

Journalists are often leaders in movements concerned about basic freedoms, even when they pay a personal price for their convictions. Their own freedom is essential to the working of democratic institutions. Freedom to publish and distribute news stems from freedom of opinion - an essential condition of democracy. Freedom of the press has been hard won, and is far too precious to be subjected to the whims of any government.

On every continent there are some people who think that governments should regulate journalists, that it is in the public interest to tell them what they should write and to pass judgement on their accuracy. Canadians do not believe that either politicians or civil servants should have anything to say in the management, direction or correction of the media. Quite the contrary, in our view, only a free press can guarantee that the decisions of the state are in harmony with the wishes of the people. An informed public is needed both for honest democratic government, and for the sensitivity a government needs to serve its people well.

In Canada, the government does not control or censure what journalists write, nor does it presume to set itself up as an arbiter of public taste. It does not decide what should be transmitted by the media, and does not interfere in the management of media enterprises. The media are answerable only before the courts for the observance of our laws concerning obscenity, libel and slander.

I think I can safely say, therefore, that in Canada we enjoy complete freedom of the press. And Canadians would not have it otherwise. As a result it is natural for us to deplore the lack of press freedom and the abuse of human rights that occur from time to time in other countries. It is with the full support of the people, therefore, that the Government of Canada is committed to support the cause of freedom of the press, and to try to protect and promote human rights not only here in Canada, but also elsewhere to the extent that our influence can be effective.

Canadian church groups, labour organizations, intellectuals and the media, as well as the public at large are asking more and more often for the Canadian government to intervene on the human rights front. Such things as the murder of a leading journalist, the closing down of a respected newspaper, the arbitrary imprisonment or execution of individual citizens - all these arouse a natural concern among Canadians, and they quite properly urge their government to express these concerns through official representations to the governments involved.