

Routine Proceedings

Why have we not raised our objections to this and other issues? What about the disturbing increase in human rights violations in Guatemala or in East Timor? What do we hear these days from our government about China, or about the events in Ethiopia? The government waits far too long and allows Canada's great record to fall behind as events unfold.

The 1987 report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade entitled *For Whose Benefit?* states:

Canada's performance on international human rights to date has been criticized as episodic and primarily reactive.

This government has obviously chosen not to pay attention to this observation. I would like to ask why we are not more consistently outspoken against human rights abuses, when members of this House, including members of all parties, feel very strongly about this.

This human rights declaration is not just a statement. By being a signatory, Canada has accepted to demonstrate a commitment to human rights around the world and at home.

We do not want to try to impose our beliefs, our values and our institutions on other countries, but Canada has an obligation to assist other nations in recognising the value of a free and democratic society where individual rights and freedoms are fully respected and protected.

Clearly, that is what people want; and, clearly, it is not what we are hearing enough about from this government. We are witnessing this almost daily with the dramatic changes taking place in the eastern bloc. As we watch changes take place both within the Soviet Union and in eastern European countries the silence of our government on human rights issues has been one that most Canadians cannot understand or accept. Canada can and should be confident in stating our views to other nations when it comes to human rights abuses.

I would also like to say that this party joined with the other two parties of the House in forming a new subcommittee of the Human Rights Committee on international human rights. As participants on this committee we plan to set out a research agenda and bring in witnesses from the various interest groups around this country who want to hear Canada speak out more consistently on human rights. Through the work of this subcommittee we hope that the government will begin to understand the tradition that this House has held in areas of human rights and begin to speak out on our

behalf. We look forward to working with other members of the House to present this case to the government.

Unfortunately, our own government and this country cannot claim total innocence in the violation of human rights. Our own Canadian Human Rights Commission clearly pointed out our negligence when dealing with people facing poverty, homelessness, undernourishment, child and spouse abuse, racial discrimination and, of course, the tragic situation facing our native people.

As a member of Parliament from Manitoba, I can tell you that issue is uppermost in the minds of people from my province, as the aboriginal commission on the state of the justice community in dealing with native rights has come to an end. We await the report. We do hope the government will respond as quickly as possible.

• (1020)

It is also incomprehensible as to why this government has not acted more rapidly in developing a children's bill of rights within this country, and why Canada has not yet signed the UN declaration against torture, and why Canada has chosen not to ensure automatic refugee status to those escaping repressive regimes.

This Universal Declaration of Human Rights has tried to provide a guideline for all nations to respect the rights of all persons. We truly support the objective of this declaration. But to support it is not enough. It is only through the actions of our government that we can ensure equal treatment for all people.

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—St. Clair): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have been delegated by my party on behalf of my leader to join with hon. members on all sides in the observation of the forty-first anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is particularly noteworthy that I should do so when my party has given substance to the dream that men and women equally should aspire to equal political participation. In Canada, on this day, we are encouraged to express the broader hope foreseen in the UN declaration and that in this country every citizen, regardless of colour, race, language, religion and disability will some