

Routine Proceedings

[English]

Millions of people in the world live under regimes which continue to deny their citizens the rights and freedoms most Canadians take for granted.

Countless countries around the world still practice torture. Thousands die annually at the hands of death squads. Thousands more simply disappear. And if this is a year which we will remember by the end of the Berlin wall, it is also a year we will remember by what happened in Tiananmen Square.

It is so important therefore that we observe December 10, Human Rights Day, not only for the progress that has been achieved this remarkable year, but also for the distance we must yet travel.

[Translation]

I hope that as Canadians, we will use that day to think seriously about these basic principles of freedom and justice and to ask ourselves what each of us can do to promote them.

[English]

Many Canadians have made and continue to make exemplary and inspiring contributions to the fight for human rights around the world. But I would ask that we think about the work yet to be done to secure those rights here in our own country as well.

[Translation]

Our Constitution, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, our laws and democratic institutions all show a deep national commitment to the principles of equality and justice.

Nevertheless, prejudice and discrimination still exist in many parts of our society. Whether they are based on colour, race, religion, language or any other difference between Canadians, they are an affront to the dignity and freedom of every one of us.

[English]

With this so important anniversary clearly in mind, I therefore call upon Canadians to share in accepting the responsibilities of citizenship as readily as we accept its privileges, and that we join together to eliminate discrimination and prejudice which continue to deny equal rights to many in our society.

Canada has long stood as a symbol of freedom and liberty to many of the world's peoples. By working to ensure the full participation of all Canadians in the life of our fortunate country, we will continue to do honour to that tradition and to that obligation. No less, we will confirm the inherent dignity, the equal and inalienable rights which must be the common inheritance of every Canadian, as instead they must be of all mankind.

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I too am honoured on behalf of members of the Official Opposition to recognize the occasion of the forty-first anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration entitles everyone to equal treatment without distinction based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Canada, of course, fully endorses this and has, in fact, used this declaration as a basis for our own Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as brought in by this party in the early 1980s.

It is unfortunate though that Canada has not played a more substantive role in promoting these goals internationally. We have the ability and the international credibility among the world community to encourage human rights developments, but Canada's approach has been inconsistent. Wherever we go to attend meetings, Canada is the first country to say, as the Prime Minister leaves, that we are in favour of human rights and that we will raise human rights issues.

When we went to the Commonwealth, the government said it was going to raise human rights concerns. When it came back, it said nothing. When this government joined the Organization of American States, it said that one of its priorities was human rights, but it came back and said nothing.

We could be playing a major role in the struggle in El Salvador. If we are going to be using the Organization of American States properly, this is an opportunity for us to state what the protection of human rights really means in a troubled country. We have been silent on that issue. We have not used the Organization of American States. We have not used our own goodwill in a troubled part of the world. I use this as an example only because it is the most current example of the problems that we face in trying to persuade the government to use Canada's goodwill in international forums to promote the human rights that we value so dearly.