Transgovernmental Activism: 
Canada’s Role in Promoting National 
Human Rights Commissions

Sonia Cardenas*

ABSTRACT

National human rights commissions have proliferated around the world in recent years. These commissions are government agencies, which are designed to implement international human rights norms domestically. The rise of these institutions, however, cannot be understood without considering the international context. In particular, existing national commissions like those of Canada have worked actively to create and strengthen human rights commissions abroad. I refer to this process as one of transgovernmental activism. This article explores the contours of this activism, focusing specifically on the role played by the Canadian Human Rights Commission. In so doing, I trace the complex partnerships and institutional linkages that the Commission is forging both inside and outside Canada. I then examine four major forms of technical assistance that the Commission is providing to other national human rights commissions: training, consultation, exchanges, and networking. I conclude the article by drawing lessons from the Canadian experience and identifying emerging challenges. Above all, I find that improvements need to be made in three key areas: foreign government commitment, resource shortages, and an evaluation deficit. Once human rights commissions are created, international actors need to cooperate to assure that these institutions are in fact effective.

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I. INTRODUCTION

National human rights commissions (NHRCs) are government agencies that have proliferated around the world in the last decade. These commissions generally have a dual mandate of promoting and protecting human rights domestically.\(^1\) Why are diverse governments around the world, including many that routinely violate international human rights norms, creating these national institutions? I argue that the worldwide emergence of NHRCs, just as the diffusion of any norm or institutional model across national settings, cannot be understood without examining the international context. One of the most noteworthy aspects of international support for NHRCs is that this support has emanated not only from international organizations and human rights groups, but from national governments who already have a human rights commission. These governments are playing an active role in disseminating the concept of a national human rights institution abroad while helping states to adapt these institutions to meet local needs. The Canadian government, for example, has played a leading role in the creation and strengthening of these emerging institutions.

Yet Canadian involvement and leadership in these institutional developments is in many ways unsurprising. Canada, after all, has one of the world’s dominant NHRCs, supported by an extensive system of provincial human rights commissions. Its Human Rights Commission was created in 1978 to implement the Canadian Human Rights Act of the previous year.\(^2\) The Commission’s mandate is threefold: to process individual complaints; to promote human rights and principles of equality; and to assist in reducing barriers to equality, especially in education and access to social services. Partly reflecting the human rights abuses prevalent in Canada, the Commission focuses on fostering equal opportunities and combating discrimination


in areas such as the rights of aboriginal peoples and disability claims, as well as disputes over employment, race, religion, and sex discrimination. These efforts are consistent with Canada’s longstanding attention to human rights issues in its foreign policy.3

Internationally, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) has entered into new and complex partnerships with other actors in Canada and abroad, governmental as well as nongovernmental, to support human rights commissions around the world. The Canadian government officials are recognizing foreign NHRCs as legitimate and important actors, and, as I detail in this paper, an extensive system of technical assistance now supports these institutions. This assistance takes various mutually reinforcing forms, including training, consultation, exchanges, and networking. Whether bilaterally or multilaterally, Canada’s Human Rights Commission is actively supporting other NHRCs.

These activities, which have not yet been surveyed systematically, are significant for many reasons. First, while transgovernmental networks and linkages have emerged in recent years and are attracting the attention of some scholars, transgovernmental activism has gone relatively unnoticed, as I detail below.4 Second, international organizations like the United Nations and the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) are calling increasingly for the formation of NHRCs as a prerequisite to sustainable human rights reform. Examining these institutions, especially the conditions under which they are most likely to form and be influential, is therefore crucial. Third, as the demand for technical assistance, particularly for strengthening existing NHRCs, rises and even exceeds available resources, it will be necessary to assess more accurately the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts. Drawing lessons from the Canadian experience may help the growing number of other governments and actors involved in supporting NHRCs.

While I could focus on NHRCs in other countries, most notably Australia’s, there are compelling reasons to zero in on the Canadian experience. Compared to other major NHRCs, Canada’s Commission is unique in two important ways: it has worked cross-regionally to a much


greater extent than others and it has placed senior officers in a foreign NHRC. Indeed, the global and expanding scope of Canada’s efforts, at a time when its own human rights commissions face shrinking resources, warrants much closer examination.

