

- Good governance encompasses respect for human rights, the practices of democracy, and responsible and accountable public administration. It considers how a government governs and what policies it pursues. It looks at how people are treated, how countries are governed and how well our contributions are used for the purposes for which they were intended, such as social and economic development, or the transformation of political or economic systems.

Canadians care about these principles -- and quite rightly. Let me take each in turn.

Good Governance -- Respect for Human Rights

First, human rights -- how people are treated. Respect for human rights lies at the core of good governance. Unless countries meet a basic standard of respect for human rights or show a clear resolve to improve conditions and address problems, they cannot expect outside assistance or support for the course they are following. They should instead expect pressure to change.

By the same token, sustained and determined efforts to strengthen observance of human rights will attract assistance and support. The reality is that sometimes we must take into account that some countries are starting from a long way back.

Good Governance -- the Practice of Democracy

Second, the practice of democracy -- how a country is governed. We know that democracy does not rely solely on specific models -- because models may vary -- but rather on the actual, effective participation of a country's people, including its women and its minorities, in the decision-making process.

Constitutions and elections are important, as in Haiti for example, but only if, in practice, they empower people to limit, control and change their governments. Participation in the exercise of power is central to democratic practice and is a key element in the development of a democratic culture.

So, too, is the tolerance of differences and the due respect for the interests and needs of a country's minorities. Democracy, whatever its form, involves pluralism, and that requires a special set of operating procedures to ensure a balance between those who hold power and those who don't.

In the final analysis, what is important is not only what a country has achieved by way of representative institutions, but how deeply it is committed -- in its own unique circumstances -- to developing democratic processes and a truly democratic system.