



Covering events from January - December 2000

CANADA

Canada

Head of state: Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Adrienne Clarkson

Head of government: Jean Chrétien

Capital: Ottawa

Population: 31.1 million

Official languages: English, French

Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes

2000 treaty ratifications/signatures: Optional Protocol to the UN Children's Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict; Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.



There were sporadic reports of the use of excessive force by police officers. At least two people faced extradition to the USA where they faced a possible death sentence.

Background

General elections were held in November. The ruling Liberal Party won a third term in office with an increased majority.

Police brutality

There were allegations of patterns of police abuse against First Nation (Aboriginal) men in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. There were reports that members of Saskatoon City Police had for a number of years had an unofficial policy of abandoning intoxicated or "troublesome" members of the indigenous community away from the population centre of Saskatoon, thereby placing them at great risk of dying of hypothermia during the winter months.

- First Nation member Darrell Night claimed that in January two Saskatoon police constables handcuffed him, drove him outside the city and abandoned him in freezing conditions. He only survived because he was able to get help from the nightwatchman of a nearby power station. The two police officers were reportedly suspended from duty and were under investigation in connection with the incident at the end of the year.
- The bodies of First Nation members Rodney Naistus and Lawrence Wegner were discovered near a power station on the outskirts of Saskatoon on 29 January and 3 February respectively. Both bodies were without jackets and the men appeared to have frozen to death.

- In August, 55-year-old Otto Vass died after reportedly being beaten by police officers outside a shop in Toronto. The police had removed him from the shop following an argument. According to witnesses, the officers "pummelled" Otto Vass with batons for approximately four minutes. Following an investigation by the civilian Special Investigations Unit, four police officers were charged in October with manslaughter in connection with the death of Otto Vass. No trial had taken place by the end of the year.
- Canadian federal and Ontario authorities failed to hold a public inquiry into the death in 1995 of Dudley George, despite calls to do so from the Ombudsman of Ontario, churches, trade unions, relatives of Dudley George, AI, the media, and the UN Human Rights Committee. Dudley George, an indigenous protester, was shot dead by a police marksman during demonstrations at Ipperwash Park. In 1997 an Ontario provincial police officer was tried in connection with the case and given a two-year conditional sentence for "criminal negligence". During the trial, the officer testified that he fired his weapon because he believed Dudley George was armed and threatening other officers. However, the judge concluded that the officer had knowingly shot an unarmed man.

Death penalty

- In May, the Supreme Court of Canada heard the case of Sebastian Burns and Atif Rafay, two Canadian citizens facing extradition to the State of Washington, USA, on capital murder charges. In 1997, the British Columbia Court of Appeals ruled that the extradition of Canadian citizens without satisfactory assurances against the death penalty, violated rights protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian government appealed against this ruling to the Supreme Court, which had not issued a decision by the end of the year.

In June 1999 - minutes after the execution of Canadian citizen Joseph Stanley Faulder in Texas, USA - the Canadian government had issued a statement noting that Canada "deeply regrets that Texas authorities did not accept its request for executive clemency... the Government of Canada will continue its efforts to ensure that the rights of Canadians in such circumstances are fully respected in accordance with the law."

Refugees

Some asylum-seekers continued to be detained for prolonged periods before being deported. The Canadian authorities examined criteria for eligibility before hearing the evidence of the need for protection in the individual case. This had the effect of rendering certain groups of people ineligible to make a refugee claim. Asylum-seekers whose applications were turned down by the Immigration and Refugee Board did not have access to a meaningful appeal on the merits of their case. At least one refugee was at risk of forcible return.

- Manickavagsagam Suresh, who had been recognized as a refugee by Canadian authorities in 1991, faced possible forcible return to Sri Lanka because of his alleged links to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The Canadian government took the position that the UN Convention against Torture allows for the forcible return of individuals alleged to be security risks, even though they may be at risk of torture on their return. An appeal

against the decision was before the Supreme Court of Canada at the end of the year.
