

During the civil society and NGO discussion, strong support emerged for the principle of working with Cuban youth, who will be the next generation of Cuban leaders in politics and social life. The principle, regrettably, was not really fleshed out into policy recommendations. More thinking is required in this area since there is near unanimous support for the concept of engaging youth.

The views of Oxfam representatives were a departure from Grenier and Wiseberg's criticisms. Mark Fried rejected both making the treatment of dissidents a litmus test of relations and making civil and political rights the focus of Canadian activities in Cuba. Fried believes that Cuba is experiencing gradual change for the better and that this improvement is founded on the widening role of grassroots actors. The key role for foreign governments is to open doors to facilitate the slow building of relationships and communities through contact with governments, international NGOs and tourists carrying medicine, clothing and different values. Fried praised the Canadian government's door-opening work in the 1990s and commented on how much the Cubans welcome Canadians because we treat them with respect. He then allowed the two former Oxfam field representatives to detail their on-the-ground experience. Their most important point was that Cuban citizens and social groups are constantly adapting their economic and social practices and these street level changes are often sanctioned after the fact by the Cuban government. Thus, Cuban NGOs and social organizations are seen by Oxfam as a source of innovation in communities that are gaining limited policy influence and are worthy of support. In their view, a society's elite does not always represent the population and in Cuba's case, there are many reform-minded and innovative people at the grassroots level.

2. Canadian Foreign Policy and Human Rights in Cuba

Overview

Canada's engagement in Cuba has been long-standing. The end of the Cold War presented a good opportunity to enhance Canada's presence on the island, to build confidence and offer Canadian expertise. However, soon it became clear that Cuba would remain an anachronism in a democratising world. As pressure from the U.S.A. increased, through the Helms-Burton legislation, for instance, Cuba became even more isolated.

Canada's two-track engagement aims at influencing the regime (especially on human rights) and engaging players (especially the young generation of Cubans). Meanwhile, the ultimate objective is a peaceful transition to a prosperous democracy and the reintegration of the island into the Hemisphere. To that end, Canadians will continue to reach out to Cubans, before and after a change occurs.

Hard negotiations resulting in the signing of the Canada-Cuba Joint Declaration (January 1997) have yielded some results. While implementation of resolutions has been uneven, dialogue and activities moved forward. Cuban officials signed anti-terrorism covenants and a number of