

The role of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - and the relationship to Civil and Political Rights - has been a matter of considerable debate in the Commission. We need together to develop a clearer understanding on this question, especially as we prepare for the World Conference on Human Rights, where the relationship between human rights, democracy and development will be a key topic for consideration.

In our view, much of the misunderstanding surrounding this subject derives from the basic difference in the nature of the governmental obligations flowing from these two families of rights. In the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 2 establishes the unqualified obligation of all states parties "to respect and to ensure to all individuals ... The rights recognized" therein. This is essentially an obligation for government to refrain from arbitrarily or unduly curtailing the fundamental freedom of its citizens.

On the other hand, Article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the central importance of limited resources in that context: "each state party... Undertakes to take steps individually and through international assistance and cooperation,... To the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized" in that Covenant.

This distinction, also elaborated in Article 22 of the universal declaration, has important practical significance. But it does not imply any difference in the relative importance of these two sets of rights.

In this respect, Mr. Chairman, Canada adheres to a view reflected in many past resolutions of this Commission: as a party to both Human Rights Covenants since their entry into force in 1976, we have long considered the principles contained in these instruments fully compatible and fundamentally inter-related. We also joined in the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development in 1986 precisely because we saw that document as a reaffirmation of the responsibility of national governments, and the international community as a whole, to strive for the realization of all principles embodied in the International Bill of Human Rights.

This view is central not only to our approach to international human rights issues, but also to the underpinnings of Canadian society. Canadians are firmly attached to the fundamental rights entrenched in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is matched by an unequivocal commitment to national social, economic and cultural programs designed to ensure that each citizen, rich or poor, healthy or sick, young or old, can participate to the fullest extent possible in the political and civil life of Canada. As a result, such things as our national medicare system, the provision of financial assistance to poorer provinces to help them provide essential