

CANADA, SOUTHERN AFRICA, AND THE NINETIES

NOURISHING THE ROOTS OF DEMOCRACY

"Among the great political transitions of this decade, the crumbling of apartheid in South Africa ranks as one of the most stunning."¹

INTRODUCTION

Events in South Africa have triggered worldwide attention. There is a widespread belief that the country has passed through a watershed in its history. Apartheid opponents' hope is that recent reforms are irreversible, and that democracy in South Africa will be a crucial element in rejuvenation throughout the region. The Sub-Committee on Development and Human Rights is compelled by Canada's staunch support for the struggle against apartheid to assess the changing situation in South and Southern Africa to determine if this hope is well-founded.

This growing regional momentum is set against a backdrop of pivotal changes on the international scene. The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a climate of hope in many parts of the world. Democracy is enjoying an inspiring resurgence of popularity, but it also faces a multitude of challenges.

Recent history has also witnessed an increased marginalization of Africa as a whole, and mounting problems on the continent, including cyclical famine and drought. Despite the unprecedented existence of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD) from 1986-1990, economic and social conditions actually worsened over the past five years. UN-PAAERD represented an agreement which required African countries to put structural adjustment programmes in place in return for increased financial assistance from wealthier nations, but this commitment to Africa was weakened by global recession and growing needs elsewhere. This precedent raises the question of whether at the very time meaningful change is possible in Southern Africa, the attention of the world community will turn toward other challenges to development and democracy.

Members of the Sub-Committee believe that this must not happen. The struggle against apartheid, Canada's major purpose in the region, is entering a new and hopefully constructive era, one which presents us with a unique opportunity to build on the promising regional momentum being released by apartheid's weakening. Whereas the focus of international attention over the past generation has been forcing the hand of constitutional reform in South

¹ Pauline Baker, "South Africa: Old Myths and New Realities," in *Current History*, (May 1991), p. 197.