

The long-term, positive impact of the 1997 elections to improve the human rights climate cannot be over-emphasized: Mexico's new democratic reality, in combination with important new political and judicial reforms, is bringing greater scrutiny to bear on questions of human rights and social justice. Democratization, reform, and an increasingly active, independent press, have produced a tangibly greater awareness within Mexico of human rights concerns.

There have been other positive developments. Mexico is increasingly willing to accept greater scrutiny by international human rights mechanisms. On Mexico's invitation, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture visited Mexico in August 1997. In his March 1998 report, he noted the widespread use of torture, generally by poorly-paid and poorly-trained police and military forces, and made a series of useful and specific recommendations. An Inter-American Human Rights Commission team was given unlimited access in 1996, and released in September 1998 an updated "Country Report". The report is comprehensive and balanced, giving credit for the fundamental reforms which have taken place, but at the same time underlining serious human rights challenges that need urgently to be addressed. More recently, Mexican authorities appear to have accepted the validity of a comprehensive, critical report issued in January by Human Rights Watch, which reported in particular on the issue of impunity and how to combat it. Mexico announced in April 1998 that it intends to recognize the binding jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and ratification procedures are nearly complete. In May 1998, the Government of Mexico and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reached an agreement by which the ICRC was able to resume humanitarian and other activities in Chiapas. These developments reflect a positive shift.

CANADIAN POSITION

The Government of Canada recognizes that there are serious human rights concerns in Mexico, and we raise these concerns at all levels. At the same time, the human rights situation needs to be viewed in the broad context of the fundamental transition to democracy that is now underway in Mexico. Canada's present view is that Mexico in transition deserves our constructive support, engaged as it is in a long-term process towards reform. Canada provides this support in a wide variety of ways, including cooperation between our electoral and human rights commissions; promoting Canada-Mexico indigenous-to-indigenous partnerships to advance the economic development of our respective aboriginal communities; or supporting initiatives to build linkages between our respective civil societies. Through its **Canada Fund for Local Initiatives**, the Canadian Embassy supports the work of various Mexican human rights NGOs.

With respect to Chiapas, Minister Axworthy asked that a Canadian parliamentary delegation visit the region in May 1998 to get a first-hand look at conditions in the region. The delegation returned with an appreciation of the complexity of the situation, and made a number of recommendations, many of which the Government of Canada has already acted on. For example, a special \$100,000 fund was created within the Canadian Embassy's Canada Fund to support indigenous socio-economic development in Mexico. Also, on Canada's invitation, Mexico's Federal Coordinator for Chiapas, Mr. Emilio Rabasa, visited Ottawa in late September and met with parliamentarians, officials, non-governmental organizations, as well as Secretary of State Kilgour. The parliamentary delegation also recommended that Canada follow up on a Mexican invitation to send observers to the October 4, 1998 Chiapas state and local elections. Minister Axworthy therefore requested that a Canadian team, composed of a second parliamentary delegation in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations, visit Chiapas in this