

been abandoned because of brigands and thugs who make armed right the dominant right.

I wholeheartedly applauded the initiative this week of the UN Secretary-General to ease the tragic suffering of these people. This one, unfortunately, I fear may be closer to the beginning than the end.

I mention these current conflicts, where the Canadian government is playing a leading role, to illustrate two points: first, the progress to pluralistic democracy is not without its barriers and costs; and, second, when violence does break out, human rights are the first to fall before the law of the bullet.

I have alluded to this week's killing fields. They are, sadly, not the only ones. We must not only focus on these, but also find creative solutions to other conflicts as they arise.

Building Beyond Conflict Resolution

But we also must look beyond conflict resolution. That means helping to build the cultures of democracy and the protection of human rights so that conflicts are prevented in the first place.

We must address and right blatant wrongs -- as we have for the blacks of South Africa, the Jews of the Soviet Union or the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic's signatories of Charter 77. And we must build these rights within the comprehensive frameworks that, at long last, can give our declarations and laws more universal meaning.

The Need for Frameworks

It has been 42 years since McGill's John Humphrey, along with René Cassin and Eleanor Roosevelt, developed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, with specific conventions, makes up the International Bill of Rights. These instruments provide standards for human values that transcend political borders and invite people to unite around the most basic principles of individual freedom, justice and human dignity.

In World War II, millions of people perished in defence of these principles, only to see hundreds of millions more subjected to tyrannies that made a mockery of their sacrifices.

In the Helsinki Final Act, in 1975, there was a further attempt in Europe to empower brave individuals to challenge the state, to claim rights for themselves and their societies. Again, there were few immediate results. There was still a need to elaborate a set of intergovernmental commitments to universal political concepts.