

Mr. Chairman,

One of the dominant political themes of the past year has been "reconciliation". Major conflicts are gradually being resolved. Some longstanding internal and international disputes are growing closer to settlement. Amid all of these hopeful signs there are opportunities for emphasizing the importance of greater respect for human rights, and the need for ensuring that respect for human rights will provide a sound foundation for longer-term national and international harmony. Nonetheless, we must not let more dynamic political situations blind us to glaring human rights inadequacies. The systematic denial of fundamental human rights in South Africa, an abhorrent situation on which we spoke at length under an earlier item some weeks ago, remains an affront to mankind.

The importance of reconciliation is nowhere more evident than in Central America, where a number of countries are in the midst of difficult transitions from unrepresentative, repressive regimes to administrations committed to the development and protection of human rights. Canada has welcomed this trend. In El Salvador the government of President Duarte rolled back significantly the level of violence and human rights violations from the early 1980s. It is of deep concern, therefore, that the protection of human rights in El Salvador over the last year has weakened, and that number of human rights abuses has increased markedly. This has been most clearly documented in the report of the Special Rapporteur, Prof. Pastor Ridruejo.

In Guatemala, while human rights violations have diminished significantly since the beginning of the decade, the level of political violence is still unacceptably high and may be worsening. The resurgence of death squads and disappearances is a matter of profound concern. The Esquipulas accord of last year, agreed to by all five Central American Presidents, was most historic; it sought not only peace but respect for human rights and democratic values. It is a commitment made by all of the leaders of Central America, and we urge them to honour this commitment to regional reconciliation with renewed vigour.

Reconciliation is also a central theme in progress towards a comprehensive peace between Iran and Iraq. And here the human rights dimension needs to be kept centrally in view. The Canadian government is deeply concerned by the overall treatment by the Iraqi authorities of the Kurdish minority in Iraq, and particularly by the reports of the use of chemical weapons against civilians. Canada repeatedly condemned the use of chemical weapons during the war between Iran and Iraq, and