

with the government they elect to act for them?

As Canadians sort out these questions, one proposition at least might find agreement: It is better to have a good effect on the exercise of human rights abroad than to please our own consciences, or to strike smug poses. Firm moral purpose can co-exist with tactics shaped to particular cases. In that regard, it must be acknowledged that Canada is a smallish state in Asia-Pacific affairs. Whereas China or Indonesia might have to take into account threats and inducements from the United States in deciding their human-rights practices, the opinion of the Canadian government weighs less heavily in their calculations. Good effect, therefore, often requires Canadians to act in concert with others in order to influence governments very much bigger.

Acting with others comes almost instinctively to Canadians; multilateralism has been a trait of Canadian diplomacy for decades. But it does not always find adherents in Asia-Pacific, where governments have generally practised a rigorously quiet and non-meddling form of bilateralism. Only in recent years, and with Canada's earnest encouragement, have governments in Southeast Asia (in ASEAN) and East Asia diffidently tested multilateral arrangements--or as it is more fashionable to say, plurilateralism. Should the Canadian government try to maximize its influence by multilateralizing the international politics of human rights? Or instead, despite the disadvantages of size, should Canada engage Asian governments as best it can bilaterally?

2. How can Canada help the region's indigenous peoples find their voice and their place in the countries of Asia-Pacific?

It is almost as if they didn't exist--or as if they lived hidden and silent in the deepest forest, or on the remotest islands. But there are tens of millions of indigenous and tribal people across Asia-Pacific (there is no agreement on their numbers), by and large marginalized both literally and metaphorically: frequently relegated to hinterlands, impoverished, politically weak, solemnly ignored by politicians and diplomats. In some Asian countries their very existence is denied; governments define them as ethnic minorities, or as nothing at all. Even where indigenous peoples are recognized as forming sovereign, independent states--the micro-states of the Pacific islands--they are ignored for the most part in the international politics of trans-Pacific and Asian relations.

Advocates for indigenous peoples argue that they are not just another category of minorities. (In some areas they are majorities, albeit usually disadvantaged.) For one thing, indigenous peoples have been afflicted with a perniciously characteristic combination of injustices and hardships: forced population transfers into or out of homelands; seizures and destruction of lands and resources; subjection to alien education and justice systems; coercive cultural assimilation; and particularly intense exposure to the evils of child labor and the economic and sexual exploitation of women.

Worse, the developing discourse on civil society in Asia-Pacific rarely embraces issues crucial to indigenous peoples--issues of political and economic autonomy, self-determination, self-government. Civil-society debates typically concern restricting government authority. But to