

In another part of the world, Canada congratulates both the High Commissioner and the Government of Colombia on their progress in establishing a UN human rights office in Bogota. But we do want to see practical steps urgently implemented to meet the challenge of protecting human rights in a very difficult environment.

Mr. Chairman, the pursuit of dialogue and engagement in support of human rights must be sustained by this Commission in all circumstances -- even in the face of refusal by some governments to respond in kind.

Frank, forthright discussion of specific situations and problems is not an alternative to dialogue. It is, rather, an essential element of the process -- especially in cases where governments deny the existence of problems, or challenge the Commission's authority to consider them.

Therefore Mr. Chairman, when the Commission takes up its debate on human rights situations in all parts of the world, Canada will participate actively. We will, in a frank, constructive manner, express our views on a range of situations in specific countries. Situations like that in Nigeria - whose government Canada has sought, with disappointing results, to engage in serious human rights dialogue through bilateral and multilateral channels.

And situations like that in China with whom we have discussed human rights in a constructive bilateral dialogue on the basis of mutual respect. We will urge all governments to engage in similarly constructive dialogues with this Commission.

I hasten to add Mr. Chairman, the Canadian delegation will - as in the past - be more than prepared to hear out and respond constructively to concerns that others, governments and NGOs alike, may wish to express about human rights problems in Canada. For there is no country represented in this room that does not have human rights problems -- and this Commission is the place to discuss them.

As I have said, the review of specific situations is a matter of obligation -- obligation under our Charter, but above all obligation to victims of human rights violations wherever they may occur. We would do well in this connection to recall the eloquent words of Mrs. Olusegun Obasanjo in receiving the Indira Gandhi International Prize on behalf of her husband last November: in the face of injustice to individuals anywhere, we must not become "quiet and seemingly acquiescent to realpolitik."

It is a matter of obligation, also, to the countless individuals, many of them members of non-governmental and other organizations who daily place their own rights on the line to defend those victims.

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