

**Human Rights Assessment - 1998 Reference Group Meeting - August 31, 1998**  
**"HOW TO DO HUMAN RIGHTS WORK BETTER"**

**Introduction:**

As a follow-up to the June 2, 1998, Roundtable on Human Rights in Canadian Foreign Policy, a reference group met to engage in further discussion and outline a work plan for a human rights assessment. The assessment was seen to be more than a debate, consultation or review of existing policies, objectives or international instruments. It is seen to be an opportunity to "put muscle on the skeleton" by:

- being more precise about outcomes of initiatives in human rights work
- looking at what Canada is trying to achieve and
- what has been successful and what could be done better and differently.

Respecting the principles of universality and indivisibility clearly articulated at the June roundtable, this assessment would assist Canadians outside of government to think and input into a further evolution of foreign policy. Taking risks to try new strategies, methods and ways may lead to a broadening of the boundaries of the work. The time is right to look at what works, what doesn't and how the work can be done better.

**The Opportunity:**

Minister Axworthy has requested this assessment and is giving leadership and commitment to support and act on the results. He is looking for new and creative ideas which:

- could lead to better strategic alliances on specific issues
- increased political support for human rights work
- increased integration and coherence within DFAIT and parallel Ministries such as Justice and Immigration.

An assessment at this time will reaffirm human rights work by Canadians and be an opportunity for Canadians to shape tools used in their human rights work. When the Minister is involved in such a process there are some elements of re-examination with policy implications and some policy options may emerge. By engaging, Canadians have an opportunity to provide public input towards moving things forward in an ongoing assessment and to influence multi-level and bilateral processes.