In this article, I seek to answer two questions that remain understudied. Descriptively, what has been the exact role of Canada’s government (especially its own human rights commission) in helping to diffuse NHRCs abroad? More specifically, how has the government interacted with other domestic and international actors to promote NHRCs? Accordingly, the first section of the article describes the nature and significance of new global partnerships, as well as introduces more fully the concept of a NHRC. A second descriptive question concerns the various forms in which Canada has provided concrete technical assistance to support NHRCs. Put simply, what are the different types of technical assistance available to NHRCs? I conclude by examining analytically the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts, focusing in particular on lessons that may be gleaned from the Canadian experience.

II. NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Some observers of international relations and law have documented the emergence of a new phenomenon: rather than non-state actors displacing the state or the state remaining a unified and omnipotent actor in world affairs, the state is disaggregating into its constituent units. These various governmental agencies, moreover, are forging global linkages—transgovernmental networks—that often are at the helm of specific international policies. Such transgovernmental networks have formed across numerous policy areas, including central banking, insurance regulations, and the judicial sphere. They also have emerged among national human rights institutions.

A national human rights institution is a permanent government agency whose purported aim is to implement international norms domestically. International guidelines defining the scope and functions of these institutions are found in the Paris Principles (1991), the foremost international standards. These guidelines are intended to ensure that national human rights institutions are independent, impartial, and effective in their work.

5. Danish Centre for Human Rights, Support for Emerging and Developing National Human Rights Institutions (Background paper on file with author).
document in this area. According to these Principles, the dominant feature of any effective human rights institution is independence, as well as accessibility to civil society-at-large. While these institutions can take various forms, one of the most popular and rapidly growing ones is that of a national commission. A NHRC tends to be distinguished by its twin goals of promotion and protection of human rights. Other types of national human rights institutions include the office of the ombudsman, certain types of hybrid institutions that combine characteristics of the ombudsman and NHRC, as well as more general parliamentary human rights bodies. Preliminary data indicates that there are approximately 300 to 500 national human rights institutions around the world, not including sub-national institutions, while NHRCs themselves number about eighty. Significantly, NHRCs quadrupled in the 1990s alone.

The growing presence of national human rights institutions in international relations is also manifest in the fact that they are beginning to acquire formal legal status within international bodies. This implies, among other things, that these institutions now have certain participatory rights, including speaking time in international forums. At the recent anti-racism conference in Durban, South Africa, for example, national human rights institutions were recognized as a distinct type of actor and were permitted to participate in the debate.

Transgovernmental networks of NHRCs are especially significant because they expand the scope of existing government linkages into a new domain. Moving beyond standard goals of regulation or information exchange, these networks have an explicitly activist agenda advocating a particular brand of human rights reform. These developments are all the more striking since non-state actors conventionally have dominated transnational activism. If it is puzzling that governments would create self-regulatory agencies to enhance compliance with norms that they break, it may be doubly puzzling that they are bothering (and expending resources) to get other governments to create similar institutions.

In fact, this proliferation of national human rights commissions is a relatively recent phenomenon historically, dating mostly to the early 1990s. This development surely reflects the impressive evolution of international human rights mechanisms and the end of the Cold War era. But the global diffusion of NHRCs also signals a growing recognition that international human rights norms can take hold only if they are tailored to meet local circumstances. That is, if human rights reform is to be sustainable, then international norms ultimately have to be implemented and supported by domestic institutions. As the CHRC stated in its 1998 Annual Report, the hope is that over time “these agencies can improve the level of human rights protection available, notwithstanding differences in political and legal systems.”

Another reason why NHRCs have spread so rapidly, and so similarly across different contexts, is the active role played internationally by a variety of actors, especially existing NHRCs. The United Nations, namely the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), has been at the forefront of these efforts. The OHCHR offers technical assistance, attempts to incorporate national human rights institutions into the work of both treaty monitoring bodies and the UN Commission on Human Rights, and supports international and regional meetings of these national institutions. Beyond the United Nations, however, NHRCs have spearheaded efforts to replicate their own institutions abroad.

