

The International community will mark next year the 35th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today I would like to anticipate that anniversary and review with you old problems and recent progress in the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world.

In a symposium sponsored by UNESCO in 1948, Jacques Maritain issued a warning that even now should be the daily watchword of those who profess attachment to the cause of human dignity.

What he said was this:

"The function of language has been so much perverted, the truest words have been pressed into the service of so many lies, that even the noblest and most solemn declaration could not suffice to restore to the peoples faith in human rights. It is the implementation of these declarations which is sought from those who subscribe to them; it is the means of securing effective respect for human rights from States and Governments that it is desired to guarantee."

A few months after Maritain wrote these words the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration, together with the U.N. Charter itself, gave a constitutional expression to the basic rights and freedoms of the human person. Since 1948 these rights and freedoms have been further defined in more than 20 conventions and covenants. Indeed that number more than doubles if we include the related agreements developed under the auspices of the International Labour Organization.

All these international instruments are major achievements in themselves. Each of them, we hope, brings us closer to conditions of true civilization and to the ideal of man's humanity to man. Yet each must be examined in the light of Maritain's admonition that faith in human rights can be restored only by implementation of those rights and not by their mere enumeration.