

Canada dead last in ranking for environmental protection

Posted by Joan Russow
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By [PAUL WALDIE](#)

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Canada has fallen behind in a global ranking on international development initiatives and ranks last when it comes to environmental protection.

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The Washington-based Center for Global Development assesses 27 wealthy nations annually on their commitment to seven areas that impact the world's poor. Canada came 13th in this year's survey, which will be released Monday. Denmark led the list, followed by Sweden and Norway, with Japan and South Korea at the bottom.

The rankings are based on the center's "commitment to development index", or CDI, which tracks each country's performance in foreign aid, openness to trade, policies that encourage investment, openness to migration, environmental protection, promoting security and supporting technology creation. The countries were chosen because they are all members of an OECD group involved in aid and development measures. Countries such as Russia, China, India and Brazil are not included in the survey because they are not members of the OECD group.

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Canada dropped from 12th place last year and did far worse in the environmental protection category, where it ranked 27th. Every other country made progress in this area except Canada, the centre said in a report on the rankings.

Canada “has the dubious honor of being the only CDI country with an environment score which has gone down since we first calculated the CDI [in 2003],” the report said. “This reflects rising fossil fuel production and its withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, the world’s only treaty governing the emissions of heat-trapping gasses. Canada has dropped below the U.S. into bottom place on the environment component.”

Owen Barder, a senior fellow at the centre who prepared the index, said in an interview that the environment category has become one of the bright spots in the survey. “Environment is the one part of our index that has really seen improvement and Canada has been the only country that’s fallen,” he said. “My expectation would have been that Canada is environmentally friendly, Canadians all seem to take the environment seriously.”

The major reasons for Canada’s poor showing, he said, were pulling out of the Kyoto Protocol and having one of the highest levels of greenhouse gas production per capita. Canada also has low gasoline taxes, which don’t encourage conservation, and high subsidies for fishing, which impacts fish stocks. Slovakia and Hungary came first and second in the environment category mainly because both have some of the highest gas taxes among the 27 nations and the lowest greenhouse gas emissions.

Canada scored best in trade and migration, where it finished fourth and third respectively. On trade, the centre cited Canada’s low tariffs on agricultural imports as helping poorer nations. And on migration the centre said Canada is among the leaders in welcoming immigrants and students from developing countries.

Over all, Mr. Barder said this year’s survey demonstrated that not much has changed in the last decade in terms of international development. “We, the rich countries, have been making promises [at Group of 20 meetings] to pursue development-friendly policies and our index doesn’t pick up very much evidence that things have changed,” he said. “And you would expect to see that. So this is a dog that didn’t bark story. This dog should be barking by now and it’s not.”

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He added that the environment has been a notable exception mainly because of the extraordinary compliance with the 1987 Montreal protocol on reducing chemicals that damage the ozone. The compliance rate has exceeded 98 per cent and many countries in Europe have gone beyond the protocol's requirements.

“What we've seen is actual follow through and give credit where credit is due,” he said. “It has actually been implemented.”

He added that despite the overall lack of progress on development issues there is room for optimism. “The optimistic part is that within these different policy areas there are some really good countries doing really good things. And that seems to be politically viable for those countries and it doesn't seem to cause them any economic or social harm,” he said. “It does make you think that there is considerable room for improvement in a politically viable way.”

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