

CANADIAN INTERVENTION

ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECOSOC

Mr. Chairman,

Under Item 12 we take stock of the situation of human rights throughout the world. It is the point at which we assess the institutional mechanisms established by this Organization to give effect to the principles of the Charter. It also provides an opportunity to examine, in critical fashion, the wide gap between the noble sentiments espoused by so many delegations, and the bleak reality of human rights in most parts of the globe.

Forty years of work by the UN has seen the construction of a solid foundation for the promotion of human rights. This work, to be sure, has been slow, incremental and sporadic. But it is well to compare the activities of working groups, special rapporteurs, special representatives and confidential procedures with what existed in 1946, because to do so, drives us to the inevitable conclusion that the United Nations has produced a virtual revolution in international law and practice. It has placed individuals and groups at the forefront of protective and promotional measures. It has rendered states accountable for their behaviour towards their own citizens. It has robbed even the most powerful countries of their traditional defences and excuses for obstructing international scrutiny.

Our confidence in the value of this collective work should not be confused with complacency. We are conscious of the frailty of some of our procedures and of the machinery for promoting human rights. We have recently seen that budgetary measures can have debilitating effects on already strained programs. Indeed, any additional reductions in the absurdly meagre support allocated to the human rights activities of the United Nations would have an even more deleterious impact. If I may be blunt: destruction of our carefully constructed mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights would further erode public support for this Organization in numerous members states. We cannot afford, and will not tolerate, a drift towards institutional paralysis in the human rights field.

Our concern for the promotion of human rights stems from obvious but fundamental considerations. Some can be traced to the tragedies of the Second World War and the atrocities which gave rise to the human rights provisions of the UN Charter; some are the products of more recent developments - - systematic violations of human rights which have destroyed economic and social progress in a number of developing countries, or the