

Democracy/Human Rights: Child Labour

QUESTION

What is Canada's position on trading with countries that abuse child labour? Why won't Canada adopt measures similar to those recently adopted in the United States banning imports of goods made by forced or indentured labour?

SUGGESTED REPLY

- The economic exploitation of children is a fundamental violation of international human rights. Canada is working with other governments, the private sector and international institutions and NGOs to change these conditions.
- Child labour is a complex problem rooted mainly in extreme poverty. Easy solutions such as trade enforcement measures can do more harm than good to those people we want to help.
- This is why Canada approaches child labour issues through cooperation based on reducing poverty and meeting human needs. When family income rises and poverty is alleviated, children no longer need to work to provide income for the family.
- The Canadian government is committed to providing 25 per cent of Canada's international development assistance to basic human needs. CIDA allocated 35.5 per cent of its budget to this priority in 1997.
- Last April, Minister Axworthy announced the creation of the Child Labour Challenge Fund to support Canadian private sector initiatives aimed at addressing exploitive child labour internationally through projects, such as the development of voluntary guidelines, codes of conduct and consumer labelling practices.
- We are also working hard in the International Labour Organization (ILO) to develop a new convention on eliminating the most hazardous forms of child labour. This convention is expected to be adopted in 1999. Last year, Canada made a contribution of \$700,000 to the ILO's International Program for the Elimination of Child Labour.
- Canada participated in the Amsterdam Child Labour Conference last February, and Minister Marleau represented Canada at a similar conference in Oslo in October.