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**CONTEXT**

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**CONTEXTE**

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## HUMAN RIGHTS IN CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY

### Context

In 1986, Parliament's Special Joint Committee on Canada's International Relations declared an all-party consensus that "the international promotion of human rights is a fundamental and integral part of Canadian foreign policy." In its February 1995 Foreign Policy Statement, the Government of Canada has made clear its position that human rights has been and will remain a priority area of international concern and action for Canadians. The Government regards respect for human rights not only as a fundamental value, but also as a crucial element in the development of stable, democratic and prosperous societies at peace with each other.

The Government regularly consults interested Canadians on international human rights issues. This process takes many forms, including Parliamentary debates and annual consultations organized by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, as well as consultations undertaken by the Canadian International Development Agency. In addition, in March 1994 the Government instituted an annual National Forum on Canadian Foreign Policy. Throughout the year, there is ongoing formal and informal dialogue with human rights institutions such as the Canadian Human Rights Commission, various non-governmental organizations, churches, universities, representatives of Native groups, the private sector, unions and ordinary citizens.

The importance Canada attaches to human rights reflects the basic values of Canadian society. This does not, however, mean our policy is motivated by a desire to impose Canadian values on other countries. The policy is, rather, a reflection of Canadian international interests: international events daily demonstrate that respect for human rights is an important key to international peace and prosperity, and to an environment where Canadians can best pursue their interests in the world. It is also a matter of basic international law: the human rights obligations of all governments find their origins in the UN Charter, which requires all United Nations members to promote universal respect for human rights, and in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose principles Canada regards as entrenched in customary international law binding on all governments. In 1993 the World Conference on Human Rights unanimously reaffirmed the principles of the Universal Declaration. Promoting them internationally is therefore not purely a question of values but a mutual obligation of all members of the international community.

### The Canadian Approach

Canada does not expect other governments to respect standards that it does not apply to itself. As a signatory of all the principal UN treaties on international human rights, Canada regularly submits its human rights record to review by UN monitoring bodies. It also accepts the authority of the UN Human Rights Committee to hear complaints from Canadian citizens under the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These undertakings strengthen Canada's reputation as a guarantor of its citizens' rights and enhance our credentials to urge other governments to respect international standards.