

The government of Mesut Yilmaz, in power from July 1997 to January 1999, expressed its intention to improve the human rights situation, but, concrete, measurable change was slow. His government openly admitted that legislative modifications to the constitution, criminal code and the anti-terrorism law were needed and promised to enact these changes. Additionally, a Human Rights High Advisory Council, operating since July 1997, has recommended that an "Ombudsman" system be established. Past governments have also made commitments, and introduced some reforms, but unfortunately these have not produced the desired results. With the current interim government of Bulent Ecevit functioning essentially on a caretaker basis, progress in this area will probably have to await the formation of a new government following the 18 April 1999 general elections.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada is concerned about abuses of human rights in Turkey and has offered to work with the appropriate Turkish authorities to assist in their efforts to improve the situation. Canadian representatives have consistently raised the human rights situation during discussions with their Turkish counterparts on every appropriate occasion, including during discussions at ministerial level. Minister Axworthy was last in Ankara in November 1997, and he hosted his counterpart, Foreign Minister Ismail Cem, in September 1998. On both occasions, human rights figured prominently on the agenda. The Canadian Embassy in Ankara keeps in close contact with and supports leading human rights NGOs in Turkey.

Canada condemns the terrorist activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and those of other violent opposition groups in Turkey. At the same time, Canada urges Turkish authorities to seek non-military solutions to the problems facing its citizens. The Canadian government recognizes that Turkey has already taken some steps to address the issue of human rights, including disciplinary action against blatant cases of police abuses, changes to anti-terrorism legislation, and a degree of cooperation with organizations promoting human rights at the international level, including the UN Committee against Torture. These are steps in the right direction but Canada would welcome more.

The Turkish government has stated that the most appropriate way to address the situation in the southeast is through enhancing socio-economic programs and improving the standard of living in general. We agree but believe that patterns of human rights abuses meanwhile need to be addressed.

In 1998, a mission including an official from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), one from the RCMP and one from Correctional Services Canada visited Turkey with a view to examine with Turkish authorities, the possibilities of implementing concrete projects of cooperation in the area of protection of human rights. The possibility of developing technical assistance in the areas of policing and corrections services was envisaged and a return visit to Canada by Turkish officials in these sectors is expected in 1999, during which concrete forms of cooperation will be further discussed.