

For years, a large part of the work of this Commission focussed on human rights behind the Iron Curtain. More recently, in some of those countries that situation had been improving steadily. Now, suddenly, the focus is not simply upon the human rights abuses of oppressive regimes; the regimes themselves have been changed. Human rights performance and frameworks are being re-evaluated at the level of official policy and practice. All of us interested in freedom must help these new governments establish the stability and the standards that will make respect for human rights automatic. That may prove a greater challenge than bringing down the walls of attitude and tyranny, whose fall ended the decade so dramatically.

Many factors contributed to those dramatic exchanges in Eastern Europe. Certainly one of those factors was the abiding, even aggressive, interest of Canadians in international human rights. We celebrate those changes for the freedom and opportunity they bring to Europe; but they also demonstrate the worth of the work of the people at organizations in this room.

Those historic changes make that work more relevant, more urgent, because they demonstrate both the impact of oppressive regimes on individual human rights and, more importantly, the power of people who assert their basic rights against oppressive regimes. Nowhere, now, can any regime claim credibly that respect for human rights is an alien concept or an impossible luxury. The message from Eastern Europe is that those rationales no longer wash. That reality should help us in our continuing work.

More than many other parts of foreign policy, success in the field of human rights is intensely personal. You would all share my satisfaction in the success of Canada's efforts on behalf of Dimitri Mazilu, a Romanian UN official prevented by the previous Government in that country from leaving Romania and continuing his UN responsibilities. He is now the new Vice-President of Romania, and has eloquently thanked Canada for our support during his ordeal.

These consultations are the first held since Canada resumed our full membership on the Commission. As an observer, we had played an active role, but full membership, obviously, lets us do more. Canada co-sponsored 30 of the 75 resolutions adopted at the 45th session and we intend to be equally active this year.

Canada welcomes the fact that the countries of Eastern Europe, including the USSR, are becoming increasingly active and interested in human rights issues in multilateral fora. At last year's Commission session, Hungary took the unprecedented step of co-sponsoring a Resolution critical of Romania, a Warsaw Pact ally. We expect that this year's session will reflect significant changes in the way that various Eastern European States approach human rights issues in general.

New positions by East Bloc States may offset the increasing resort to "bloc voting" to prevent examinations of the human rights records of particular countries. Increasingly the issue of whether the human rights records of specific countries should be examined is not determined on merit but by the ability to muster support on the basis of regional solidarity and invocation of opposition to foreign intervention in internal affairs of States.