

A *Canadian Approach to Human Rights*

Canada has a well-earned reputation for respecting the rights of its citizens, and of those who come to its shores for refuge. A deep and fundamental respect for human rights and freedoms is part of the very fabric of Canadian life. Yet, surprisingly, formal laws to protect these basic rights are only a recent development.

This fact reflects not a lack of concern about human rights, but the special position these rights have enjoyed in the nation's history. Unlike many countries, Canada has never faced the need for a violent revolution, nor undergone the struggle to assert individual rights against an oppressive regime. From the beginning, a belief in human dignity and integrity was quietly assumed — and this assumption has made Canada one of the most privileged countries in the world.

This belief has also created a distinctively Canadian approach to human rights. Over the past 40 years, Canada not only has adopted human rights legislation but has also enacted the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This legislation, although reflecting the basic principles of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Rights and Freedoms, is also uniquely Canadian and deeply rooted in Canada's history.

Canada's Human Rights Heritage

The key to that history is a tolerance — of different attitudes, cultures, and ways

of living — that is firmly entrenched as part of the Canadian character.

Canada was originally inhabited by aboriginal peoples of many different languages and cultures. After the first Europeans started their settlements, the country quickly grew with the arrival of people from around the world, bringing their own social customs and religious beliefs.

Respect for the right of individuals to pursue their own dreams, according to their own beliefs, was a practical necessity. And while inevitable conflicts occurred, this goodwill and generosity of spirit played a prominent part in Canada's growth.

When Canada was founded as a nation in 1867, it inherited the political and legal rights recognized in English common law. These include specific rights established by such historic documents as the Magna Carta, the English Bills of Rights, and the Habeas Corpus Acts, as well as traditional rights enshrined in the heritage of common law.

In the twentieth century, however, the need to strengthen traditional common law protection of human rights became evident. Clear legislation was needed to prohibit discrimination against racial, religious and other minorities. The provinces and the federal government passed a variety of "fair practice" laws prohibiting such discrimination in specific areas of employment, trade and commerce.

Canadian Wins UN Prize



A distinguished Canadian, Professor John P. Humphrey of Montreal, has been awarded a United Nations (UN) human rights prize on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Dr. Humphrey is the first Canadian so honoured.

Professor Humphrey has enjoyed a long and internationally respected career in international human rights. He was the first Director of the United Nations Human Rights Division and was instrumental in the preparatory work and drafting of the Universal Declaration, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948.

Canadian professor Dr. John P. Humphrey recently was awarded the United Nations Human Rights prize.

The author of numerous books and articles on human rights and other aspects of international law, Dr. Humphrey was awarded the Order of Canada in 1974 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to international human rights.

After receiving his award, Dr. Humphrey stated:

Never in the history of the Universal Declaration has it received the attention which it has received during this fortieth anniversary. I hope that this may be the *élan vital* that will help us to bring peace to our world and universal recognition of the dignity of man and of woman.