

We in Canada have been gratified by the closer links being forged between the Commonwealth Secretariat and l'Agence de cooperation culturelle et technique. As you will appreciate, we in this country see both organizations as important channels for giving expression to our dual heritage internationally.

I also wish to take the opportunity to mention the important role played in Commonwealth affairs by a vast number of non-governmental organizations which range from the Commonwealth Foundation to this Association. These are the grass roots of the Commonwealth. These various organizations encourage people-to-people dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect which fosters a sense of inter-dependence and common purpose. Involving people at all levels, they bring mutual benefits to our community as a whole. They are multi-dimensional in character, innovative, flexible and supplement governmental undertakings. Giving as they do a human dimension to the Commonwealth, they are deserving of our support and encouragement.

I now turn briefly to another topic of capital interest to the Commonwealth and that is the question of human rights. All of us in the Commonwealth share in the heritage of British Parliamentary democracy and the rule of law. Respect for the rule of law must be guarded as a cardinal precept for us all. Unfortunately, this precept has not always prevailed and political freedom has on occasion been replaced by arbitrary treatment of citizens or political expediency. But these should be rejected by us all in favour of respect for the rule of an impartial law. We as parliamentarians have a grave responsibility to those we represent to ensure that the most profound respect is given to this principle. The arbitrary loss of freedom by one individual remains a threat to the freedom of all.

The Commonwealth must stand for the political and civil rights of the subject. We might recall that it was our resolute rejection of apartheid which forced South Africa to leave the Commonwealth many years ago. Obviously we in the Commonwealth community are all equal nations and we have a long tradition of non-interference in one another's affairs. However, we cannot take refuge behind this principle when blatant oppression appears within our membership. The current situation in Uganda causes us grave concern and distress in this regard. Commonwealth Heads of Government took a forthright line on this question in London; we as parliamentarians can do no less.

While we cannot expect perhaps to achieve perfection in human rights, the Commonwealth must set an example for the world. And our commitment must be universal. We cannot vigorously demand respect for equality and basic rights in one area or state, for example, in southern Africa, unless we demand and apply the same standards everywhere. Our concern cannot be selective in terms