

Nor must we forget that our journey in search of greater respect for human rights is already well begun. There already exists an impressive body of legally binding United Nations instruments on human rights. We have all freely subscribed to the painstakingly drafted human rights commitments in the Helsinki Final Act and Madrid Document. Many of the participating states are members of regional groupings which have developed their own sophisticated human rights machinery. We cannot now halt or turn back on our road, even if the way ahead looks long and our visions of what the final destination should look like may vary. Given the importance of human rights, and the serious concerns which our citizens continue to manifest about their implementation both at home and abroad, we must doggedly seek to improve our implementation, strengthen our commitment, and intensify our dialogue.

It would be gratuitous for me to suggest what exactly you should or can accomplish in your six weeks in Ottawa. You, as experts in your field, and as experienced negotiators, will be able to articulate the problems and determine the progress which can be made here. Suffice it to say that Canada sees this meeting as a valuable opportunity which must not be lost to give impetus to the process of improving fulfillment of our human rights and humanitarian commitments. If Ottawa can provide momentum which will help at Berne, Vienna and beyond, it will indeed have achieved something positive. It will also do much to give us a positive perspective of the tenth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, which we observe this summer.

Before concluding, let me recall the deep personal interest that so many of our individual citizens will be taking in this meeting. For them the questions you will be discussing are not abstruse matters of interstate relations, but rather affect their everyday lives in the most direct and fundamental ways. I do not pretend that Canadians have any special corner on concerns for human rights nor would I say that Canada has itself a perfect human rights record, though we do try hard. It has nevertheless been very apparent to me in the course of our own national preparations for this meeting how much informed interest there is in this country in the work you will undertake.

During your meeting I expect you will yourselves see signs of this interest. Some of the expressions may be vigorous; all of them, I hope, will be within the bounds of legitimate self-expression. In the final analysis, I believe it is a token of the need for this meeting that there should be heartfelt interest of this sort.