

Mr. Chairman, with these remarks, I have outlined but a few of Canada's priorities for strengthening the institutional framework for promoting and protecting human rights. Clearly, the mechanisms at our disposal are imperfect, often fragile, and they require constant nurturing.

But human rights machinery is of no consequence if it is not put to work in addressing real situations of human rights violations wherever they may occur. We cannot allow our activity here to be dismissed as mere academic irrelevancy.

Accordingly, Canada's delegation will participate actively in the Commission's efforts to reach concrete conclusions on a wide range of specific situations.

And in two weeks time, it will contribute in a forthright and constructive fashion to the Commission's annual keynote debate on human rights violations in all parts of the world.

Canada regards that debate not as a matter of interference in the internal affairs of others, but as a common quest for the universal application of standards, which we are all, as members of the United Nations, obliged to respect and promote.

There is clearly scope for improving the basis on which that quest proceeds. Concerns about excessive politicization might, for instance be alleviated, if deliberations on specific situations were based on an objective report by the High Commissioner on the state of human rights worldwide. The work of the many treaty bodies and rapporteurs might afford ample basis for such an annual report. Canada intends to pursue discussions on this idea.

In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, it is our intention to pursue the debate on human rights problems, just as we pursue the need for institutional reform, in a spirit not of confrontation but of solidarity and co-operation.

These are the challenges we collectively face - building our human rights institutions and putting them to work in real-life situations. Daily, we are confronted with stories of human atrocity - defenceless human beings, the elderly, students, children, mothers, fathers - innocents all - tortured, abused, imprisoned, murdered. We must keep faith with the citizens of all of our countries, whose well-being we are pledged by our Charter to serve.

That is both our minimum, and our highest, responsibility: our responsibility to our common humanity.

Thank you.