

I welcome your invitation to speak to you about Canadian policy in South Africa. As you know, Prime Minister Mulroney and I pursue an activist foreign policy, trying to assert Canada's interests and our influence on issues ranging from trade, to the environment, to international debt. But we have given a particular priority to the fight against apartheid, and some Canadians wonder why. South Africa is, after all, half a world away. There are other systems which practise oppression. There are other countries which permit brutality. Why should Canada focus on South Africa? There are three main reasons.

First, apartheid is a singular abuse of human rights, in that it enshrines racial discrimination in its law and constitution. That is unique in the world and should be of particular concern to western democracies because the constitution that enshrines racism draws its legitimacy from its roots in western values. The Soviet Union does not pretend to be part of the West. Burundi does not claim to be part of the developed world. South Africa does, and should be judged by the standards to which it aspires.

Second, the violence which apartheid engenders could tear apart the whole of Southern Africa. The Eminent Persons Group of the Commonwealth warned that action is urgently required "to avert what could be the worst bloodbath since the Second World War". Each side has weapons. Each fears the other. Each is tempted by its own extremists. For each, apartheid is the central issue. If it is not ended peacefully, there will be, sooner or later, a catastrophe.

And finally, this is a catastrophe which Canada can help prevent, an injustice we can help correct. One of the frustrating realities of foreign policy is that many issues are beyond our influence. We can't stop hurricanes. We can't decree an end to disease. We can't order sovereign countries to respect their citizens. The challenge, for a practical foreign policy, is to identify the problems we can influence and then apply that influence constructively, creatively. More than a challenge, we believe that is the duty of a country like Canada, whose people enjoy a wealth and a freedom denied to most of humanity.