

Government of Canada Response to request for information by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights concerning a request in Human Rights Council resolution 7/23 for a detailed analytical study of the relationship between climate change and human rights.

Canada, November 2008

The following is the Government of Canada response to the letter dated 2 June 2008, from the High Commissioner for Human Rights, requesting any relevant information for the preparation of a detailed analytical study of the relationship between climate change and human rights, requested in Human Rights Council resolution 7/23.

Canada joined consensus on resolution 7/23, notwithstanding initial concerns that the Council is not the most appropriate forum for a discussion on climate change issues. Canada believes that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the most appropriate forum in which to address issues related to climate change.

Canada acknowledges that there can be an impact on the effective enjoyment of human rights as a result of situations arising from environmental degradation amplified by climate change.

However, because Canada extends full legal protection of human rights to its citizens through various constitutional, legal and policy frameworks, should the human rights of any Canadian citizen be violated due to a situation arising in whole or in part from environmental degradation and /or the impacts of climate change, existing legal protections, policies and programmes would apply. Thus, no direct links are made between climate change and human rights.

Priority should be placed on ensuring the effective enjoyment of human rights, under all circumstances, including where they may have been jeopardized as a result of stresses caused by the impacts of environmental degradation amplified by climate change. In this context Canada would urge all countries to extend full protection of human rights to their citizens by enhancing relevant legal frameworks and institutions, policies and programmes.

From an international perspective, Canada's development cooperation programme, administered by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), is aimed at reducing poverty, and promoting human rights and sustainable development. This includes strengthening and building the capacity of national governance systems and human rights mechanisms to be able to effectively promote and protect the human rights of all. In particular, CIDA's work to promote human rights focusses on the most marginalized and vulnerable people who are particularly at risk of experiencing the negative impacts of climate change.

Canada understands that properly managing environmental resources and adapting to the impacts of climate change present an opportunity to minimize those conditions where human rights can be violated. Canada recognizes that certain communities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including those concentrated in high-risk areas such as the Arctic, Small Island Developing States, and Least Developed Countries; those with limited financial or governance capacity to adapt to climate change; and those countries which have not put, nor been able to put, into operation the means to reduce risks related to environmental impacts. To effectively address vulnerability to climate change, Canada continues to support the integration of climate change considerations into national planning, sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies.

Canada has contributed \$15 million USD to the UNFCCC fund in support of adaptation in developing countries, including \$10 million to the Least Developed Countries Fund, and \$12 million to the Special Climate Change Fund, \$5 million of which is earmarked for adaptation. Most recently, Canada announced \$100 million to assist those countries that are especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, including least developed countries and small island developing states, particularly in Africa, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific.

Domestically, Canada has conducted two major national climate change assessments on health and adaptation. These assessments include chapters outlining the impacts of climate change on Canada's North and on the health, well-being, livelihood, inter alia, of its population, including Aboriginal communities. While some of these impacts could create conditions whereby the human rights of Canadians are potentially threatened, Canada's robust system of legal protections, policies and programmes will help to ensure that the human rights of all citizens are protected.

As an Arctic country, Canada is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and pays great attention to the impacts of climate change on the lives of people living in the far north. Canada works closely with Northerners, Aboriginals and with our Arctic neighbours to protect northern communities and the northern way of life from negative environmental and social impacts.

Canada's new domestic adaptation programme, announced in December 2007, includes \$14 million for Northern and Aboriginal Communities to assess key vulnerabilities and opportunities, and \$7 million to assess key vulnerabilities and health impacts related to climate change in Northern/Inuit communities.