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CANADA SIGNS TWO PROTOCOLS TO THE
GENEVA CONVENTIONS ON THE PROTECTION OF
VICTIMS OF ARMED CONFLICT

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The Department of External Affairs announced today that the Canadian Ambassador to Switzerland signed on behalf of Canada two Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to the protection of victims of armed conflict. The Protocols were opened for signature today. These Protocols were adopted by a Diplomatic Conference convened as a result of an initiative of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Conference held four sessions in Geneva from 1974 to 1977 and the Canadian Delegation to the Conference played an active role in the negotiation of both Protocols.

Protocol I deals with the protection of victims of international armed conflict. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 afford protection to sick and wounded members of the armed forces, to prisoners of war and to the civilian population. This protection has been significantly extended by the first Protocol; for example, it includes articles on protection of non-defended localities, of the environment and of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population (food and water supplies). There are also special provisions on reunion of families, protection of journalists and measures in favour of women and children.

Protocol II applies to victims of internal conflict (civil war), a domain hitherto unregulated by international law. For the first time, international law has established standards for the treatment of victims of internal conflict. Such protection had previously been available only in situations of traditional types of war between states.

By signing the Protocols, Canada associates itself with a major development of international humanitarian law. The Government welcomes these instruments as concrete steps on the part of the international community to extend the protection of human rights and to ameliorate the condition of those who suffer the destructive consequences of conflicts between and within nations.