

been suspended since 1962. Canada believes that isolation by its nature is unhealthy, especially at an important time of transition in Cuba. It is in all our interests, individually and as an organization, as well as in the interests of the people of Cuba, that we support a process of change in Cuba that is positive and orderly. We in the Canadian government are examining ways in which we can enhance our own dialogue with Cuba. We also believe it is important for the OAS and Cuba to examine how we can fulfil the vision of the founders of this organization for universal hemispheric participation. Cuba is a part of that vision. In looking ahead, it of course will be essential to take full account of our resolutions and our determination with respect to human rights and democratic development.

The strengthening of human rights instruments and institutions in the hemisphere is another key issue for the Canadian government. In our view, the Inter-American Court and Commission are unique and extremely important mechanisms for protecting and promoting human rights in the region. The defence of human rights is one of the fundamental principles of the OAS and, as a membership, we must ensure that these institutions are given the wherewithal to execute their mandates fully, effectively and objectively. This implies not only increased human and financial resources — although these are indisputably in order — but also increased moral support from all member states.

Canada has been an ardent and steadfast defender of the Commission since joining the OAS. The fact that this year two cases were opened by the Commission against Canada has not changed our attitude. Canada believes that the essential test of a member state's commitment to human rights promotion within the OAS is its readiness to co-operate and participate openly and fully in the deliberations of the Court and Commission. Canada was pleased to see, during this year's debate on the Commission's report, that many of the countries which were the subject of country reports, or of specific cases, took a more constructive approach than in the past: they acknowledged that their systems were not perfect, provided clarifications where they thought appropriate, and, in so doing, demonstrated the ultimate value and significance of the Commission's work. We would urge all member states to follow their example.

In the area of women's rights, Canada has been actively involved — over the past three years — in the drafting of an Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women. This involvement is consistent with the steps Canada has taken in other multilateral fora to address one of the most pervasive and serious forms of human rights abuses. These actions have included the initiation of a United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by the 48th Session of the United Nations General