

In its discussion of the situation in Southern Rhodesia, the Conference came to grips in real and immediate form with the problem of race relations. That is a problem which the Conference also had to face in 1961. No more explosive problem can reach the Conference table, and I think it is a tribute to the statesmanship of the African leaders and to the essential moderation expressed by all members of the Conference that the exchange of views on this matter was temperate and constructive, and there could be agreement in a way which reflected itself in the communiqué.

The Canadian delegation, representing a country which is not directly involved in this problem -- and I say "not directly" -- tried to make a contribution which would be objective and helpful in the evolution of our multi-racial community based on racial equality and non-discrimination. A firm stand was taken against racial discrimination and apartheid by the Commonwealth Conference of 1961. At that Conference, Canada played an important and very constructive part. I was glad to pay my tribute to the efforts of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition in this matter at that Conference, and I am glad to repeat that tribute at this time.

Challenge of Non-discrimination

I, in my way, tried to follow and reaffirm the position taken then in regard to racial equality. I suggested to the present Conference that we around the table were facing a very important moment of decision which would have far-reaching implications on the future of the Commonwealth, if, at a meeting where the majority of the members were from Asia and Africa, we did not, all of us, in some form meet this challenge of racial equality and non-discrimination. If we could not take a stand; if we could not reaffirm in the communiqué the principles of racial equality and non-discrimination -- if we could not do that, then the Commonwealth was not likely, in the form in which it is now, to go ahead or even to survive. The continuance of racial discrimination and the intensification in many areas of mutual fear between races are both a most disturbing features of the present world situation and a great cause of the difficulty with regard to many remaining unresolved colonial problems. That problem exists in the Commonwealth; it exists outside the Commonwealth.

There has been a good deal of talk about interference or intervention in the affairs of other areas or countries or colonies that were not represented in London; but the British Government, quite rightly I believe -- this is how we came to discuss this matter -- put on the agenda an item, "Progress of dependent territories toward independence". It seemed to us that under that item we should face up frankly to the implications of the subject, and we attempted to do so; I think all delegations did.

Our contribution was to suggest that the Commonwealth might adopt a declaration of racial equality very much along the lines of some of the statements which were made at the 1961 Conference, and that we should reaffirm in our final communiqué the principles for which we stand in the Commonwealth on this matter, principles on which our association must be based in the future if it is to go forward. Then we suggested that from this statement of principles we should go forward to discuss its application to particular problems such as Southern Rhodesia, British Guiana and other areas. The Conference agreed to this suggestion, and the declaration of principles is included in the communiqué.