

Bill C-293: Aid Accountability Legislation

SUMMARY

Key to accountability is clarity of purpose. A legislated mandate for foreign aid would set out a clear purpose for aid spending. If Bill C-293 were to become law, it would make the purpose of Canadian foreign aid clear: Canadian aid should be focused on ending poverty.

BACKGROUND

All Party Support for a Legislated Mandate

Bill C-293 introduces legislation consistent with what MPs from all parties have called for. It would assure parliamentarians and the public that aid resources are directed to the needs of those living in poverty, while respecting human rights obligations.

In June 2005, the House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution to set a plan to reach 0.7% by 2015 and to introduce legislation establishing poverty reduction as the priority for Canadian ODA.

The Conservative Party's 2006 election platform, committed to "make Parliament responsible for exercising oversight over the conduct of Canadian foreign policy". Aid legislation would provide an important mechanism for monitoring, accountability and reporting to Parliament.

Bill in Senate

Bill C-293 successfully made its way through the House of Commons and is currently before the Senate with Sen. Romeo Dallaire as its sponsor.

THE ISSUE

For more than a decade, observers both inside and outside the Government of Canada have called for a legislated mandate for Canada's official development assistance (ODA), or foreign aid.

Enshrining the mandate for ODA in legislation would focus aid on poverty reduction, protect ODA from ever-changing "flavour of the week" policies, and heighten accountability to Parliament and all Canadians.

Bill C-293 would require Canadian foreign aid to: (a) contribute to poverty reduction; (b) take into account the perspectives of the poor; and (c) be consistent with Canada's international human rights obligations.

BILL C-293 HIGHLIGHTS

Bill C-293 establishes a clear purpose and accountability for ODA:

- Canada's aid spending will be limited to programs which, in the view of the Minister, are likely to contribute to poverty reduction, consider the perspectives of the poor, and are consistent with Canada's international human rights obligations;
- The Minister will consult with beneficiary countries, international development agencies (like UN agencies) and Canadian civil society groups and Non-Governmental Organizations;
- A statistical analysis of Canada's aid spending will be made available to Parliament within twelve months of the end of the fiscal year;
- A narrative account of Canada's aid spending will be made available to Parliament within six months of the end of the fiscal year.

RECOMMENDATION

CCIC supports Bill C-293 and calls on Senators from all political parties to vote in favour of the Bill.