

As a practical matter, no part of foreign policy is more difficult than deciding when and how to react to human rights abuses. We can be proud of the fact that few countries have standards as high as our own, and fewer still are as consistent as Canada in respecting our own standards, including in our foreign policy. If we refused absolutely to deal with countries who do not meet all our high standards, we would not deal with many countries. Our trade would plunge, our development assistance dry up; our embassies close. We would become a nation of impeccable standards and no influence. The challenge becomes to decide whether Canada's presence, or Canada's absence, will do more to advance human rights in particular cases. Those judgments are always controversial.

Just last month, demonstrators criticized me for resuming limited Canadian aid to El Salvador, where abuses of rights continue. Ironically, that same week, the Special Representative of the United Nations Committee on Human Rights reported significant improvements in the human rights situation in that country.

Nowhere is the judgment of the appropriate balance in Canadian policy more difficult than in the question of our relations with the Soviet Union.

Soviet violations of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms are well known. Many of the rights and freedoms we take for granted in the West are limited, controlled, or even denied in the Soviet Union. Freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, the right to move about freely or to emigrate, if that is your wish -- all these and many more are either restricted or prohibited in the USSR. Many groups suffer under such a repressive system, but perhaps none so harshly as Soviet Jews.

The Soviet Union has long claimed that our repeated calls for an improvement in its human rights record are unacceptable interference in their internal affairs. If the Soviet Union fails to respect human rights, what is that to us? That question is worth answering.