Others suggest that such charges come primarily from governments, not from the people whose rights they repress.
5. By assuming that capital, rather than government, provides the primary channel for influencing human rights, we are acquiescing in the "withering away of the state," and allowing the state to *download responsibilities*. The Canadian government has been unwilling to link economic relations with human rights concerns, even in situations of the most blatant abuse, such as Indonesia.
6. *Canada's presence in Asia* should not be overrated. For example, Canada's share of exports to the region is slipping. Yet, the ability of the government to influence Asian governments should not be underrated. Canada has persuaded Malaysia and Indonesia to support a UN forestry convention, for example.
7. The issue of *transparency* in the use of resources and financial management