

situations you will consider today — Sudan, Iran and Tibet — are also troubling, each for unique reasons.

However, challenges to freedom of religion wherever they happen cannot go unanswered. Canadians need to be involved in responding — as a way to project our values and advance our interests.

Efforts to promote religious tolerance abroad reflect our experience at home. The same capacity for tolerance, accommodation, negotiation and goodwill that we have used to build a united, multicultural — and multifaith — country can and should be applied internationally. While we seek to project these values elsewhere, we must remain vigilant about the impact of religious extremism in our own midst and constantly work toward greater religious understanding at home.

Advancing religious freedom also serves our national interests. Religious intolerance can and has led to uncertainty and violent conflict. As a result, it can affect our prosperity, which depends on global and regional stability. It can cost us directly through the funds Canadians devote to humanitarian and other aid to victims of conflict in which religious persecution plays a part or is used as an instrument of war — in Sudan, for example, the conflict has cost Canada \$1 million a month. It can increase the risks to our own security if it involves terrorism or if it spills over onto our own shores.

Canada therefore needs to be engaged — and we have been, in multilateral and bilateral forums. At the United Nations, we have strongly backed the activities of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Question of Religious Intolerance. Canada was a key proponent of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. We have worked vigorously to promote the implementation of its objectives. Canada has been an active co-sponsor of resolutions opposing religious intolerance at both the UN General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights.

We have also been working bilaterally and with civil society to use religious dialogue as a tool for reconciliation. As a follow-up to the Oslo Interfaith Declaration, Canada and Norway are exploring an initiative involving the Canadian Council of Churches and their Norwegian counterparts aimed at building a broad-based international civil society coalition to advance freedom of religion.

Freedom of religion is also part of the agenda in our bilateral human rights dialogues with China and Cuba. We are working hard to foster dialogue between Chinese and Canadian civil society groups in this area. In Cuba, the recent progress made by the Catholic Church results in no small part from the emphasis Canada and other countries have put on this issue. As part of our efforts to expand contacts with Iran, Canadian parliamentarians raised the issue of religious freedom during a visit there last month.

In many ways our approach is still a work in progress. As we look to the future and to developing our ideas and activities further, we will focus our efforts in the following areas:

1. **Reinforcing existing mechanisms.** To a certain extent, we already have many of the instruments we require to move forward. What we now need is to make them work better. Multilaterally, Canada will carry on efforts at the UN while expanding our efforts, where appropriate, in other organizations in which we participate. The OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] is promising in that regard. We will support further reflection and initiate concrete actions to engage a multifaith dialogue in the OSCE region. To that end, the OSCE Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion has an