



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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THE ADVANCEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Statement by the Honourable Paul Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, through the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation - International Service, on Human Rights Day, December 10, 1967.

Nineteen years ago today, the United Nations adopted, without a dissenting vote, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On that historic occasion, the Canadian position was expressed in the following terms:

"...We regard this document as one inspired by the highest ideals; as one which contains a statement of a number of noble principles and aspirations of very great significance which the peoples of the world will endeavour to fulfill, though they will make these efforts variously, each nation in its own way and according to its own traditions and political methods.... The Charter itself commits the members of the United Nations to principles which are not yet applied uniformly throughout the world. The difficulties in the way of a full and universal application of the principles of the Declaration of Human Rights will be even more complex. We must, however, move towards that great goal."

In 1948 the most confirmed optimist could not, I believe, have foreseen the tremendous impact that the Universal Declaration, a document imposing only moral obligations on states, would have within a relatively brief period on the advancement of human rights throughout the world. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the human-rights programme of the United Nations, inspired as it was by the Universal Declaration, is one of the solid and lasting achievements of that organization. When the Universal Declaration was adopted, human rights were mainly defined in terms of political and civil rights. The elaboration of human rights by the United Nations has given all of us a greater appreciation and understanding of the extent of these rights and that economic, social and cultural rights have an equal importance in the welfare of the individual. We have come to recognize that the possession of these rights is essential to an enlightened and humanitarian civilization.

The Universal Declaration was, of course, the first step in defining human rights. Since then, the United Nations has adopted a fairly large number of instruments, both legally non-binding Declarations and Conventions. In sum, they cover in considerable detail the various rights and freedoms specified in the Declaration. To name but a few of these instruments;