

Vancouver's role as an important international city is emphasized by not one but two significant international meetings -- the North Pacific Co-operative Security Dialogue at which I spoke last night, and the International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy.

I would like to congratulate you on this initiative, and also welcome the many distinguished individuals who have come to Canada, to Vancouver, to discuss a subject that has major implications for the concept and conduct of international law.

The idea of an international criminal court is not new. There have been war crimes trials dating back to the Middle Ages, when military leaders who allowed their soldiers to commit inhumane acts against innocent civilians were tried for violating the "laws of God and man." Early in this century, the League of Nations called for the creation of an international criminal tribunal to make terrorists accountable for their criminal acts.

The horrors of World War II prompted the establishment of the Nuremberg and Tokyo military tribunals to prosecute those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

As a member of the Tokyo Tribunal observed: "War is and always has been a crime in the eyes of reason and universal conscience, expressions of natural law upon which an international Tribunal can and must be based."

The Nuremberg tribunals created a landmark in international law by firmly establishing an important principle -- that there are some acts that so grossly violate the norms of behaviour accepted by the international community, that international law imposes individual criminal liability on their perpetrators.

Four decades have passed since the Nuremberg Tribunals were dissolved. During that period, some took a stab at the establishment of a permanent international criminal court continued within the United Nations. Sadly, the international community ran into a wall of defeatism and a lack of political will, to agree on the creation of an international tribunal to bring to justice those guilty of violating fundamental norms of international law.

Over the past two years, however, events in the former Yugoslavia have shocked the international community out of its lethargy. Evidence of atrocities is too graphic to ignore any longer. We have all seen the heart-rending reports of those who have seen the bullets, the detention camps and the mass graves, or experienced the systematic rape and torture.

Canada is dedicated to a resolution in the former Yugoslavia, through peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, monitoring missions and all those other things we do as well as we can in