

Mr. Chairman,

We are proud of the United Nations system for the progress that has been made in the more than forty years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

At the same time, we are deeply concerned about the gap between principle and practice, and the human rights violations that have persisted -- and in some cases, have intensified -- in various parts of the world.

At last year's Commission, Canada was deeply disappointed with the failure of the Commission to adopt a resolution condemning the human rights record in Iraq. Since August 2 of this year, the world has been made more aware than ever of the sorts of abuses Iraq routinely employs to intimidate those it seeks to control.

Mr. Chairman,

We all know -- and have known for years -- about the difficult human rights situation faced by the people of Iraq, and we have expressed our concern over the ongoing abuse of Iraq's own population -- be it through detention without trial or executions conducted without due legal process.

To these must be added the gross violations by Iraq of the rights of the citizens of Kuwait and third country nationals in Kuwait and Iraq since August 2. Those abuses against Kuwaitis have been further documented in a report prepared by Amnesty International and published in December. These documented abuses included arbitrary arrests and detentions; extrajudicial executions; torture; disappearances; refusal to allow international humanitarian agencies to do their work; denial of food and water to civilians; and the forced relocation and mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of innocent workers. I will not repeat the tragic picture, the Kuwaiti Vice Minister presented to this Commission last week.

Now we have seen further abuses in the form of the deployment of prisoners of war in Iraq to strategic sites and their public display for propaganda purposes. These and the conscription of trapped foreign workers into Iraq's armed forces and military industry are flagrant violations of the 1949 Geneva Conventions to which Iraq is a party.

The international community is now engaged in seeking implementation of Security Council resolutions respecting Kuwait. I would like to associate Canada with the strongest condemnation of violations of human rights by Iraqi authorities both civilian and military in their behaviour against human beings whether Iraqi nationals, Kuwaiti or third country nationals both in the territory of Iraq and that of occupied Kuwait. Such willful and defiant violations of human rights have struck each delegation that is concerned with the furtherance of the work of this Commission. I would like to take this opportunity to condemn forcefully an ominous declaration made in this room a few days ago by the Iraqi delegate when he suggested that violations of human rights in Kuwait were basically not subject to criticism because Kuwait was in the hands of Iraqi troops. I submit that such flawed logic and lack of respect of human rights flies in the face of international law and practice. Such misconstrued concepts that would somehow justify violations of human rights anywhere in the world must be denounced vehemently.

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