Existing NHRCs like that of Canada have supported the diffusion of human rights commissions, both multilaterally and bilaterally. Multilaterally, a global network of NHRCs has emerged across diverse regions. These transgovernmental linkages set standards of state behavior, meet regularly, and exchange valuable information and services. The umbrella forum for this network of NHRCs is the International Co-ordinating Committee (ICC), which was created following a meeting of all NHRCs in Paris in 1991. Since then, the ICC has held six international workshops in which dozens of national human rights institutions participate. Regionally, moreover, net-

works of national human rights institutions are forming, with the most formalized of these being the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. The Canadian government for its part is a longstanding member of the ICC, an organizer of nascent networks of national human rights institutions in the Americas and in Francophone countries, as well as a frequent invited participant to other regional networks.\textsuperscript{15} Table 1 provides a more detailed list of these emerging transgovernmental networks.

Bilaterally, existing NHRCs have joined forces with international and domestic partners to support the expansion of their institutional counterparts overseas. On the international front, Canadian actors participate and work actively to promote transgovernmental networks of NHRCs. For example, as part of a cooperative agreement with Cameroon’s National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, the CHRC helped Cameroon organize the first African Conference on National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Yaoundé in 1996, and then sent a delegation to participate in this important conference.\textsuperscript{16}

Within Canada itself, multiple actors cooperate to promote NHRCs abroad. Canada’s Commission (often joined by provincial commissions) tends to devise and implement the technical assistance projects, with funding provided primarily by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and secondarily by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. A request for assistance, however, always has to originate with a foreign government; it is then transmitted to the United Nations Development Committee (UNDP), OHCHR, CIDA, CHRC, or a comparable agency. This partnership between development and human rights agencies is noteworthy, since the notion of enhancing national human rights capacities per se is relatively new. For development agencies like CIDA or UNDP, supporting NHRCs has become part of a broader strategy of promoting “sustainable development and good governance.”\textsuperscript{17}

The CHRC also has relied on actors from civil society, mostly human rights organizations and academia, to support NHRCs abroad. The Canadian Human Rights Foundation (CHRF), a non-profit organization created in 1967 that has a specialized program in national human rights institutions, frequently partners with Canada’s Commission. The CHRF assists the government in providing technical assistance to human rights commissions abroad, especially in terms of training. Likewise, the Human Rights

\textsuperscript{17} Canadian International Development Agency, Government of Canada Policy for CIDA on Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance (Dec. 1996); Reif, supra note 1, at 17.
TABLE 1
Trans-Governmental Networks: Emerging Human Rights Linkages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network Name</th>
<th>Permanent Forum:</th>
<th>Date Created:</th>
<th>Membership:</th>
<th>Activities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>16 rotating NHRIs, representing four major world regions</td>
<td>joint activities and cooperation among NHRIs; accreditation of NHRIs that comply with Paris Principles; regular International Workshop; liaison to international organizations; assistance to governments in creating and strengthening NHRIs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>open to NHRIs in the region that comply with Paris Principles (Australia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka)</td>
<td>technical cooperation; information dissemination; and regular meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network of National Human Rights Institutions in the Americas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>open to NHRIs in the region that comply with Paris Principles (Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru)</td>
<td>technical cooperation; information dissemination; and regular meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference of African Institutions for National Human Rights Institutions</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>standard setting; information exchange; and regular meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West African Human Rights Forum (WAHRF)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>national human rights commissions belonging to ECOWAS</td>
<td>information exchange and regular meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Meeting of National Human Rights Institutions</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
<td>information exchange and periodic meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference of Euro-Mediterranean National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td></td>
<td>standard setting; information exchange; and regular meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research and Education Centre (HRREC) at the University of Ottawa is a common partner that offers research and other support services. Figure 1 depicts this complex array of Canadian partnerships.

