

Madam President, Mr. Secretary-General, ministers, delegates,

I am here today representing Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, and I am delighted to do so because the eyes of the world are upon this conference.

The world is at a critical historic juncture. The Cold War has ended. More open and democratic societies have emerged in many parts of the world. The prospects have improved for a major leap forward in observance of human rights.

At the same time, violations of human rights -- torture, disappearances, summary executions, racism, denial of freedom of expression, rape and discrimination against women -- all continue unabated.

There is, less than 500 kilometres from this conference hall, a tragedy raging out of control which serves as a powerful reminder of the horrors that can be unleashed when human rights are abandoned.

Yet the battle for universal human rights has ignited a spark in virtually every corner of the world. And we must fan that spark into a flame.

Our decisions can challenge parliaments and reach into small villages. And so we must seize this chance to build a "worldwide culture of human rights" that can be a stronger bulwark against abuses, more effective than any law or any sanction.

Decisions alone, however, are not enough. Concrete and practical measures resulting in early improvements in human rights are what we need to see emerging from this conference.

So, Madam President, the United Nations Charter calling for "universal respect for ... human rights for all" set in train one of the most noble enterprises in the history of humankind.

The subsequent adoption of the International Bill of Rights and other human rights instruments over the past 45 years is one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations. It has inspired real progress in respect for human rights in many countries.

The right of all governments and of the international community to address human rights violations, wherever they may occur, is today beyond challenge. And the days when governments could claim sovereignty to justify abuses of human rights, those days have drawn to a close.

#### **Reinforcing Commitment to Universality**

Here in Vienna we must reaffirm the principle that has guided the United Nations throughout its history -- the principle of the