

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your kind introduction. I am pleased to again have the opportunity to address this Assembly, at these annual consultations in preparation for the 45th session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

Our meeting takes on added importance for us in the sense that after a four-year absence, Canada will again this year sit on the Human Rights Commission. In previous years we have played an active part in the Commission's work in an observer capacity, and have promoted a number of initiatives, but this year we will be able to play a leading role. We can submit resolutions and exercise a greater influence during the informal consultations. We will attend closed-door sessions of the Commission, in which the human rights situation in a number of countries is discussed. Thus more than ever, Canada will be in a position to pursue its active commitment to human rights.

Allow me to take this opportunity to reaffirm the importance ascribed by my government to the international promotion of human rights. This key element of our foreign policy reflects the abiding interest of the Canadian people in the protection of human rights, and rests on deeply-rooted national convictions. When we are confronted with flagrant violations, our short-term goal internationally is to work toward rapidly improving the conditions of those who are deprived of the full enjoyment of their human rights. In the longer term, on both the bilateral and the multilateral levels, Canada strives to promote the acceptance of international human rights standards and to ensure that states act in accordance with these standards. We have an enviable reputation in this area, proof of the sustained effort we have put forth over the years to defend the cause of human rights.

Canada has played an active and often crucial part in writing, codifying and applying the principles set forth in the various international instruments on human rights. This role was highlighted a month ago when the United Nations honoured a Canadian, Professor John Humphrey of McGill University, by awarding him the Human