

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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Text of a statement made in the House of Commons on February 22, by the Prime Minister, on religious persecution.

During the past few weeks, Mr. Speaker, this House and the country as a whole have watched with deepening concern what appears to be a systematic campaign of religious persecution in all the satellite states of Eastern Europe, but particularly in Hungary where within a short space of time the heads of three branches of the Christian church, the Roman Catholic, the Calvinist and the Lutheran, have either been sentenced to severe punishment or driven into exile. More recent persecutions in Bulgaria seem to be following the same pattern.

2. The Government of Canada has already indicated in the most positive terms and in language clear beyond all possibility of mistake, its abhorrence of this systematic persecution. In a statement on New Year's Day I said that the increasingly brutal persecutions of religious leaders in countries behind the iron curtain have shocked all civilized people. These views were reiterated and strengthened on February 2 by the Secretary of State for External Affairs. In the light of more recent developments, I now wish to re-affirm the position of the Canadian Government.

3. Immediately after the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty, Primate of Hungary, the Canadian Government as a signatory of the Peace Treaty, asked our diplomatic representatives in a number of European capitals and Washington to secure all the available information and to report any steps that might be anticipated on the part of the governments to which they were accredited. Careful study was given also to official intelligence from other sources and to press reports.

4. This was followed, as the House will recall from the statement made on February 2 by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, by a communication to the Hungarian Government through the Hungarian Minister in Washington, protesting strongly against a policy of repression and religious persecution which appeared to destroy religious freedom in Hungary and appeared also to violate obligations to secure the enjoyment of human rights, including freedom of religious worship, to which Hungary was pledged under the Treaty of Peace of 1947.

5. In this message, particular reference was made to the arrest not only of Cardinal Mindszenty, but also of the Senior Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary, and to the flight into exile, under force of persecution, of the Senior Bishop of the Calvinist Church in Hungary.

6. It seemed clear from these incidents that all religious faiths were involved and that a general attack was being launched on the fundamental freedoms of human society. Fresh emphasis was given to the repressive character of these arrests by the conditions under which the trial of Cardinal Mindszenty was conducted. It can hardly be said that these proceedings bear any resemblance to what we understand by a "fair trial". From official sources in which we have confidence, we learn, for example, the following facts about the conduct of this case.