

D. HUMAN RIGHTS

I. THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 11, 1978, Professor John P. Humphrey, O.C., Special Adviser to the Canadian Delegation, delivered a statement in Plenary of the General Assembly. He spoke about the adoption and evolution of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, having been Director of the Division of Human Rights in the UN Secretariat when the Declaration was adopted. Professor Humphrey also discussed the Declaration's impact on international law as well as the revolutionary aspect of the Declaration at its adoption and today. Finally he stressed the importance of the Declaration as an instrument to judge the conduct of states towards their citizens and to interpret human rights provisions of the UN Charter. Portions of Professor Humphrey's statement follow:

Thank you for giving me the floor. And may I also thank the Canadian Government for inviting me to be part of its delegation long enough for me to make this speech. I owe this privilege to the fact that I was a member of the Division of Human Rights in the Secretariat of this Organization when the Universal Declaration was adopted and to the further fact that I have survived these thirty years which is something for which I thank the genes I inherited from my ancestors. I may well be the only person in this hall who was also present in the Palais de Chaillot when this Assembly adopted the Declaration in the night of 10 December 1948.

The Universal Declaration has been an important, perhaps the most important factor, in the revolution in the nature of international law that has taken place since the Second World War. Whatever jus inter gentes may have been at the outbreak of the Second World War it is certainly no longer a legal order governing only the relations of states - witness the fact that this Organization, which is not a state, is now recognized as a person in international law. The changes in the scope and character of international law in the last three or four decades have been so fundamental that the name, international law, is no longer an appropriate description of a discipline which should now be called world law. There has never been a more profound revolution in the history of ideas than this revolution in the nature of traditional international law. The Declaration is also, whatever the intentions of its authors may have been, a revolutionary document in the sense that it provides succour and encouragement wherever and whenever individual men and women are fighting for their freedoms in the face of oppression. There is revolutionary dynamite in the Declaration; and there has probably been no social or political conflict anywhere since it was adopted in which it has not been invoked or played some role. It is in the Universal Declaration that for the first time the existence of certain economic and social rights are recognized and proclaimed, rights which because they are just as important, the Declaration puts on the same footing as the traditional civil and political rights, something which, in the context of 1948, was revolutionary indeed. That alone is enough to ensure for it a place in history.

Thirty years after its adoption, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights possesses a moral and political authority which is unequalled by