

Helsinki Human Rights Day

awareness of the agreement and human rights issues, both at home and abroad.

Similar efforts are being undertaken in other western nations. I urge my colleagues to join with me in supporting these efforts through the passage of this motion.

With your assistance, much can be accomplished in the field of human rights. Without it, the future may be bleak for those freedom fighters in oppressed nations, who are relying on our support.

In accepting the Nobel Peace Prize last year, Elie Wiesel said:

We must always take sides, neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented... When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Whenever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion or political views, that place must, at that moment become the centre of the universe.

While this motion may seem a small step on a long road toward the universal rights and freedoms we seek for those who look to us for help, it is a symbol of our commitment to make that journey a reality.

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Madam Speaker, the idea of designating August 1, 1987 as Helsinki Human Rights Day as proposed by the Hon. Member for Parkdale—High Park (Mr. Witer) is a good one. He should be commended for coming forward with the idea and for the wording of the motion that he has put on the Order Paper for this debate today.

There is no doubt that the cause of human rights has been put forward in that fine document signed in 1975 by some 35 nations in Helsinki. The Hon. Member for Parkdale—High Park is, I am sure, familiar with that document in detail having participated at conferences where this agreement between East and West is regularly reviewed.

The Member for Parkdale—High Park probably knows that human rights is one of three baskets that are included in the accords. That is an important factor which must be kept in mind because I would submit to the Hon. Member for Parkdale—High Park that the cause of human rights within the Helsinki Agreement can best be pursued within the overall context of the agreement. As you know, Madam Speaker, 35 nations did get together in the mid-1970s with a feeling of optimism that there could be and there must be a rapprochement between East and West. The European nations added the United States and Canada to the 33 European signatories because they felt that the presence of two nations from North America, one of them being a superpower, was essential. So we did participate, and since 1985, Canada has held a very high profile in the promotion of human rights and in dealing at times also with specific cases of individuals. Today, the Hon. Member for Parkdale—High Park mentioned a list of names representing the present wave of cases that are on the agenda.

• (1250)

I would urge the Hon. Member for Parkdale—High Park, however, to look at the advancement that must be made in human rights as part of a broader approach that is contemplated by and implicit in the conference and the accords themselves. In those accords, there is a basket of issues dealing with disarmament. There is another basket of issues dealing with economic matters. Then there is the very important basket of social matters including human rights. One cannot make substantial progress on just one of these fronts. One must keep the pressure going and chip away at the totality of these fronts because mutual interests must be met.

The Conference on Co-operation and Security in Europe does not work on the basis of a voting process like this Chamber. It operates by consensus. Therefore, it is important that the Hon. Member who is advancing a list of names also participate with other parliamentarians in the proceedings of this conference by advancing other elements of the conference itself. These elements are disarmament, economic matters including the environment, and human rights.

No doubt progress can be made within the Conference on Security and Co-operation, and it has been made. That process has gone through very difficult times. In 1980 particularly, at the time of the invasion of Afghanistan, the conference came to a stalemate in Madrid for 18 months. Nevertheless, the spirit of Helsinki is basically a good one. That is what the Hon. Member is in essence endorsing. He is telling us that we should promote and advance the Helsinki spirit on August 1 by emphasizing Human Rights Day. We are with him all the way. However, it is important that the participation of parliamentarians be spread out on all fronts of that conference because it is a conference to which East and West come together with separate agendas and the two agendas must eventually be integrated.

For example, disarmament is very high on the agenda of eastern European countries. Elements of human rights are very high on the agenda of western nations including Canada. On the economic front, it is a mixed bag of different interests which not very often come together. Nevertheless, there is an awkward, difficult and sometimes not very focused convergence of interests. Therefore, the process must be refined and the role of parliamentarians, particularly through the Inter-parliamentary Union, is crucial.

I hope that the Hon. Member for Parkdale—High Park attends conferences of the Inter-parliamentary Union in order to advance the ideas he has advanced here today. I suggest that he put his time, efforts and energies, which I know are very high, into those conferences under the auspices of the Inter-parliamentary Union which brings together parliamentarians from East and West to discuss the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. That is where we as Canadian parliamentarians can communicate our preoccupations and priorities. That is where we can communicate the names of people we think ought to be given human rights