

governmental organizations have been formed — and are certain to grow in number — to register their concern and to take action in their own areas of commitment.

The Canadian government fully shares these concerns. We support the efforts of Canadians who are moved by reports of violations and who are determined to act in defence of their fellow men and women in many parts of the world. Today, before a Foundation with a membership distinguished by its competence and experience in the fields of both domestic and international human rights, I want to emphasize the depth of this commitment, and to review with you some of the central aspects of Canada's approach to international human rights issues.

Canada's approach is one of dynamism and realism. We are determined to press forward on a number of fronts and in a variety of ways. We want to strengthen the international legal regimes which sustain the work of the UN, the ILO and other organizations. We need to fill gaps in such fields as inhumane treatment and punishment, and in freedom of religion and belief. In addition, Canada attaches a high priority to encouraging more widespread ratification of the existing human rights instruments, particularly the two international covenants. At the same time, we are seeking to improve the means for promoting and protecting human rights, through, among other things, better implementing machinery within the UN and more effective publicity for the human rights activities of the UN and other bodies.

Canada has stood firmly in defence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we have participated in the gradual process of elaborating new instruments based on enduring principles. We have also been pragmatic, building upon precedents and cases over the years, probing for new opportunities to secure breakthroughs — whether in a particular area, such as torture, or by means of a new mechanism, such as an investigative working group on disappeared persons.

I am committed to this dynamic policy on international human rights. It is essential that Canada respond to the legitimate concerns of Canadians, and it is entirely right and appropriate that we accord human rights its place as one of the main principles of Canadian foreign policy. But I am equally sensitive to the difficulties of promoting human rights effectively in a tougher, more hostile world. And for that reason, I believe Canadian policy should and must remain rooted in a certain realism — a realism that recognizes the principles to which we must adhere, and which, at the same time, acknowledges the constraints on our international activities, particularly in the current environment of distrust, disillusionment and insecurity.

Current international tensions impinge on human rights in many ways. In tough economic times, many governments merely pass off their problems to the poorest in their societies, adding thereby to the depth of their misery. In other circumstances, economic problems are used as excuses for added measures of repression, or for a more secure state of siege by authoritarian regimes.

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