

to express his determination to make children's rights a priority for Canadian foreign policy. He has.

How did this remarkable development come about? To answer we have to look at the history of human rights discourse. The ideas of justice and freedom that frame our current understanding of human rights emerged during the Age of Enlightenment in 18th century Europe. It was the human wrongs of the 20th century, however, that made them universal. When the 20th century began, the hand of colonialism was heavy, democracy was limited and women had no vote. Then came the tragedy of the First World War, the massive and inhuman oppressions of Hitler and Stalin, the growth of Japanese imperialism and the global conflagration of the Second World War. Once the war was over, vast numbers of people finally became aware of the extent of the horrors that had been taking place all along. Concern for human rights, particularly for civil and political ones, deepened. The United Nations (UN), founded in 1945 to prevent a new outbreak of global hostilities, quickly made the promotion of human rights a key element of its strategy for global security.

In December 1948 the UN proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the common standard of achievement for all people and nations. By adopting this declaration member states committed themselves to the proposition that "recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and unalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". Since then the UN, through negotiation, has developed a wide-ranging body of understandings about human rights to which we can all turn for guidance and direction. Among the first to be drafted were the two broad legal instruments known as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Both were adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1966. These covenants are complemented by four focused conventions: the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (December 1965); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (December 1979); the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (December 1984);