

In this framework of multilateral treaties, states have defined more and more precisely international standards of human rights which they have agreed to observe within their frontiers, and which they have undertaken to promote widely. States are now answerable to one another, and to the international and regional communities at large, for their conduct in this field. This is "truly revolutionary", indeed.

Obviously the "revolution" is not yet complete. While we can rejoice at the establishment of this international network of state obligations in human rights, we cannot take as much satisfaction from the means available to ensure that these obligations are met. To create more effective structures and procedures for implementation will be a long and difficult task in a world of states, each of which must be persuaded to yield still greater amounts of "sovereignty".

There are a number of ways in which protagonists of human rights can seek to achieve more effective and universal implementation of the agreed upon international standards. The first of these is by ensuring that new international conventions contain within themselves some adequate means for their enforcement. I think this will be done in the case of the Draft Convention on Torture, which has gone forward from this session of the Human Rights Commission for consideration at this fall's General Assembly. While final agreement is still to be obtained, Canada is giving its strongest support to the creation of an active committee under this convention, a committee which will not only consider national reports on the matter but will also have a mandate to investigate complaints received from various sources.

Secondly, more coverage can be obtained by improving the processes, particularly those of the Human Rights Commission, under which any member state of the United Nations, and not just those who have ratified the covenants and conventions, can be called to account on allegations of gross and persistent violations of international standards.

Thirdly, more states must be persuaded to join the international network of treaties and conventions, and thus expose themselves to the implementation procedures which exist. For example, at present, only 77 states, not quite half of the UN member states, have ratified the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Of these, only Canada and 30 others have ratified the Optional Protocol to that Covenant, giving individuals a right of appeal to an international panel, the Human Rights Committee. Since human rights problems, in their nature, involve disputes between the individual and his government, that individual's right of petition is crucial to the real defence of human rights. It is heartening that more states are joining in. Some have learned the hard way; Bolivia recently signed the Optional Protocol on its return to civilian government, and the new government of Argentina has legislation before its congress to permit ratification of both basic Covenants and the Optional Protocol. As usual the revolution is evolutionary!

At the United Nations, and in its bilateral relations with other states, Canada will have to continue to push the slow, incremental process of bringing more states into the network of treaty law, and in improving the means of bringing states to implement such laws.

This brings me to a second set of considerations, on the role of Canada in this area of human rights.