18 The Canadian Human Rights Foundation is available at http://www.chrf.ca/; HRREC of the University of Ottawa is available at http://www.uottawa.ca/hrrec/.
Fomenting institutional linkages is a deliberate strategy on the part of Canada’s Commission, one that may reflect innovative ways of maximizing limited resources. This is illustrated by a recent bilateral “institutional linkage project” with India’s National Human Rights Commission. This multi-cycle project, which began in 1997 and continued through at least the end of 2002, is administered by Canada’s HRC and is funded by CIDA ($1.6 million contribution). The project includes three other Canadian partners, one drawn from a provincial government agency and two from civil society: the Ontario Human Rights Commission (Toronto); the HRREC at the University of Ottawa; and the CHRF. This particular project consists of
exchanges, training, and linkages between governmental and nongovernmental institutions in India.\textsuperscript{19}

To summarize, Canada’s NHRC is forging multiple and cross-cutting partnerships, as Figure 1 shows. First, it is party to multilateral networks of human rights institutions, both international and regional. Second, it is entering into formal and cooperative arrangements with foreign NHRCs. Third, within Canada, the Commission networks both with its provincial human rights commissions and with groups in civil society that have an interest in supporting NHRCs. Fourth, the NHRC is building more complex global linkages between itself, other Canadian institutions (governmental and nongovernmental), as well as NHRCs and civil societies abroad.

III. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance to support NHRCs, as noted above, can be both bilateral and multilateral. Bilaterally, Canada’s NHRC has signed cooperative agreements with several countries’ human rights commissions, including India, Mexico, Indonesia, Cameroon, South Africa, and more recently Bolivia and Peru. In the case of Indonesia, the CHRC is the only human rights commission in the world to have concluded a formal cooperative arrangement.\textsuperscript{20} I discuss various types of bilateral assistance more fully below.

Multilateral technical assistance to NHRCs is often provided directly to other international organizations. For example, CIDA has supported an OHCHR program that promotes national human rights institutions in developing countries, contributing $80,000 for the training of relevant staff. The Canadian government likewise agreed to send an advisor to the human rights ombudsman in Bosnia (an institution called for in the Dayton Peace Agreement\textsuperscript{21}), as well as a human rights expert to assist the OSCE in its broader work on national human rights institutions.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{19} Canadian International Development Agency (Online: Sept. 1998) (on file with the author).

\end{thebibliography}
Technical assistance in general tends to be slated for either creating or strengthening a NHRC abroad, and Canada’s Commission has been active in both areas. Regarding institutional creation, for example, the Commission has been particularly energetic in the Asia-Pacific region. In a multi-phase project that is now in its third stage (1999–2002) and has been funded largely by CIDA, the Commission assisted Indonesia in forming a NHRC, known as Komnas Ham. Together with CIDA and other Canadian partners, the Commission likewise convened a series of seminars and workshops that apparently led to the decision to create an ombudsman’s office in Thailand. Similarly, the Commission has assisted Cambodia’s National Assembly in establishing a Commission on Human Rights.23

Based on a survey of public documents, I found four standard types of Canadian technical assistance to NHRCs abroad: training, consultation, exchanges, and networking. These activities are all closely related and overlapping. Seminars and workshops, for instance, tend to serve as forums for consultation and advising, especially for creating NHRCs, in addition to forums for training and networking. Complementing the work of CHRC, moreover, provincial human rights commissions can provide their own technical assistance. (See Table 2.) In the remainder of this section, I draw on the experiences of Canada’s Commission to describe the various types of activities that characterize technical assistance to NHRCs abroad.

One of the most important forms of technical assistance to NHRCs is training or education, whereby members of one country disseminate human rights information while sharing technical expertise and knowledge. Training consists very often of developing, or assisting in the development of, educational materials or courses. It also can include helping NHRCs create human rights documentation centers (e.g., Canada’s Commission assisted in building three such centers in Indonesia, one at the NHRC and two at local universities); supporting foreign NHRCs in their computing needs; and equipping diverse actors, including those investigating human rights

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complaints and members of the judiciary, with specialized skills. The Canadian Commission often facilitates training through workshops and seminars in which individuals receive relevant information about creating or strengthening a human rights commission. Training, moreover, can be directed at members of both foreign governments and civil societies.

