

30. HUMAN RIGHTS

Background

The International Charter on Human Rights is the foremost international legal instrument on human rights. It comprises : the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol. Other instruments aimed at protecting human rights are the Helsinki Final Act adopted by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), for the countries of Europe and North America, and numerous conventions related, for example, to the rights of women, the rights of refugees, and those regarding labour, racial discrimination and torture.

Government adherence to international human rights standards is monitored by UN agencies, particularly the General Assembly (Third Committee), the UN Human Rights Commission, the Human Rights Committee and the International Labour Organization. Adherence to the Helsinki Final Act is monitored through the periodic meetings of the CSCE. There are also procedures established to respond to alleged human rights violations.

Canada has adopted legislation to protect human rights within its boundaries, namely the Canadian Bill of Rights, enacted in 1960, the Constitution Act on Human Rights (1977), and the Constitution Act comprising the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). Since human rights come under provincial jurisdiction, the Federal Government has worked with the provinces (which have also passed their own legislation) to formulate Canadian policies in this field. The twenty-four international instruments which Canada has ratified include