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Promotion of respect for international human rights

The following excerpts are from an address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Don Jamieson, to the Canadian Human Rights Foundation, the Canadian Council on International Law, and the Canadian section of the International Commission of Jurists, in Ottawa on October 26:

...Canada has moral and legal obligations to be involved in the promotion of human rights both at home and abroad. Canadians are demonstrating growing interest in perfecting the protections for human rights at home. They are also increasingly making known their hope that the Canadian Government will observe a morality which reflects Canadian standards in its dealings with other governments.

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Canada has been active over the years in supporting the development of the international norms and is now encouraging broad adherence to them. We also support the development of standards in fields not yet dealt with, for example the elimination of religious intolerance, the elimination of torture and the promotion of the status of women.

Canada has become a party to the most important human rights covenants and conventions. Through that process international actions have directly affected domestic developments in the human rights field.... Our support for human rights works in both directions. While we are promoting human rights internationally, we have the obligation to pursue our efforts domestically on the basis of our domestic objectives and our international obligations.

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UN's performance poor but hopeful

Over the past decade, the UN's performance in dealing with gross abuses of human rights has been dismal. There has been a lack of common will to take action in many serious situations. Differences of perceptions of human rights... have been a factor. But more significantly a double standard has been in operation.

Action has been taken only in a few situations, where the UN majority considered that the political situation as well as the human rights situation warranted action.

Nonetheless, there have been signs in the past year that the UN majority may be coming to accept that it is important to take action in situations of gross and persistent violence to individuals and groups. This was shown by the decision of two developing countries of the Commonwealth to pilot through the General Assembly last year a very significant resolution on human rights. That resolution placed emphasis on the belief that the achievement of lasting progress on civil and political rights was dependent upon sound and effective national and international policies of development. But it stipulated that all human rights were nonetheless indivisible and inalienable. The initiative was influenced by the Commonwealth Heads of Government action the preceding June to single out Uganda as a serious violator of human rights. The Commonwealth action was, I might add, the result of Prime Minister Trudeau's determination that the Commonwealth could not employ a double standard. While condemning the abhorrent system of *apartheid* in South Africa, it could not overlook the odious practices of the Ugandan regime.

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When Canada intercedes

I turn now to the question of when and in what manner the Canadian Government should intercede when human rights are being violated in other countries. The question is not easily answered. No country has an unblemished human rights record.

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Fifty-eight years ago today... Canadians participated in the first meeting of the League of Nations in Geneva.

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