

*Human Rights*

Rights. I wonder if it could be agreed that that statement and the responses be made now rather than at some indefinite time down the way. My understanding is that there is a speaker from each party ready to respond to a statement that is to be made by the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen). It seems to me, in view of the importance of the question of recognizing the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, that we might do that now in an orderly fashion.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) raises a useful point of order. Without anticipating great difficulties we may be able to take routine proceedings through entirely, including, of course, statements by ministers, and conclude routine proceedings but before taking the order of the day for debate, we return to the procedural matters which were just raised. We could try that, but if it is too lengthy it would be unfair to other members.

I understand the statement and responses on the other matter will be brief. We might proceed to take routine proceedings through to their conclusion and, before going to orders of the day, return to these procedural questions. Is that agreed?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

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**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[*English*]

**DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**
**THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

**Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, the interparliamentary union at its sixty-fourth interparliamentary conference made a useful suggestion in one of its resolutions that each national parliament commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a result of recommendations made by the executive of the interparliamentary union in the House of Commons, it is my responsibility to make a statement on behalf of the Government of Canada.

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Sunday is the thirtieth anniversary of that event. It should be used in Canada and all parts of the world as an occasion to review the progress, or the lack of progress, that has been made in these three decades toward guaranteeing human rights. More significantly, it must be used as an opportunity to identify what more can be done, both internationally and in Canada, to ensure that the rights and freedoms enunciated in the Universal Declaration are effectively enjoyed by all people.

The agreement 30 years ago on the principles of the Universal Declaration was a remarkable achievement by the interna-

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

tional community, given the wide variations in political and social systems throughout the world. One of the people directly involved in that success was Dr. John P. Humphrey, a Canadian. In his former role as the Director of the United Nations Human Rights Division he oversaw the drafting of the declaration. He is to speak on behalf of Canada at a special commemorative meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on December 11. The principles of the declaration have been elaborated and defined in more than 20 international agreements. However, we are all painfully aware that the existence of these agreements has not created a world in which human rights are respected. In many countries there are gross violations of even the most basic human rights.

The member states of the United Nations have not given it the power to oblige governments to respect human rights. But it is a forum where world opinion can and should be focused on those governments which persistently abuse the rights of their citizens. Canada and certainly the Canadian House of Commons, are firmly committed to efforts to improve the performance of the United Nations in the human rights field.

In Canada we have made considerable progress in the past 30 years. That progress has been influenced by the international obligations we have assumed. Every province has adopted human rights legislation and has established a provincial human rights commission to consider complaints from individuals. The federal government has adopted important human rights legislation and has established the Canadian Human Rights Commission. The distinguished former member for Fundy-Royal, Mr. Gordon Fairweather, has taken on the key position of Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

In 1976 Canada became a party to the most important human rights conventions, the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol. The federal and provincial governments are aware that Canadian legislation and practice are not always totally consistent in every detail with the international obligations we undertook by adhering to the covenants. But they recognized that the covenants provide a standard against which Canadian performance can be measured to identify where improvements should be made.

The thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights is being recognized across Canada by the provinces, by church groups and by non-governmental organizations. Among many other significant events, the Canadian Human Rights Foundation has conducted seminars and conferences across the country on the nature of Canadian obligations arising from our international commitments. On December 9 and 10 the Canadian Human Rights Commission, in co-operation with the Departments of the Secretary of State and of External Affairs, will hold a conference at which national organizations concerned with human rights will review progress in Canada since the Universal Declaration was adopted.

The federal and provincial governments are now preparing reports for the United Nations on the implementation in Canada of the two human rights covenants. When the reports