

However, we are all painfully aware that the existence of those agreements has not created a world in which human rights are respected. In many countries there are gross violations of even the most basic human rights. Often these violations are perpetrated deliberately by governments and on occasion by governments which have freely assumed legal obligations to respect those rights. The international community must find ways to rectify this unpalatable situation. Canadians look to the United Nations to do so.

The member states of the United Nations have not given it the power to oblige governments to respect human rights. But it is a forum where world opinion can and should be focussed on those governments which persistently abuse the rights of their citizens. Canada is firmly committed to efforts to improve the performance of the United Nations in the human rights field.

In Canada we have made considerable progress in the past thirty years. That progress has been influenced by the international obligations we have assumed. Every province has adopted human rights legislation and has established a provincial human rights commission to consider complaints from individuals. The federal government has adopted important human rights legislation and has established the Canadian Human Rights Commission. The distinguished former member for Fundy-Royal, Mr. Gordon Fairweather, has taken on the key position of Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

In 1976 Canada became a party to the most important human rights conventions, the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol. The federal and provincial governments are aware that Canadian legislation and practice are not always totally consistent in every detail with the international obligations we undertook by adhering to the Covenants. But they recognized that the Covenants provide a standard against which Canadian performance can be measured to identify where improvements should be made. The Canadian adherence to the Optional Protocol has extended to individual Canadians the right to take their complaints to the United Nations Human Rights Committee when domestic legal remedies have been exhausted.

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