



Statements and Speeches

No. 77/5

HUMAN RIGHTS ONE OF THE MOST COMPLEX FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES

An Address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Don Jamieson, to a Seminar Sponsored by the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops, Ottawa, March 16, 1977

* * * *

Canada has already established a reasonably good record in international human-rights-oriented activities over the years.

Unfortunately it seems that, in this struggle, while there have indeed been developments that are encouraging (no major wars for over 30 years, a measurable improvement in international awareness of the interdependence of the world community, a heartening increase in developmental-assistance flows from richer to poorer nations, an apparent increase in the enjoyment of personal liberties even within the restrictive regimes of Eastern Europe), nevertheless there still exist too many gross violations of human rights in many countries, violations that are naturally a cause of concern to Canadians and that all of us would like to be able to rectify or at least ameliorate in one fashion or another. How Canada should react to such situations, what considerations should guide us, what constraints affect us will be the theme of my talk this evening.

I should like to stress at the outset that there is a fundamental difference, which it seems is not always readily appreciated, between our domestic activities in the human-rights field and the action that Canada can take internationally. The difference between the domestic and international spheres of action is twofold: the first is the problem of *standards*; the second is the question of enforcement *machinery*.

We in countries of Western traditions too frequently assume that those standards of conduct and behaviour towards our fellow man are perceived as having equal validity by other governments. But the perspective of other countries is, in fact, often different, partly because they may not be Western or democratic in background, or partly because their economic situations are vastly different from ours. Western democracies traditionally accord priority to civil and political rights, while Third World countries often place their pressing economic needs ahead of human-rights issues. It may seem callous or insensitive to Canadians, but we are told regularly
