



Statements and Speeches

No. 84/14

APARTHEID – A VIOLATION OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Statement by Stephen Lewis, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, to Plenary, United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 20, 1984.

I do not think it an exaggeration to say that *apartheid* is one of the single most intractable issues facing this body. It is not solely a political issue; its social and economic ramifications are rightly reflected in debates and discussions in the committees of this General Assembly as well. The Canadian government has condemned, and will continue to condemn with every fibre of moral strength which we possess, the policy and practice of *apartheid* in South Africa. It constitutes an unconscionable violation of fundamental human rights. Change must – and will – come. The question facing us today is how to promote change and to hasten the end of the abhorrent system of *apartheid*.

Sad reality requires that we recognize that racism exists in many places on this less than perfect planet, but only in South Africa do we find *apartheid* enshrined in the law of the land. Only in South Africa is it government policy to divide the population on the basis of race. Only in South Africa is segregation supported by the full range of powerful government institutions. Only in South Africa is racism extended to every area of human existence, social, cultural, economic, and political. Only in South Africa are people herded into isolated, often impoverished and arid areas far removed from every economic opportunity. Only in South Africa, in other words, does the state debase the human spirit and the human condition on the basis of colour alone.

And what are the results of South Africa's policy of *apartheid*? In the most elementary terms, it has condemned the vast majority of the population to poverty – economic poverty – intellectual poverty – even spiritual poverty. No matter what its proponents may argue, *apartheid* cannot be justified as some form of separate but equal development – just witness the South African government's own statistics on *per capita* educational expenditures or the allocation of arable lands to the so-called homelands.

But of course, it's far more than that. *Apartheid* also corrodes the institutions most prized by white South Africans, the democracy and freedom of expression which they treasure within their own community. Why? Because inequality breeds anger. Anger breeds unrest. Unrest begets violence. Violence is met by more violence and suppression.

Suppression requires vast police powers, government control of movement and assembly, and increasingly, intervention by the armed forces. The cycle of inequality, anger, and suppression shreds the fabric of society. The entire coercive apparatus of the state is enlisted in the service of injustice. I remind you of the words of Bishop Tutu before the Security Council just last month: "...my beloved country is wracked by division, by alienation, by animosity, by separation, by injustice, by avoidable pain and suffering. It is a deeply fragmented society, hag-ridden by fear and anxiety, covered by a pall of despondency and a sense of desperation, split up into hostile, warring factions. It is a highly volatile