

In 1976, Canada became a party to the most important human-rights conventions, the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol. The federal and provincial governments are aware that Canadian legislation and practice are not always totally consistent in every detail with the international obligations we undertook by adhering to the covenants. But they recognized that the covenants provide a standard against which Canadian performance can be measured to identify where improvements should be made. The Canadian adherence to the Optional Protocol has extended to individual Canadians the right to take their complaints to the United Nations Human Rights Committee when domestic legal remedies have been exhausted.

The thirtieth anniversary is being recognized across Canada by the provinces, by church groups and by non-governmental organizations. Among many other significant events, the Canadian Human Rights Foundation has conducted seminars and conferences across the country on the nature of Canadian obligations arising from our international commitments. On December 9 and 10, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, in co-operation with the Departments of the Secretary of State and of External Affairs, will hold a conference at which national organizations concerned with human rights will review progress in Canada since the Universal Declaration was adopted.

The federal and provincial governments are now preparing reports for the United Nations on the implementation in Canada of the two human-rights covenants. When the reports are completed, they will be made public. They will provide Canadians with important information on the state of human rights in Canada.

We are commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, not only as a reflection of the past and present importance of that historic document but also as an opportunity for us, as Canadians, to move forward. In doing so, we renew our commitment to ensure that everyone, everywhere, will enjoy fully the fundamental rights and freedoms described in the Universal Declaration.