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# **Introduction: Labour and Human Rights**

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# INTRODUCTION: LABOUR AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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As national economies become more globally integrated, governments are looking for new and better ways to increase cooperation in the areas of industrial relations and employment policy, and strengthen capacity building by improving working conditions and living standards for workers in their respective countries.

The papers in this volume are the products of the first *Canada-China Forum on Industrial Relations and Labour Employment* that was held on May 6 and 7, 2011, at the Beijing Conference Center, China, No 88, Laiguangying Westroad, Chaoyang District, Beijing. The purpose of the *Canada-China Forum* was to establish the framework for a joint global public policy network on industrial relations and employment standards, and continued collaboration and best practices dialogue among Canadian universities, governments, business, union and NGO communities and their Chinese counterparts in the years and decades ahead.

Following the Chinese Minister of Labour's visit to Canada in 2006, the Canadian and Chinese Ministers of Labour signed a "*Cooperation Framework Between The Labour Program Of Human Resources And Skills Development Canada And The Ministry Of Human Resources And Social Security Of The People's Republic Of China In The Field Of Industrial Relations And Labour Standards*" in 2007 and renewed the Cooperation Framework in December 2009 for another three year term. The objective of the Cooperation Framework is to strengthen respect for ILO fundamental labour principles set by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in conjunction with the 1998 ILO *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, which defines the "freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining" as an essential right of workers.

The Cooperation Framework agreement also culminated in the launch of a Canada-China public policy network and coalition for learning in the search for creative answers to the key labour relations challenges of globalization and interdependence.

The *China-Canada Forum* sought to be informative, provide ample opportunity for participation and the exchange of information, and open constructive dialogue among international scholars and labour/ employment practitioners. It also provided participants with the chance to examine important comparative subject areas, including the current standards and new developments in Canada and China with a view towards increased

awareness of labour rights; employment and labour market governance; social security and employment promotion; socially responsible enterprise restructuring; health and safety standards; and workers' rights and foreign trade linkages with the role that social partners play with workplace issues. Finally, the Forum provided an opportunity to consider how the respective roles of the state authorities, workers' and employers' organizations could adapt to better reflect the opening of the economy to market forces and the experience of other countries in applying the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work endorsed by the Canadian and Chinese governments.

In February 2012, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao presided over a signing ceremony for a wide-ranging of continuing agreements set to further bind the Chinese and Canadian economies and augment the *Cooperation Framework*. This was followed in 2014 with the Canada-China Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA). Although FIPA has many critics, it has been hailed by the Government of Canada as an extremely important milestone in the continued development of the strategic partnership regime between Canada and China that now addresses a full range of issues from labour standards to worker's rights, and investment protection to corporate social responsibility, as part of an on-going frank and productive relationship. Of course, the new frontier will probably be the newly negotiated Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement.

It is our hope that readers will find this collection of articles a helpful introduction to the domestic issues and global challenges in the modern workplace, and guide China and Canada in progressive directions moving forward.

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