National human rights commissions also can serve as consultants and advisers to those working with other commissions. Consultations and advisory services can entail hosting visits of foreigners interested in the work of NHRCs, assisting a commission in devising strategic plans, or participating in international conferences. Visitors to the Canadian Commission are diverse, representing foreign governments, other national human rights institutions, and NGOs. They come from numerous countries, including in recent years China, Ireland, New Zealand, Russia, Hong Kong, Cuba,

Kenya, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, South Africa, and Cambodia. By offering consultations and advisory services, a NHRC can help foreign actors define their institutional goals and strategies.

Staff members of two or more national human rights institutions quite often trade personnel, or undertake institutional exchanges. Most notably, Canada’s Commission has provided technical assistance by “loaning” senior staff members to another NHRC. Thus, Indonesia’s Commission has benefited from the presence of a CHRC officer. This person has assisted in the daily administration of the Commission, especially in the handling and processing of human rights complaints, staffing and organizational needs, as well as issues relating to information technology. Exchanges, however, need not be limited to commission staffers. Canada’s Commission has also sponsored exchanges of law enforcement personnel, for example. Internships and study tours too provide an added means of conducting human rights exchanges. Recent interns hosted by Canada’s Commission have included representatives from Benin, the Czech Republic, India, Madagascar, Nigeria, and Indonesia. While in residence at the CHRC, interns receive practical training in areas like public education and the handling of human rights complaints.

Technical assistance may also be transmitted through a process of networking. Such networking occurs both when the CHRC forges links with other NHRCs, as discussed in the previous section, and when it facilitates linkages between foreign NHRCs and their respective civil societies. Improving ties between a foreign NHRC and civil society, a task often envisioned in “national action plans” for human rights, can be accomplished through the convening of seminars and workshops. Meetings such as these bring together a cross-section of the population to address human rights issues of mutual concern. And national networking efforts are often undertaken as part of cooperative agreements, such as those the CHRC has concluded with India and Indonesia.

In addition to technical assistance, governments support NHRCs abroad when their representatives include Commission members in official state visits. For example, Canadian officials have met occasionally with members of human rights commissions in both Indonesia and Mexico. In the case of Mexico, these visits followed escalations in the human rights crisis in Chiapas. Diplomatic visits such as these can serve both to pressure the host government and to legitimize a NHRC.

27. On national actions plans for human rights, see Pinheiro & Baluarte, supra note 9.
IV. ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSIONS

Have efforts by Canada and other international actors had a noticeable impact on national human rights institutions? As demand for technical assistance begins to outstrip the capacity to deliver such assistance, assessing the influence of transgovernmental human rights efforts is increasingly important. One touchstone for evaluating technical assistance in this sector is to compare the Commission’s work with the principles advocated by the United Nations.

Under its Technical Cooperation Programme, the OHCHR has elaborated a comprehensive “programme of action” for providing technical assistance to national human rights institutions. The principles enumerated in this plan, and endorsed by the UN Commission on Human Rights, are as follows: 1) to promote the concept of a national human rights institution; 2) to assist in creating effective institutions; 3) to assist in strengthening existing institutions; and 4) to foster cooperation between institutions. While Canadian actors have performed all four functions, strengthening NHRCs may be the most challenging goal. It is one thing, after all, to promote the creation of a human rights commission and to engender cooperation between existing institutions, but it is quite another to assure that NHRCs prove effective.

Another approach to measuring the impact of human rights policies is to ask participants themselves. In a small survey conducted by the Canadian Human Rights Foundation in 1998, Canadian respondents who work with national human rights institutions overseas differed in what they considered to be the principal indicator of success. Some emphasized information exchange as a measure of accomplishment; others focused on enhancing awareness within civil societies. Still others highlighted the importance of strengthening the links between foreign NHRCs and their respective civil societies. Respondents also noted that helping NHRCs and foreign actors clarify their goals and develop strategic plans were substantial accomplishments.

