

Mr. Chairman,

Under Item 12 of the agenda States have an opportunity to review the human rights situations of the world. This reflects the fact that each State has a responsibility for the protection of human rights in its territory and that all States have a responsibility to work for the protection of human rights throughout the world.

The up-and-down nature of the struggle for human rights only re-emphasizes the importance of sustaining the work that is done here at the Commission. It demonstrates that the international instruments which are the foundation of the UN human rights system must be more than just words on pieces of paper, they must apply to real situations and real people, and can only effect true change if they are put into practice.

This is one of the reasons why Canada is so committed to the Commission and the UN human rights process as a whole. We realize this process can sometimes seem slow and somewhat frustrating, but we also know that what we are all doing here in Geneva can have a real impact.

When we talk about the draft declaration on the right to promote and defend human rights, for example, we are not talking about a theoretical situation. Rather, we are responding to the hundreds, if not thousands, of human rights defenders who are imprisoned, tortured or executed merely because they have spoken out for the rights of their fellow citizens; or, as in the case of occupied Kuwait, befriended a foreigner notwithstanding the threat of capital punishment.

Human rights defenders are the practical tools, the human conscience of this Commission. They are the real propagators of the principles embodied in the human rights instruments and they deserve recognition and protection above all.

The same goes for Canada's determination to enhance respect for the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Religious Intolerance: we have seen in many parts of the world the devastating human impact of the persecution of religious minorities, which is clearly unacceptable by all human rights standards.

Similarly, when we promote the Convention on the Rights of the child, which Canada expects to ratify in the near future, we are talking about something that is so close to all of us: the future generations in whose hands the very survival of our planet will be placed.

The fact that the work of the Commission can have such a direct impact on real-life situations is also why the Canadian delegation continues to advocate strengthened resources for human rights treaty bodies, the Centre for Human Rights, and the Advisory Services Program. Without these mechanisms for implementing the decisions we make here at the Commission, our work would be rendered virtually meaningless.

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