

Keynote Speech

Human Rights - How Can Canada Make a Difference?

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(Text)

The theme for your conference "Human Rights - How can Canada make a Difference?" raises some important and timely issues.

As we approach the new millennium, one of the major concerns in pursuing world peace, stability and justice, continues to be how the international community, including Canada, deals with issues of human rights.

If we examine world history since 1945, the year sometimes referred to as the end of the last war, we note that there have been (approximately) 120 wars in that period, in which 27 million people were killed, two-thirds of them civilians, and the vast majority in the developing world of the southern hemisphere. Not an era marked by peace or respect for human rights - especially in the south.

Some say that the developed world has exported war to the developing world as part of a pattern of economic and cultural domination.

They point to the worldwide distribution of military bases and the arms exports to the developing countries, which during the last 20 years are estimated at \$220 billion.

In recent years we have had barbaric conflicts, massacres and genocides and massive abuses of human rights in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Algeria, Rwanda, Colombia, the Middle East, and even Northern Ireland - to name only a few.

In nearly all these cases, the conflicts arose out of a disrespect for human rights, whether the freedom of religion, the freedom of expression and dissent, the right to form a union, the right to equal treatment economically and socially, or the right to gender equality. These conflicts and abuses, cascaded in turn to even more serious violations.

Faced with such deplorable and difficult human rights situations - what can Canada do to make a difference? My quick answer is that - on a larger scale - Canada can make a difference by doing exactly what it did with respect to the International Criminal Court and the Land Mines Treaty. In both cases Canada demonstrated considerable political will, committed resources, stood on principle against major powers, and worked closely with NGOs and like-minded countries from around the world to accomplish human rights improvements.

On a smaller scale, Canada can continue to support the International Centre, the human rights NGOs, and the human rights program in CIDA, all of which are working to strengthen human rights capacity and civil society around the world.