

Mr. Chairman,

As we mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, many have decried the failure of the United Nations to achieve universal realization of the ideals elaborated in that historic document. The reasons for failure are sometimes complex; and the search for solutions can often be difficult and sensitive. It is nonetheless our responsibility in the debate under this agenda item - however difficult it may prove - to address such situations in a forthright manner, demonstrating that this Organization is serious about translating the noble principles of the Universal Declaration into reality for the people we all represent.

Some of the most brutal and repressive human rights violations continue to be committed in the course and immediate aftermath of wars and armed insurrections.

The current conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as the persisting ethnic violence in neighbouring Rwanda and Burundi, raise grave concerns for the respect of humanitarian law and human rights in that region. We are most concerned that the return of hate propaganda and calls for ethnic violence could lead to an horrific spiralling of serious human rights abuses.

Similarly, Canada deplores in the strongest terms the violence that has taken place in the province of Kosovo over the past year, in particular the direct targeting of civilians by the Serb authorities in clear violation of their obligations under international law. We also condemn all abuses committed by the "Kosovo Liberation Army" in the course of their armed insurrection. We welcome the establishment of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission, and call on both sides to fully cooperate with the Mission.

Canada expects Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to fully meet their obligations under the Dayton Peace Agreement, in particular on the critical issue of return of refugees and displaced persons. We remind these countries once again of the need for those indicted for war crimes to face justice before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Hague. We also note with concern the unacceptable situation with regard to press freedoms in both Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In particular, we strongly condemn the recent adoption of the Serbian Information Law and the repressive actions taken as a result, including the closure of such independent media as Danas and Dnevni Telegraph.

In Sudan, we remain concerned about continued reports of human rights violations including arbitrary arrests, religious intolerance and persecution, as well as slavery. Although commending the parties to the conflict for adhering to a cease-fire in Bahr el Ghazal to deliver humanitarian assistance, we deplore the use by all parties of military force to disrupt or attack relief efforts, and particularly the indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets by government forces.

The human rights situation in Afghanistan is among the worst in the world. Abuses of every description appear to be growing increasingly severe and widespread. The Taliban militia have instituted a policy of systematically denying women and girls the most fundamental human needs: education, medical care, and even a livelihood. There are credible reports that the Taliban have conducted atrocities against civilians in areas they have captured. The world at large must speak with one voice in demanding that the Taliban respect internationally established norms.

7

8

9

10

11

12