Difficulties of measurement aside, there is little question that Canadian assistance to NHRCs has had positive results. In the case of Indonesia, for example, Canada’s HRC claims that it has enabled its Indonesian counterpart to “improve its complaints handling procedures, information management and research capacities.” Likewise, technical assistance to India’s

29. See Paris Principles, supra note 8.
NHRC has “helped sensitize police and the military, combat child labour, promote child education and strengthen links among human rights organizations.” While these have been concrete and practical improvements, the Canadian Commission assures that its activities also have contributed more broadly to enhancing the domestic credibility of foreign NHRCs.

Yet the impact of human rights policies in general and of national human rights institutions in particular has also been problematic. Whether the baseline used to evaluate Canada’s experiences is that of U.N. guidelines, participant perceptions, or a comprehensive overview of Commission activities, three basic obstacles are apparent: foreign government commitment, resource shortages, and an ‘evaluation deficit.’

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge facing those who promote NHRCs abroad concerns the commitment of target governments. As one of the respondents to the survey cited earlier stated, “National institutions may be perceived as a façade to hide real violations, simply to allow the government to continue its international trade policies.” If this is true, and other research suggests that it is, then challenging governments that attempt to manipulate their NHRCs must be a top policy priority. In fact, some Canadians working in this area have suggested that perhaps greater care should be taken to assess a government’s commitment to international human rights norms and policy reform prior to providing technical assistance. Similar recommendations have called for taking pre-cooperation inventories to determine national institutional capacities, including potential NHRC staff and resources. The problem with this approach is that it risks not providing assistance to those countries that need it most. Rather, attempts to create and strengthen NHRCs must go hand in hand with efforts to support local human rights groups and civil society.

It is no secret that NHRCs confront frequent resource shortages. Consequently, it is essential that NHRCs and other international actors supporting these commissions adopt strategies that maximize limited resources. Above all, NHRCs like those of Canada should coordinate as closely as possible with their international partners and parallel donors. Particular care should be taken to delineate a clear division of labor. The ICC, comprised of leading national human rights institutions, should be the major forum for this coordination. And while international donors debate the advantages and disadvantages of providing bilateral versus multilateral

32. Id.
33. Canadian Human Rights Foundation, supra note 30, at 60.
34. Similar dynamics are discussed in Stephen D. Krasner, Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy (1999).
aid, the evidence here favors multilateral policies or, at least, highly coordinated bilateral approaches.37

Precisely because governments are often weakly committed to NHRCs and resources can be limited, evaluating the impact of a NHRC is now imperative. Yet evaluation remains the sticking point of Canadian and other efforts to promote NHRCs.38 On the one hand, it is difficult to assess the effects of any institution, let alone one that is intended to change both social norms and state practices. On the other hand, the failure to evaluate systematically the impact of national human rights institutions makes it difficult to justify expending resources for projects whose payoff is mostly long-term (e.g., human rights education). According to the CHRC, “The Commission’s contribution to improving global human rights may not immediately affect the lives of those who experience discrimination and disadvantage as their daily fare.”39 If NHRCs are to be strengthened effectively, then new tools for measuring their influence will have to be devised. As Canadian participants who have worked to support foreign NHRCs have suggested, donors need coherent and rigorous methods for evaluating human rights projects.40

Situated precariously between the state and society, many national human rights institutions reflect government attempts to co-opt human rights discourse and silence nongovernmental actors. This reality confounds efforts both to evaluate the impact of NHRCs and to justify allocating scarce resources to these NHRCs. The result may be a slippery slope, wherein donors help to create institutions that they then are unable to strengthen effectively. To avoid this, international actors working to build robust human rights commissions must 1) take the utmost care to ensure that they do not unwittingly collude with state officials seeking to control and bureaucratize human rights concerns; 2) organize their efforts under the umbrella of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions; and 3) work with academics and researchers to devise more effective indicators of institutional impact and human rights reform. Lessons derived from Canada’s experience in supporting NHRCs abroad can set the stage for these new institutional endeavors in the human rights field.

37. Danish Centre for Human Rights, supra note 5.