

Mr. Speaker,

I know that all Members of this House, and indeed all Canadians, share with me a deeply-felt sense of horror and outrage at the events that have unfolded over the last few days in China.

We have watched a country's armed forces turn on its own citizens in an indiscriminate and brutal fashion. We have seen unarmed students and citizens gunned down and over-run by tanks. We have witnessed troops shooting from behind at fleeing crowds. We have heard of military units dealing summarily with even non-violent acts of resistance. Tiananmen Square, which has been the site of so many important historical events over the decades and centuries, now adds to its legacy one of the most tragic occurrences of modern China.

Mr. Speaker, the situation is evolving very rapidly. The latest news we have from our embassy in Beijing only minutes ago is that the violence started in the Chinese capital is spreading across the country. There is growing evidence that the military is at odds with itself and we have received reports that there is now fighting between various factions of the military. The appearance is one of military chaos. Those forces who unleashed the initial program of violence against the students in Tiananmen Square appear to have set in train a chain of violence that cannot now be easily contained.

How could this have happened? We had hoped and believed that China was on the road to extensive and fundamental reform. For eleven years the Chinese leadership has been pursuing a range of policies aimed at opening China up to the outside world. Hallmarks of this welcome reversal of earlier centralism and isolationism have been the decentralization of decision-making, the encouragement of private enterprise, and the welcoming of increased trade and economic exchanges with Canada and other western democracies.

During the past few years we have also seen welcome change on the political front, even if the depth of reform has been somewhat less than in economic areas. We have seen more freedom of the press, more freedom of speech, more freedom of association, less control on travel, more flexible policies on emigration, and even some tentative signs of willingness to accept legitimate political action expressed through vehicles other than the Communist Party.

Indeed, the last few weeks of political difficulty were in some ways a great signal of the strides China had seemed to have taken. Students in great numbers were tolerated in the non-violent expression of their desire for further change. Their cries for greater democracy, for the establishment of basic rights and freedoms appeared to be