

towards which participants should strive. It may also attach low priority to provisions to which we attach the highest priority.

Canada has been active over the years in supporting the development of the international norms and is now encouraging broad adherence to them. We also support the development of standards in fields not yet dealt with — for example, the elimination of religious intolerance, the elimination of torture and the promotion of the status of women.

Canada has become a party to the most important human-rights covenants and conventions. Through that process, international actions have directly affected domestic developments in the human-rights field. Consultations related to Canada signing and ratifying the important human-rights covenants, for example, had a catalytic effect on the evolution of human-rights legislation in Canada. It encouraged, as well, the establishment of statutory human-rights agencies at the federal and provincial levels. The international obligations we have assumed by ratifying the covenants ensure a continuing review of domestic performance judged against the covenants standards. That is to say, our support for human rights works in both directions. While we are promoting human rights internationally, we have the obligation to pursue our efforts domestically on the basis of our domestic objectives and our international obligations.

**Problem of  
differing  
international  
perceptions**

When I spoke on the subject of human rights last year, I drew attention to the differences in perception of human rights as between Western democracies and the vast majority of member states of the United Nations. I noted that, while Western countries traditionally accord priority to civil and political rights, Third World countries consider that the most essential human rights are the economic rights of their citizens to the basic necessities for survival. While Western countries emphasize the rights of the individual, most other countries stress equally the rights of the citizen in his society and his concurrent responsibilities to that society.

These differing approaches have hindered the development of co-ordinated, effective action to promote and defend human rights. Western democracies have been particularly concerned by the comparatively low priority developing countries and Eastern European countries accord to civil and political human rights. Western countries have also been concerned by the reluctance of the UN majority to support measures to improve the UN's ability to deal with situations of gross abuses. The developing countries have, on the other hand, often considered Western efforts and initiatives in favour of international human rights to be callous and hypocritical. They have accused us of focusing too often on the civil- and political-rights issues the Western democratic tradition holds dear. They consider that we have been too ready to take up human-rights issues while paying insufficient attention to the economic context in which they occur.

Experience has shown that situations of severe economic hardship do impede the development of conditions and mechanisms to guarantee the enjoyment of human rights. Canada acknowledges this relation, and accepts its responsibility to promote equally the civil and political, and economic and social, rights internationally. We

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