

It is a pleasure for me to join you today to give you the Government's views on the current state of human rights on the international scene, and some indication of what we are doing about it. The Foundation's annual meeting provides an excellent opportunity for taking stock, and for giving a reckoning to some of our staunchest supporters and critics.

The Minister for External Relations has a special mandate for human rights, and as Parliamentary Secretary I mean to be active in these matters.

This is the first such event since the new government took office, and I assume that you will be looking and listening closely to detect any changes in Canadian policy. So I shall start by stressing continuity. The human rights problems out there in the world have not changed, and nor has the desire of Canadians to improve matters. I can assure you that in my constituency in Edmonton, a great many people care about these things. Many have relatives living under repressive regimes abroad; others are deeply involved with church groups, Amnesty International, or other organizations involved in international human rights matters. Their concerns, and their expectations for government action, are very real, and the Government is studying new ways to meet these expectations.

I am sure you know the importance which Prime Minister Brian Mulroney attaches to human rights. He made it clear in a speech to a recent Israel Bonds Dinner that as, and I quote, "children of liberty, it is up to us to protect the cause of human rights and minorities wherever they are challenged". We hold strongly that human rights must be defended wherever they are threatened. It is insincere or worse in my judgment to turn a blind eye to rights violations in one country if the same type of violations in another country produces a quite different reaction. In other words a human right must be a right regardless of the site of the violation.

You should expect new initiatives, and some increased efforts along existing avenues. The party now in government has never taken a back-seat in human rights. Prime Minister Diefenbaker gave Canada a Bill of Rights.