

1.3 While DFAIT is moving ahead in its ability to balance interests and values, competing domestic interests sometimes lead to inconsistently implemented human rights policy.

Human rights issues are managed in the context of the department's relations with Canadian and international stakeholders — very few of whom are neutral about the theme. As an issue, international human rights carries a large amount of domestic political capital, and policies sometimes appear to play more to the hometown audience than to the situation overseas. Canadians hold seemingly contradictory values (e.g. human rights and trade) but want consistent and integrated policies in our foreign affairs.

Balancing these interests and values is a dynamic, on-going process that may never reach completion in practice. DFAIT officers remind us that human rights is a relatively new policy area in bilateral relations, and that in a short period we have taken significant steps to build our capacity to manage the seeming inconsistencies, particularly in policy implementation. However, the officers state clearly that inconsistency in human rights policy across time and geographic location remains a source of frustration and an obstacle to effective issues management. They ascribe this inconsistency to two sources: different ministers with different priorities, and the officer's need to balance serving government policy, providing policy advice, and serving the needs of the minister.

1.4 DFAIT's performance in managing human rights issues is based on individual excellence. Its performance could improve with more effective management systems.

DFAIT relies more on individual officers' abilities than systems and procedures in managing human rights issues. Given the shrinking resource base, and the declining level of support to officers, this may not be the most propitious strategy. Assuming a clear government policy and corporate mission, the department lacks strong, effective systems and procedures for planning, implementing and monitoring its performance in managing human rights issues. This would include: priority-setting and resourcing; policy coordination among themes and agendas; operating principles for determining who gets involved when and for what reasons; coordination mechanisms to ensure the added value of expertise; coherent roles and responsibilities to reduce indecision; clear lines of communication; effective human resource management; performance standards and benchmarks; and systems for learning from past successes and failures.

1.5 Coordination in issues management among DFAIT branches and among DFAIT and OGDs is complex, costly, but it usually works well. Good coordination is necessary for effective issues management.

The human rights context requires Canadian experts to intervene in specialized capacities. The cornerstone of an effective strategy is the coordination of such expertise. DFAIT divisions routinely coordinate their efforts with a range of internal and external groups that are often specialized in some aspect of the political, trade or aid dimension of a bilateral relationship.

While effective coordination facilitates issues management — and conversely, poor coordination prevents people from playing their specialist role and adding value to the work produced — we must ask how effectively DFAIT's structures serve its coordination strategy. Interview data suggest that DFAIT is not always coordinating the work of experts efficiently. The 'stove pipe' effect sometimes results in too many people at meetings; work teams are the exception, not the rule;