

Canada and the USSR are co-signatories of many international agreements governing human rights. By freely and willingly entering into these agreements, the Soviet Union has given us the standing to call them to account for their performance under these Agreements. It has taken a long time, but the USSR is now prepared to discuss with us its human rights record. Let me give you an example.

Last year, during my discussions in Moscow with the then Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, I raised the issue of human rights violations by the USSR. Mr. Gromyko's reply was as predictable as it was unsatisfactory -- that such representations were an unacceptable interference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union.

Last month, when I met in Ottawa with the current Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, I again raised this issue. This time, Mr. Shevardnadze did not refuse to discuss the matter. I gave him lists of Soviet citizens wishing to be reunited with their families in Canada. I also made special representations on behalf of Jews seeking emigration to Israel. Mr. Shevardnadze undertook to review the cases personally, and even answered questions from Canadian journalists on the human rights record of the Soviet Union at a news conference held at the Soviet Embassy.

This new approach by Soviet authorities would have been unheard of just a few years ago, and yet today it can be seen in many forums. At the Reykjavik meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev, both sides agreed publicly that the question of increased human contacts was a topic to be discussed along with arms control and defence matters. Much of the CSCE Follow-up meeting now underway in Vienna will be devoted to discussing human rights.

Indeed, last week in Vienna, Mr. Shevardnadze invited Canada and other CSCE countries to come to Moscow to discuss humanitarian cooperation. That was the latest step in a deliberate campaign to change the Soviet image on human rights. We should not dismiss this proposal out of hand. It requires a careful response from the West, designed to move Moscow from image to action.