

The resistance of so many States to international scrutiny is of profound concern to the Canadian Government. It raises directly the question as to how best to ensure that the human rights set down in so many documents are in fact put into practice. How can States be persuaded to comply with international human rights standards?

Over the last four decades, the international community has established a significant collection of human rights standards and an impressive array of protection mechanisms. These developments are very important. International instruments are crucial because they provide a benchmark, against which performance can be measured. Canada has always played an active role in standard-setting exercises and will continue to do so.

The time has come to move beyond standard-setting exercises and examine ways in which existing human rights instruments can be fully and effectively implemented. This concern has both short-term and long-term aspects. We want to be able to respond rapidly and effectively when faced by flagrant violations of human rights. In the longer-term, we wish to persuade more States to act in accordance with international human rights standards.

In Central America, for example, many countries have subscribed to various international human rights instruments. But such a step in itself has not protected people from human rights abuses. In organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States, Canada help improve the situation in those countries. In the last session of the General Assembly, Canada co-sponsored a resolution dealing with human rights in El Salvador, and the Canadian delegation will be dealing with this situation at the Commission as well.

Canadian delegations have taken the lead in putting forward resolutions aimed at effective implementation of human rights instruments. Canada has also taken the initiative in establishing and strengthening mechanisms to deal on an urgent basis with human rights abuses which may result in mass exoduses. We have supported UN efforts to publicize human rights standards globally and recognize the important role of non-governmental organizations. We have also strongly supported the UN Voluntary Fund for Advisory Services; we view advisory services as a key instrument in persuading States to improve their human rights performance. In this area, cooperation between governments and non-governmental organizations is critical.

Canada has taken concrete action in multilateral fora to put our belief in the importance of human rights into action. At the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Canada won support for a human rights initiative dealing with Commonwealth States. Similarly, we have supported human rights action with La Francophonie.

Our action at the multilateral level is a reflection of Canadian determination to put into practice the Canadian Government's affirmation that the international promotion of human rights is "an integral part of Canadian foreign policy". The Department of External Affairs and the Canadian Foreign Service have been assigned the task of implementing Canadian policy in this area and have taken steps to do so.