

While the Croatian constitution guarantees **freedom of thought and expression**, the Government keeps tight control over television. Independent radio stations suffer some official harassment through the licensing system. The print media is much freer and provides better news coverage, but the government continues its efforts to stifle criticism or dissent by prosecuting journalists for "libelling" the government; most prosecutions do not succeed but nevertheless force many journalists to impose self-censorship. Control of the electronic media is the principal deficiency in the electoral process; the opposition parties get little coverage during electoral campaigns. The provision for the election of a disproportionate number of representatives of the Croatian diaspora is an issue.

The Croatian judiciary is not completely independent of the government. It is subject to control or influence through the processes for appointment and removal of judges, which have been used to remove individuals perceived as not supporting the ruling party. The Croatian judiciary does have independent contacts with foreign judiciaries, particularly at the level of the Constitutional Court, and has occasionally defied the government in its rulings.

The following **positive trends in 1998** are worthy of note: the smooth re-integration of Eastern Slavonia into Croatia after the end of the UNTAES mandate; increased cooperation between the Croatian government and international organizations, particularly on refugee and displaced persons issues; public statements of the government became supportive of the return of non-Croat refugees and displaced persons; the Programs of Refugee Return and Reconstruction and Development were improved; the Croatian government committed itself to remove discriminatory provisions from legislation.

The human rights situation in Croatia is addressed in **omnibus resolutions on Former Yugoslavia**, which Canada traditionally co-sponsors, adopted at both the **Commission on Human Rights (CHR)** and the **UN General Assembly 3rd Committee**. At the 54th session of the Commission on Human Rights, the resolution was adopted by 41 votes to none, with 12 abstentions and renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Former Yugoslavia.

CANADIAN POSITION

We welcome the positive developments that have taken place over the past year, but **much remains to be done**. Canada believes that the Croatian government must continue to ensure that those wishing to return to their homes can do so safely and securely. This involves amending discriminatory laws, enforcing existing laws, simplifying procedures and publicly promoting an atmosphere in which returns can proceed. Control of the media, particularly the electronic media, must be relaxed. A free and independent media is fundamental to a democratic society and essential to the maintenance of other freedoms.

We continue to urge Croatia to cooperate fully with the **International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)**, and to continue to use its influence on the Bosnian Croat authorities to arrest indicted war criminals. We fully support the efforts of the international community to promote respect for human rights and monitor their implementation, particularly through the **OSCE Mission in Croatia**.