

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

An address by Right Hon. Louis S. St. Laurent,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
to the Montreal Branch of the United Nations
Society, February 24, 1947.

It is a most encouraging and stimulating experience to be present tonight at this great meeting of the United Nations Society. The Charter of the United Nations begins with the words: "We the peoples of the United Nations". It says, "We the peoples of the United Nations, determined ... to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security ... have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims".

Those words express a profound truth. The creation of the United Nations was the result of the blood and sweat and tears shed by the peoples of the world during the past unholy thirty-three years of depression, frustration, injustice and war. The strength of the United Nations lies in the determination of the peoples of the world to unite their strength to keep the peace. If that determination falters the United Nations will decline in strength.

It is therefore essential that throughout the world the peoples should unite their efforts in societies such as this United Nations Society of Canada so that they may become well-informed about the United Nations and so that they may understand the problems which confront their governments in carrying out their obligations to the United Nations. The government of Canada, like the governments of the other Members of the U.N., undertook serious commitments when Canada joined the U.N. The ability of the government of any country to honour its international commitments depends on how well the people of that country understand the extent and nature of the commitments and how far they are willing to honour them.

The commitments of Canada to the U.N. include a commitment to use force to resist aggression, and a commitment not to use force to settle one's own private disputes with other nations. But it is not these commitments which I wish to draw to your attention tonight. I should like instead to draw to your attention, in the presence of the chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, the commitment entered into by the government and people of Canada to promote and encourage "Universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion". We are pledged under the Charter "to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the 'Organization' for the achievement" of this purpose.

Speaking tonight in the largest French-speaking city outside of France, speaking as a representative of a country which long before the Charter of the U.N. was drawn up had rejected as a damnable heresy the doctrine that a nation must be based on only one culture and one language, and speaking in the presence of Mrs. Roosevelt who is herself so delightfully fluent in French, it would, I think, be appropriate if, in the remainder of my remarks, I were to speak in French.