

Maritain in 1948 ventured to express only the most guarded optimism about the chances of securing effective respect of human rights from states and governments. He wrote, of course, against the background of horror of the Second World War. Since then, we have mercifully been spared from horror on that same scale. What we have lost in scale, however, we have made up for in refinement. The new science and the new technology of the postwar years have been used to mount new assaults upon the integrity of man, new invasions of his innermost being, new obscenities against the human spirit. The jailers of the mind, the specialists of pain and terror and degradation — all the enemies of decency and dignity — have found new weapons for their works of darkness.

But on our side we have weapons too. The best is mankind stands higher, stronger than the worst. The best endures. The international instruments we have forged since 1948 will not rust from want of use. They will lead us slowly, painfully closer to the end Maritain had in mind in 1948 when he wrote: "Pending something better, a Declaration of Human Rights agreed by the nations would be a great thing in itself, a word of promise for the downcast and oppressed of all lands, the beginning of chances which the world requires, the first condition precedent for the later drafting of universal Charter of civilized life."

The International Commission of Jurists is one of the guides and guardians of the road to "something better". I wish you well in your work. I invite your comments and criticisms on Canada's performance in the field of human rights. And I thank you for the honour you have done me in asking me to join you today.

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