

Human rights



Background Briefs
Development issues and efforts

The issue

What is a “human right?” A human right and freedom is something to which people are entitled simply because they are human beings. Everyone has the right to life, food, shelter and an education. Everyone has a right to a life free from torture and slavery. Everyone has a right to a life free from discrimination. We have a right to freedom of thought and expression. We have many more rights and freedoms and no one can take these rights from us. Many people around the world do not have the human rights that we take for granted.

Most of the ideas we have today about human rights developed shortly after World War II. Members of the United Nations General Assembly (UN) were alarmed about the terrible things that happened to people during the war.

In 1948, the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDR). Article I of that document states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

The basis for the UNDR is that you cannot separate different rights because they are all connected. In other words, if all human beings are equal, everyone should have equal access to all rights, not just some. In some countries, boys or girls are not able to go to school simply because of their gender. The right to education is there, but not for everyone. If you cannot afford enough food or proper shelter because some jobs are not open to everyone, you have some rights, but not access to all rights. This is the reason the declaration includes civil, political, economic, social and cultural

rights. Many believe the UNDR is an accepted international law.

The road to human rights for all

Organizations around the world work to protect human rights and end human rights abuses. These organizations have websites to describe human rights abuse and call on governments and individuals to take action. Public support and criticism of abuses is important to their success. These organizations are most successful when people criticize human rights abuse and support calls for change.

The core value of the human rights declaration is the equality of all people. The document also recognizes that governments are responsible for the promotion and protection of those rights. The well-being of individuals and sustainable development of countries is not possible without human rights in place. Education plays an important role in the protection of human rights.

People without rights cannot contribute to or benefit from any progress in a country. Some of the groups who are most commonly affected are the poor, the elderly, women, children, persons living with disabilities and illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, ethnic minorities, and refugees. Unfortunately, in countries where there are human rights abuses, we cannot tell the government how to treat its citizens. To do so often makes it worse for the victims.

But the Canadian government, through the



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Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), works in other ways to promote human rights.

The goal is to promote awareness of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights by all individuals in society. CIDA oversees projects that provide technical assistance to include human rights standards and principles into government organizations. It also supports programs to increase knowledge of and demand and respect for human rights. CIDA takes special actions to increase respect for the rights of women and the protection of children.

Projects to promote human rights

One way to promote human rights is to make certain countries are able to provide basic necessities to their people. More than one billion men, women and children around the world suffer from extreme hunger and malnutrition. And the number is growing. Canadians realize that unless people have a safe food supply and proper shelter, they cannot work toward other human rights such as education, gender equality and democracy.

For that reason, Canada, through CIDA, funds various projects around the world.

Food security: Canada is the third largest single-country donor to the World Food Program (WFP). CIDA contributed over \$200 million to the WFP in 2009. This money helped meet the nutritional needs of approximately 14 million people in seven countries in Africa, the Middle East and South America. It also met the nutritional needs of approximately 3.7 million refugees. Since refugees often live in difficult conditions for a long time, they rely completely on aid to meet their most basic needs.

Food for school children: In 2007, CIDA contributed \$125 million to a five-year program

to feed 20 million school children in Africa. The program not only provides nutritious meals for the children, but also encourages families to send their children to school. During Canada's previous three-year program, school enrollment rose by more than 20 percent. Girls' enrollment was equal to or higher than boys.

Rights of children and youth: In 2009, CIDA adopted a program that focused on improving human rights and reducing the inequality and poverty in Colombia. Millions of young people in that country who live in poverty are targets for sexual exploitation and recruitment by illegal groups. CIDA hopes to help youth become involved in legal economic activities. Up to 66 000 children and youth in rural areas will have access to education and conflict resolution skills. Up to 70 percent of adolescents will be released from illegal groups and helped to rejoin their families. The youth will have access to technical and job training that is directly linked to jobs in the local market.

Democratic governance: Beginning in 2008, CIDA agreed to provide up to \$9.5 million to Equitas, an agency for human rights education. The project will run until 2013 in several countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. It builds on the annual training of human rights educators that Equitas already provides. The project is learner-based and focuses on local priorities.

Find further information about:

- CIDA's work in the area of human rights at <http://les.acdi-cida.gc.ca/servlet/JKMSearchController?desTemplateFile=cpoSearchEn.htm&desClientLocale=enUS&AppID=cpoEn>
- the Declaration of Human Rights at <http://www.humanrights.com/>.



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