

We acknowledge that many of the principles and provisions of the Final Act are in the form of unilateral undertakings by participating states. We believe nevertheless that all these undertakings are a legitimate subject for discussion at our meeting here in Belgrade. This applies to human rights and human contacts as it does to the other subjects that come within the ambit of our review. We cannot agree that such a discussion constitutes an intervention in the internal affairs of participating states. We are here to measure progress and the only measure we can apply is the degree to which undertakings freely assumed by governments are being carried out.

The point is sometimes made that the problem with human rights is that they are subject to very different interpretations. It is true that different societies attach different weights to particular human rights. It is also true that some societies claim precedence for the rights of the collectivity over those of the individual. We are not here to arbitrate those differences. But we do not believe that matters of definition should stand in the way of conscientious performance. We are not, after all, writing on an unwritten page. The universal declaration of human rights is common ground between us. So, between many of us, are the relevant international covenants. The Final Act itself, in declaring human rights to derive from "the inherent dignity of the human person", has surely dispelled whatever doubt there may have been of where our obligations lie.

All our governments could probably claim to have put in place an adequate legislative basis for assuring the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. But concepts in this field are evolving and there is a need to ensure that this evolution is progressively reflected in our laws. We also have to consider that our systems are not perfect. All too often, there is a gap between what is prescribed in the statute book and what is vouchsafed in practice. We acknowledge that it is the responsibility of each government to see that such a gap does not develop and that, where it has developed, steps are taken to remedy it. But we also accept the right, in Canada as elsewhere, of individual citizens to concern themselves with these matters and to enter into a dialogue with their governments where precept and practice appear to diverge.

In raising these issues in Belgrade our purpose is not to create confrontation. Nor is it to arrest the course of détente. Our concern, in fact, is just the reverse. The Canadian Government has itself undertaken obligations at Helsinki in the matter of human rights. We are prepared