

I want today to pay tribute, on behalf of Canada, to those who have in the past year made the ultimate sacrifice in this cause, including the human rights monitors recently murdered in Rwanda. Canada has lost two of its own in the past twelve months: Ms. Nancy Malloy, a nurse with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Chechnya, and Father Pinard, a Missionnaire d'Afrique in Rwanda. They will not be forgotten.

I want also to join those who have called for the early completion of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In the 11 years since Canada and Norway tabled the first draft for this declaration, individuals and members of NGOs have played an increasingly important role, as an essential front-line force, in promoting and protecting human rights throughout the world. We were gravely disappointed at the limited progress at the most recent Working Group session. We strongly urge all parties -- and above all the very few who have raised obstacles to the process -- to give renewed attention and commitment to concluding the work on the Declaration in the coming year.

Mr. Chairman, Canada attaches similar priority to advancing the Commission's work on a comprehensive Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. At the 1996 session of the Working Group, Canada sought to give momentum to the discussions in recognizing that indigenous peoples have a right to self-determination which respects the territorial integrity of democratic states. We encourage all parties to seek ways to cooperate so that important progress can be made in developing the Declaration at the next Working Group meeting.

On the scale of human injustice, there can be no greater cause for alarm than abuses suffered by children. The Canadian Government has made the rights of children a priority in both domestic and foreign policy. We take seriously our commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and we strongly support the work of this Commission on guidelines for two optional protocols to the Convention: one on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and the other on children in situations of armed conflict.

We are also following up on the Agenda for Action of the Stockholm World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children. As Foreign Minister Axworthy said at that conference, it is hard to believe that on the eve of the 21st century, we are still trying to deal with what is essentially a form of slavery: the sex trade involving children. Canada's efforts on this front have included a parliamentary bill that will make Canadians who engage in child sex tourism abroad liable to prosecution in Canada.

Last month, I attended the Amsterdam Child Labour Conference, where representatives of governments, international organizations such as the ILO and concerned non-governmental organizations came together in common cause to meet this challenge. Canada recognizes child labour as a human rights issue as well as a development issue, a challenge demanding a multi-disciplinary