

On this day, twenty-five years ago, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations". In voting for adoption of the declaration, Canada made a moral commitment to integrate into the Canadian judicial system any of these rights not already recognized therein.

Since that day both the federal and provincial governments have taken many concrete steps to honour this commitment. Parliament has adopted a Canadian Bill of Rights; the Secretary of State Department now administers a programme for the protection of citizens' rights and freedoms; and a number of measures have been implemented in an effort to eliminate hate propaganda and any discriminatory employment practices. Nearly all the provincial governments have agencies for the preservation of human rights, and several have appointed ombudsmen.

Since its adoption, the declaration has served as a basis for a number of United Nations' agreements dealing with human rights. Canada, as you no doubt know, has ratified a number of these agreements. Among them are the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and the Convention on the Abolition of Forced Labour, to name only a few.

These conventions are mentioned here not because we believe that Canada has done all it can in this area, but to underline the efforts on the part of Canada's governments to eliminate as far as possible all risk of offences to human dignity.

It is true that Canada has not yet ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This we recognize, but we must point out that the subject matter of these covenants falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces as well as that of the federal government. For this reason the federal authorities have considered it advisable to consult the provinces before acceding to them. It has been said time and again that the covenants are standards of achievement to which all nations should tend. In this context, and even though our country has not yet ratified these instruments; we can be justly proud of our accomplishments in the protection and advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The United Nations General Assembly is meeting today to celebrate this twenty-fifth anniversary appropriately and to launch a Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. Canada shares the objectives of this decade, as its representative to the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly stated recently.

Although Canada has been fortunate not to have experienced racial strife, our society is not totally free of discrimination. We hope that that which does exist will be eliminated through education, and that all Canadians will come to respect the dignity of the human person. Let us henceforth adopt this as our goal for the coming decade. The Canadian Government will work towards this end with all means at its disposal, and would hope to enlist in this task the co-operation of all Canadians.