

At the same time, we are not perfect, and we must be vigorous in our efforts to secure the highest possible standards. As Christians, we must never lose sight of human rights at any time, and must always be willing to convey our concerns to others. The Canadian Government has a right and duty to act that we expect other states to respect, must as we respect their right to approach us on similar issues. At the same time, we have to be prudent. For our actions to be meaningful, they must reflect the genuine concerns of Canadians.

This, in turn, means that we cannot be involved to the same degree in every single human-rights problem, because there is a danger that a Canadian action would eventually be interpreted as simply yet another empty moral gesture, which other countries could then dismiss. Seriousness is an obvious consideration. While we cannot ignore any discernible pattern of violations of human rights anywhere in the world, our case will be stronger where the offence is greater and if the weight of Canadian and of world opinion is behind our representation.

Thus the determination whether Canadian action is appropriate depends upon a careful assessment of a number of factors respecting Canada and the other countries concerned.

While stressing our moral considerations, we must also be realistic and recognize the difficulties in drawing a line between human rights and other areas of activity. The suspension of aid is frequently suggested as a response to human-rights violations, and it may seem on the surface to be an understandable way for a donor country to react. You will agree with me that we cannot question the need to provide food aid to some impoverished countries. But, in the area of economic aid, let me emphasize the real dilemma we face in attempting to determine what part of, for instance, a project for a cement plant or an irrigation scheme benefits the people and what part ends up simply serving the aims of a government unresponsive on the question of human rights. This fine line, as I describe it, is hard to draw in practice, and I can only repeat that I have an open mind on this subject. I am prepared to consider possible courses of action available to us if I can be convinced that such action will prove effective.

At the same time, there is a real difficulty in acting on many economic issues: if we go beyond what is called for by international sanctions, where do we then draw the line as a matter of policy? If we take unilateral action, and it accomplishes nothing, what have we gained?