

PRESS RELEASE



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Secretary of State for External Affairs marks Human Rights Day

Today, December 10, 1966, member states of the United Nations mark the 18th anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and we in Canada, along with other nations across the world, should take stock of how these rights are respected and preserved in our own country which will next year celebrate its 100th birthday.

Although the Universal Declaration has not the binding force of law, the principles which it enshrines of freedom and equality in dignity and rights for all the human family are those towards which each of us, individually and as nations, must surely strive. The result of two years unceasing work by the newly created Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, the Declaration was adopted without a dissenting vote by the Third Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations meeting in Paris in 1948.

Having completed its work on the Universal Declaration, the Human Rights Commission then proceeded to the second, and perhaps most important, part of its task -- the preparation of the two draft Covenants on human rights, two legal instruments designed to embrace virtually all aspects of human rights such as civil liberties, the status of women, freedom of information, the prevention of discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, language or religion and rights related to education and trade union membership, to name only a few. The Covenants are designed as a means to give practical effect to the fundamental rights listed in the Declaration by creating legally binding obligations for all states which ratify them.

The Covenants have been debated in the General Assembly over the past several years. However, this year's anniversary of the Universal Declaration is perhaps of