

in other spheres, and thus we progress. Governments which lose too much of their sensitivity to the right of individuals and minorities may be replaced but the process is peaceful, and human rights are strengthened rather than diluted.

In many ways, our United Nations General Assembly provides us all with a concrete visible example of the wisdom of this perspective. In this committee, each member state, rich or poor, powerful or weak, new or old has one vote. We have the absolute freedom to express our point of view, to debate strongly and sometimes at length with each other. Sometimes we make decisions on the basis of majority votes but individual states remain free to dissent and to protect their individuality. For 39 years we have proceeded in this fashion, sometimes in nine or more fora simultaneously. Our evolution is so far bloodless, and yet we progress not as far or as fast as we sometimes think we should; not always in the direction that some of us would like to see; almost never with the feeling that we have solved a problem perfectly or even permanently. But we do go forward, we do change, and we do have reason to be thankful that this General Assembly does exist and that we are party to what it can teach us and to what it can do for the people we represent.

Setting human rights standards by further elaborating and defining rights in declarations and conventions has been an on-going task of the United Nations. This process of standard setting is now at a relatively mature stage. It is a process which demands time, expertise and sensitivity to a wide variety of cultures, legal systems and linguistic differences. Important work on the elaboration of standards is proceeding, notably work on a convention on the rights of the child and a declaration on the rights of minorities, to name only two. Also, important work has yet to begin on a draft declaration on the right and responsibility of individuals, groups and organs to promote and protect human rights. My government supports this work of developing human rights instruments which provide standards as well as a legal framework for the protection of human rights.

In the years ahead however, my government would like to see more of our energy turned toward solving the problems of the implementation of human rights standards and to the amelioration of the sufferings of the victims of human rights abuses. These problems can be approached in two ways: the one approach is thematic, considering types of human rights violations; the other is through consideration of situations in specific countries.

There have been significant developments in the past year in the thematic approach to human rights violations. Of note has been the recent debate on totalitarian ideologies. The United Nations began in the aftermath of the appalling extremes to which totalitarianism led and sadly it is not solely a phenomenon of the past. My delegation will continue to follow with great interest the deliberations of the United Nations on this issue.

The marked increase in declarations of states of siege and their extension for prolonged periods has attracted the attention of the United Nations. The suspension of civil and political liberties, often by fiat, is a matter of concern to my government and we look forward to the report on this issue which has been requested by the Commission on Human Rights.

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