



Visit to the
U.S.S.R.
by Prime Minister
Brian Mulroney

November 20-25, 1989

La visite du
Premier ministre
Brian Mulroney en
URSS

du 20 au 25 novembre 1989

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE U.S.S.R.

The human rights situation in the U.S.S.R. has improved considerably in recent times. Prominent dissidents and political prisoners have been released from detention and many have been allowed to emigrate. An overall review of the Soviet penal code is under way as part of an evolution towards a law-based society.

In political fora, in the media, on the streets and in the republics there is a degree of openness and self-criticism in public debate unheard of up to now. The very fundamentals of the system are being openly called into question, in many cases by representatives to the Congress of People's Deputies.

Unofficial groups not connected with the Communist Party are permitted. Public demonstrations against Soviet policies have essentially been tolerated, notably when these have been in support of greater cultural and linguistic autonomy for the various nationalities.

Emigration thresholds, particularly for Soviet Jews, have increased greatly in recent years. A new law on emigration has been submitted to the Supreme Soviet; it should relax to a maximum of five years the secrecy restrictions which impede emigration. Finally, there are currently no remaining family reunification cases pending between Canada and the U.S.S.R.

Several negative trends do persist, however. There are unconfirmed reports that some dissidents may be in prisons; and some may also remain in internal exile or in psychiatric hospitals. Harassment of some dissidents continues. In addition, religious faithful who attempt to worship outside officially sponsored organizations are harassed.

