

Canadian Business for Social Responsibility (CBSR)

Roundtable on Canadian Firms/Canadian Values: Foreign Policy Implications of Business Canadian Firms Operating in Risky States. Vancouver, May 2nd 2000

ROUNDTABLE FINDINGS

Introduction

On May 2nd CBSR hosted a roundtable meeting of Canadian businesses, NGOs, social investors, and academics to discuss how the Government can better manage the activities of Canadian firms operating in risky states; a full list of participants is attached. The meeting was part of a larger research initiative undertaken by CBSR and funded by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development.

Objectives

The objectives of this meeting were:

- to gather responses and suggestions in the draft research paper (prepared by Dr. Kai Alderson of the Institute for International Relations at UBC), especially regarding the roles and responsibilities of government, business and NGOs in promoting corporate social responsibility;
- To collect recommendations regarding specific measures that could be taken by 1) the federal Government 2) the Canadian business and 3) NGOs; and
- to promote mutually informative discussion on these issues among government, business, NGO and academic representatives attending the roundtable.

General Observations

Complexity of Definitions

Participants felt that some terms used in the report were difficult to define. These included: 'risky states', 'human security', 'complicity' in human rights abuses, corporations' 'sphere of influence', and what precisely was meant by 'Canadian values'. This last term was felt to be particularly problematic, for two reasons. First, it is too vague. Second, it is presumptuous to assume that Canadians have cornered the market on good social and environmental practices. There was a strong consensus among participants that standards had to be based on international law instruments and especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Doing so would avoid charges of paternalism and arguments based on cultural relativism.