



# Statements and Speeches

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## THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AFTER THIRTY YEARS

A Declaration by Ambassador Yvon Beaulne, Canadian Representative to the Thirty-sixth Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Geneva, February 4, 1980

The decade which is now ending marks a decisive stage in the evolution of human rights. In the first 30 years of its existence, with the collaboration of the experts of the sub-commission, the Commission has acquitted itself admirably of the tasks which the General Assembly confided to it. Since the entry into force four years ago of the two covenants based on the universal declaration of 1948, the Commission's role has been enlarged. It now acts not only to enunciate principles but also to ensure that they are respected everywhere.

Experience has shown that the implementation of international instruments is much more complicated than their elaboration. The Commission has been faced with resistance and opposition. However, even if the execution of the mandate given it by the international community has become more difficult, the Commission must continue to fulfill it as best it can.

Since 1976 the Commission has improved and reinforced the procedures concerning massive violations of human rights. The debates of the last session served to dissipate a great number of uncertainties and ambiguities on this score, and brought clarification which defined the limits and possibilities of these tools. However, a majority of delegations have drawn back from certain actions, the need for which seems to us even more evident today. The Commission has preferred, for example, to delay the examination of a situation which constitutes one of the greatest tragedies of our time and which a special rapporteur, the President of the sub-commission, described for it in a well-documented report. Other initiatives, notably concerning thousands of disappeared persons and massive exoduses of populations, suffered a similar fate, while the situations which these initiatives were designed to remedy were in the meantime aggravated. Would these situations not have been different if the Commission had dealt with them at the appropriate time?

Many proposals, including some of considerable interest, have been presented to the Commission with a view to improving its performance. Of course it is necessary to seek constantly to ameliorate the methods at our disposal. For myself, I believe that our most important difficulties are not technical in nature. We are not short of time, nor of documentation; we are short of will and sometimes of good will. We could go faster and further if we truly wished to do so.

What paralyzes our Commission above all is the narrow and obsolete conception some governments hold of their responsibilities to the international community for their actions in the field of human rights. However, it is not possible to maintain seriously

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