



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 51/32

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

A statement by Mr. Jean Lesage, Head of the Canadian Delegation to the 13th Session of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, made at Geneva on August 13, 1951.

Freedom of information, as a fundamental human right, is deeply imbedded in the tradition of my country. It is an essential part of our democratic heritage; we recognize indeed that it is the very life-blood of our democracy which can only survive on the basis of free public opinion and free discussion. The Canadian people fully recognize the tremendous value of the free flow of information; they enjoy a degree of freedom of information which is second to none, and they guard this freedom with the greatest vigilance.

We realize also that, like every other freedom, freedom of information suffers everywhere if restricted anywhere. In the closely integrated and interdependent world of today, the unhampered flow of information is absolutely essential to real understanding among the peoples of all countries. The Canadian people, for example, while having the widest degree of freedom of information within our own borders, cannot enjoy full freedom of information so long as governments of certain other countries control or restrict the flow of information from within their territories. For that reason, we would welcome international action genuinely designed to promote and protect this fundamental freedom universally.

My Government has shown its interest in the drafting of a convention to that end by sending to the International Conference on Freedom of Information held here in Geneva in 1948 a delegation of able and experienced persons active in the information media in Canada. Our delegation at that conference made an earnest effort to reach agreement with the other delegations on a definition of the principles of freedom of information which would genuinely reflect the aspirations of all those people throughout the world who are concerned to ensure that information may flow freely within each country and between the nations.

Although at that time we found ourselves unable to accept all of the principles enunciated in the draft convention, we cherished a sincere hope that by a process of further consultation, solutions to the outstanding difficulties and disagreements might be found. However, the history of the attempts made since that date to widen the area of agreement shows quite clearly that serious and even irreconcilable differences of