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Policy Options

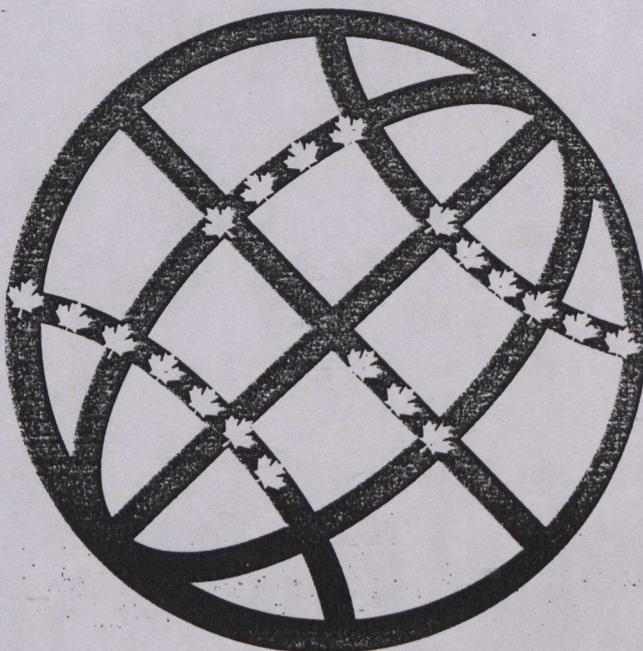
Dept. of International Affairs
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Human Rights Assessment
1998 Reference Group Meeting
August 31, 1998
"HOW TO DO HUMAN RIGHTS WORK BETTER"

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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.

The Key Process Questions for an Assessment:

- What to assess?
- Who can make valuable contributions to an assessment?
- What can be accomplished in the next 5-6 months and how to do this?

The reference group was tasked with coming up with a work plan identifying pieces to be addressed in 5-6 months that would be valuable to an on-going process and contribute to more effective human rights work. Discussing conflicting values in human rights work was not one of the tasks of this group.

What to assess?

This assessment would not only be a brainstorming of new ideas but an in-depth dialogue and analysis of actual practices leading to new ideas of how to do things better. The assessment would look at:

- best practices and problems, both themes and regions
- a look at what works well other places such as the UN and Norway
- case studies, including country specific
- effective influence
- kinds of partnerships and differing roles of state and civil society
- human rights objectives and risks
- instruments and tools (ie. sanctions and Human Rights Commissions)

Who to involve?

- Experts (CHR commission, ICHRDD, Human Rights Internet)
- NGOs (development, human rights and domestic groups)
- Labour and business
- Universities
- Media as participants
- General public, including community leaders
- Women, indigenous and youth participants
- Churches
- other countries (by international testing of questions and ideas through civil society networks and the Minister through the Canada/Norway mechanism)

Characteristics of the Assessment Process:

- Minister has requested this assessment and is committed to responding
- Open, transparent and accountable
- Long term in both engagement and view
- Good credible background information will be provided
- A balance of sector representation will bring legitimacy
- Background papers and discussion questions will frame and facilitate specific and focussed dialogue which includes tools and priorities
- Government officials will be engaged in the dialogue and respond

Issues to Consider:

- Perceptions: Doing things differently in different situations has implications on how things are perceived by the public.
- Resources: Time, people, and dollars will be scarce for this process. There are no new government funds allocated for this assessment. It is hoped the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development will financially support some of the process.

Outcomes and Output - a product:

This 6 month piece of the assessment could result in:

- anchor and reaffirm human rights work
- incorporate human rights principles into shaping work overseas
- assist finding out if Canadians are supportive and hear their view
- DFAIT will find out if they are in tune with what the public supports
- internal department discussions will lead to better coherence within the department and other parallel ministries
- new ways of doing the work leading to improved practices
- greater awareness will increase public and political support.
- partnership and complementarity between government and civil society - that each have different and important roles

Next Steps: How to do this process over the next 6 months?

- A report of the August 31 meeting (this document) will be circulated to all

- participants
- Roundtables, case studies, papers, Internet discussions, and conferences can shape the assessment
 - A reference group can act as a sounding board for the assessment

Conclusion: Further action and work:

- A draft plan
- This work will be undertaken by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development in cooperation with DFAIT, the Minister's office and expert advice.
- Information from meetings and roundtables should be widely available and Scirculated
- The Internet needs to be used as effectively as possible

Documents circulated prior to this meeting:

- Canada's Human Rights Strategy (one page)
- Report from Human Rights in Canadian Foreign Policy (June 2, 1998)

Participant List:

Eric Hopkins
Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hellene Giroux
Office of the Minister for International Cooperation and the Francophonie

Steve Lee Meeting Chair
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

Stuart Carre
Business Council on National Issues

Laurie Wiseberg
Human Rights Internet

Steve Benedict
Canadian Labour Congress

Gerry Barr
Steelworkers Humanity Fund

Roger Clark

Amnesty International

Iris Almeida
International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development

Adele Dion
Director, Human Rights Division, DFAIT

Kerry Buck
Policy Planning Division, DFAIT

Joe Stern
Consultant

Rick McTaggart
Director, Political and Social Policy, CIDA

Dawn McLean
Consultant and Rapporteur

Mike O'Shaughnessy
CCFPD, Facilitator

Regrets: Conrad Wyn
Compass Research

David Gilles
CIDA Consultant

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