

There was a time when the Commons Committee on External Affairs and National Defence was very active indeed. In the period from 1970 to 1973 that committee held inquiries into fourteen major subjects, including such important matters as the Nigerian-Biafran conflict, the establishment of the International Research Development Centre, the United Nations and peacekeeping, Canada/US relations, and the major policy review paper "Foreign Policy for Canadians". These inquiries were valuable, and they gave an opportunity to many individual Canadians to put forward their views and concerns as witnesses before the committee. They created public interest in many of the major issues of the day, and they even appeared to have some impact on government policy.

So it is to be regretted that after fourteen inquiries in four years, the committee held only two in 1974, and a mere one in each of 1975, 1976 and 1977. In 1978 there was none at all. Well, we shall change that. And one of the first jobs that will be given to the committee is a review of our overall foreign policy in the light of the current world situation. We shall be encouraging that committee to involve as many Canadians as possible in that work.

I have said that I cannot prejudge the outcome of the committee's deliberations. Another thing I cannot do is avoid taking decisions until it has reported and the government has had an opportunity to study its findings. The world will not stop, even for the Parliament of Canada. In the interval, of course, I shall be having discussions with a wide variety of people from all walks of life. My officials will be providing me with assessments of Canada's interests in the almost endless variety of issues that arise in the daily work of my portfolio. Life must go on, and in the process I shall also be preparing myself and my colleagues for the overall review and the decisions that it will necessitate.

But as I have said, decisions must be taken, work must go on. I think it's only proper, therefore, if I spend a very few moments outlining some of the approaches I shall be taking to this work, and some of the new emphasis I intend to give to the exercise of my responsibilities in this portfolio.

There are three general areas I want to mention this afternoon. First, I intend to ensure that Canada's foreign policy lays even greater emphasis than it has in the past on human rights issues. I firmly believe that the way we treat our brothers and sisters is the measuring stick of civilization. There is no shortage both in Canada and in the international community of pious statements of human and individual rights. There is also no shortage of examples of their flagrant violation. As you know, the party to which I belong has a long history of concern for human rights. Well, I intend to translate that concern to the international front, just as my colleagues and I intend to continue to combat inequities in our own society.