

Statements by Ministers

that day, the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Written by René Cassin, a Frenchman who, with his family, personally suffered from Nazi tyranny and understood poignantly the importance of human rights, the Declaration became an ideal and an objective for all nations to seek to attain.

Since that time, Canada has in countless ways shown its desire to conform to those ideals. We have signed the International Human Rights Covenants. We have signed many United Nations special covenants. In fact, we have passed laws and set up human rights commissions across the country. We have proclaimed our opposition to racism and discrimination.

After a prolonged legislative battle in the House, we enshrined these rights in the Charter which now all political parties support and uphold. We are a nation of minorities and, for that reason, we know that human rights are important now to everyone because everyone belongs to a minority. We have not one, but two official languages, both of them equal.

By comparison with most other nations on earth, we have had a superb record of liberty and equality. For this reason we have not been inhibited from speaking out on behalf of oppressed individuals or groups in other countries. That is why it was fitting that we honoured, as the first person ever to become an honorary Canadian citizen, not a person who was great because of his brains, money, power or fame. Last year on this day we honoured Raoul Wallenberg because of his heroism in upholding human rights. That tells us where we have our hearts as Canadians. That is why we have begun to examine our past and try to atone for wrongs imposed on such minority communities in Canada as our native people, Japanese Canadians, those innocent people who have been executed by error, and those who have been persecuted because of their faith or origins.

We know that we have much for which to atone but we must also admit that there is still a long way to go. We must remind the Government that words do not heal the hurt of discrimination and poverty and lack of opportunity. Words will not do. We must remind the Government of its stalling and its lack of political will to root out systemic discrimination, of which the Government's so-called equality Bill is the most obvious cynical example.

Let this human rights day ring in the ears of the Secretary of State (Mr. Crombie), the Minister responsible for multiculturalism, the Ministers responsible for the status of women and youth, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. McKnight), the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) and the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Bouchard). In fact, let it ring in the ears of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and all members of his cabinet. This day should ring loudly in their ears as they are reminded of the inequality of access to jobs, to training, to post-secondary education for women, handicapped, native peoples, those who are minority groups.

• (1620)

We have a built-in systemic barrier because of the structural barriers to equality which this Government has skirted and evaded. The Government talks of reform by education rather than by law. It is counting on the goodwill of Canadians to do the right thing. That is the Government's alibi for inaction; it is going to count on Canadians to do the right thing. That is just the trouble. The Government has a hands-off approach to human rights rather than a hands-on approach. The reason injustice still exists is because the Government has relied on other people to do the right thing instead of doing the right thing itself.

As the Official Opposition, we pledge to support the Government in whatever measures it brings forward to give everyone in every region a sense of dignity. We will not support its failure to do this. We will also support Canada's efforts throughout the world when our country champions human rights in the face of oppression and tyranny. Canada has a responsibility to the world community of nations. We are proud of Canada's record, yet we realize we have a long way to go.

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join with my colleagues today as we recognize the thirty-eighth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations. In 1948 each and every delegate representing the nations of the world committed themselves to guaranteeing for their citizens all the basic rights and freedoms that centuries have taught us are fundamental to civilization, peace and progress for humankind.

Although progress has been made in achieving the goals set in 1948, most notably in the struggle for decolonization, it must nevertheless be recognized that the grandchildren of those who were the authors of that noble declaration have inherited a world which for many falls far short of the dream. I am talking about that mighty dream of Martin Luther King. It is a costly dream, dreamed until death in the Soviet Union by Anatoly Marchenko. It is a dream dearer than freedom itself for Nelson Mandela, and it is a dream that, to Mahatma Gandhi, represented the culmination of a love shared for all mankind, achievable only by the power of love.

It is not a part of that dream that 128 countries can still be characterized by Amnesty International as being involved in the systematic violation of human rights. It is not part of that dream that children would be imprisoned in South Africa for merely sharing it. It was not part of that dream that the people of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and the people of the Ukraine could dream that dream freely only on foreign shores, or that Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Lebanon, Angola and other third world nations should have their right to self-determination compromised by the national interests of others.

However proud we may be as Canadians in accepting the Nansen medal, the refugees arriving on our shores in such numbers are evidence of that unfulfilled dream. When Martin