

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the Sixth Annual Conference of the Canadian Human Rights Foundation - devoted to the topic of Human Rights and Canadian Foreign Policy. I am especially pleased to be able to speak to you at a time when we have just passed an important anniversary for human rights in Canada and as we approach a landmark anniversary year for human rights in the community of nations.

This past Sunday marked the first anniversary of the proclamation of the new Canadian Constitution. That historic document, with its Charter of Rights and Freedoms, affirmed in an unequivocal fashion our fundamental determination to respect and guarantee the basic human rights of all our citizens in Canada.

The second anniversary of which I spoke is that of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations almost thirty-five years ago. Dr. John Humphrey, your Foundation's President, was present that day in December when the Declaration was adopted. And, as he will readily attest, that particular document was instrumental in moving human rights from the periphery of international relations to a central place in the conduct of foreign policy among nation states.

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, the international community has moved a considerable distance. The U.N. has elaborated more than twenty legal conventions and covenants. It has set standards for human rights, and opened for public scrutiny and debate the human rights records of many countries. Other agencies and organizations - from the ILO and UNESCO to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and various regional organizations - have been equally active in widening the scope of human rights activities and in asserting the need for more effective measures of protecting fundamental rights.

The trend towards greater prominence for human rights in the conduct of international relations has been fully supported by Canadians. In their letters to me, to other members of Parliament and to the media, they have made their concerns known. They are shocked by torture, enforced disappearances and summary executions. They are unanimous in opposing the institutionalization of racism and the perpetuation of wars and conflict leading to massive flows of refugees. Non-governmental organizations have been formed - and are certain to grow in number - to register their concern and to take action in their own areas of commitment.