

Indeed in Canada, we have considerable experience with the rights of minorities. By the standards of the day, a rather inflammatory situation was created when Protestant England took possession of a colony that was not only Catholic in religion, but French in language. That was also a time when the British colonies to the South were already restless, and any attempt to enforce radical change in Québec would not have been wise. Accommodation in matters of language and religion was essential.

I have made the point before that we Canadians, having started with such clear differences, had no alternative to tolerance. Of course, our history is full of evidence of goodwill and generosity of spirit, and those are genuine and valuable characteristics. But there was more than goodwill. The diverse nature of Canada forces us to respect and accommodate genuine differences.

Canada was founded as a confederation of strong provinces, giving full recognition to our right to be different from one another. As immigrants from many lands spread over our country, there was no real attempt to enforce assimilation. Indeed the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms has now given specific constitutional support to the preservation and enhancement of this multicultural heritage. That Charter also confirms and expands the language rights of Canadians in both official languages, and includes provisions for educational facilities for the language minority in affected provinces. In the Charter and elsewhere in the Constitution, recognition has also been given to the rights of Canada's aboriginal population.

Internationally, Canada has nothing to hide with respect to minority rights. We are one of only 34 states that have agreed to submit their record of performance under the U.N. Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to the test of petitions by individual citizens under the Optional Protocol to that Covenant. Acting on such a petition, the Human Rights Committee found that Canada was not living up to Article 27 of the Covenant, the single article in which minorities are explicitly mentioned. The issue concerned the discrimination in the Indian Act to which I have referred. We had already recognized this as a problem