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International Covenants on Human Rights

Text of Statement made in the Third Committee by
the Canadian Representative, Professor R. St. John
Macdonald, in explanation of vote on Item 62
(International Covenants on Human Rights), Monday,
December 12, 1966.

My delegation has explained its votes on a number of previous occasions. Our position is well-known, and it is unnecessary for me to repeat at this time that we have sought to go to the limits of consensus in the continuing efforts by the United Nations to promote international concern for human rights and international co-operation for their advancement. We have sought wherever possible to widen as well as to deepen the involvement and commitment of the world community in the human rights area; and in our collaborative search for modern measures of implementation, my delegation has attempted to steer a middle course that would avoid, on the one hand, the rather routine conservatism of pro forma reporting and conciliation, and, on the other hand, the overly optimistic systems of compulsion that are beyond our reach at this stage of international relations.

We were rather disappointed, of course, that the Third Committee did not find it possible to agree to the acceptance of stronger measures of implementation, measures which, in our opinion, would have strengthened and improved the texts, and would have represented a slightly more forward position than that which we were finally able to reach. We were also disappointed over the imprecision and ambiguities which were allowed to insinuate themselves into some of the substantive articles, as well as the confusions and overlaps that were permitted to develop between a number of parallel articles within each covenant and between the two covenants themselves. These and related difficulties of a substantive as well as a formal nature will make it necessary for my