

## **REPORT ON THE SEMINAR ON UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL SANCTIONS**

### **Introduction**

This paper summarizes the findings and recommendations of the seminar on United Nations Security Council sanctions, held in Ottawa on 17 July, 1998. The paper begins by outlining the observations of seminar participants about the underlying logic and effectiveness of UNSC sanctions. It also presents major critiques of the current practice of UNSC sanctions, and describes key trends which will bear upon efforts to address these faults.

The next section outlines the participants' vision of a Canadian approach to UNSC sanctions. This is followed by a series of general principles intended to guide Canadian policymakers as they consider the imposition of sanctions on a case-by-case basis. These principles address three issues: when to support the use of sanctions, what sort of sanctions (if any) to promote, and how to ensure that Canada's voice is heard on the Council.

The final section of the paper enumerates the key proposals for reform which emerged from the roundtable. These fall into four categories: reforming the administration of UNSC sanctions, addressing the humanitarian impact of sanctions, building international support for reform, and building support for reform within civil society.

### **1. UNSC sanctions in perspective: (il)logic and (in)effectiveness**

Participants agreed that the past practice of UNSC sanctions can best be described as "amateurish" in that it has been determined by fundamentally politicized debate (largely among P-5 members) and by a desire on the part of states to "do something," rather than through a rational process which seeks an effective, politically viable, and humane strategy for dealing with threats to the peace. Furthermore, rather than being designed to bring about reform in the target state, sanctions have often been applied in a vindictive manner, intended to inflict the maximum amount of pain on the target without regard to the likely effectiveness and humanitarian implications of such a strategy.

The discussion also emphasized the key role played by public opinion in motivating states to "do something" in response to perceived atrocities abroad. In the sense that sanctions satisfy the demands of domestic audiences, they can be viewed in an important sense as "successful" regardless of their impact on target states. The prevailing "pain equals gain" mentality, combined with the force of public opinion, means that it is sometimes difficult to persuade states to adopt a more nuanced approach when imposing sanctions, or to dissuade them from using sanctions when other, less dramatic strategies might be more constructive.