

monitor the compliance of member states with their legal and moral obligations, the gap between the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the practice of states has widened noticeably. It is regrettable that only one-third of the total membership of the United Nations has ratified the major human-rights covenants, and that even fewer states have accepted the Optional Protocol. The various monitoring and reporting procedures are too slow and cumbersome to be truly effective, and offer little tangible assistance to victims of violations.

More progress can and must be made in those areas where abuses are flagrant and persistent. We should direct our efforts towards finding a means of monitoring compliance with the declaration against torture passed by the General Assembly in 1975. We should improve the procedures for screening complaints and for acting on those that reflect serious abuse. We should consider better procedures for co-ordination of all UN activity in defence of human rights.

We recognize that the Charter of the United Nations obliges member states to respect the sovereignty of others. But it is surely consistent with acceptance of the principle of non-interference to urge more complete and universal recognition of other freely-assumed obligations – the promotion and encouragement of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

The fact is that, on this as on all the other issues, I have mentioned the performance of the United Nations and of all of its member states is being examined more closely and critically than ever before, for the sound and obvious reason that the stakes are higher than ever before.

I have spoken critically of some aspects of our past performance and present practices. I have done so not out of any desire to weaken this organization but because Canada is convinced that, without a marked change of attitude on the part of members and without the reforms that are so clearly necessary, the erosion of the effectiveness and prestige of the United Nations will continue.

We must dedicate ourselves to work for this organization as if our lives depended on it. In truth, they probably do.

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