

In a separate resolution, the Commission should give careful consideration to the observations of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Radhika Coomaraswamy on her first report, which provides an excellent basis for pursuing concrete action to promote respect for the UN Declaration on Violence Against Women.

Mr. Chairman, no country is without its human rights problems, and for my country the plight of its Aboriginal citizens is a matter of particular concern. Since its election in October 1993, the Government of Canada has launched efforts to build with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada a partnership based on trust, mutual respect and participation in the decision-making process. We are also determined to help build stronger, healthier and more self-reliant Aboriginal communities.

This commitment to partnership extends to the work on which this Commission is about to embark, in giving consideration to the Subcommission's proposed "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." Canada has signalled its determination to ensure that those whom the declaration is intended to benefit will have a meaningful voice in the work of the Commission.

We have also emphasized our strong belief that the time has come for this Commission to establish a separate agenda item for consideration of the draft declaration and other international issues of immediate concern to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and their indigenous brothers and sisters in all parts of the world.

Mr. Chairman, no list of priorities for reform of the UN's human rights institutions would be complete without mention of the working methods of this Commission itself. The Commission on Human Rights is the most important and complex United Nations forum apart from the General Assembly. Yet in recent years, we have all come increasingly to realize that we are not equipping ourselves with everything we need to meet the ever-growing demands placed upon us by the world community.

Most important, we need better preparation; and better preparation requires, above all, more time between the closing of the General Assembly's human rights debate and the start of the Commission. The current six-week interval is clearly insufficient for rapporteurs and the Secretariat to prepare documentation for the Commission, let alone for governments to consider their contents.

Canada therefore urges this session of the Commission to consider urgently this matter and to propose to ECOSOC [Economic and Social Council] a more appropriate timeframe for its meetings on the basis of advice from the High Commissioner and Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights.