

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, December 8, 1989

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Secretary of State of Canada and Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship)): Mr. Speaker, it gives me very great honour to note on behalf of all members of this House that Sunday marks the forty-first anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

When the universal declaration was adopted without a dissenting voice by the young United Nations organization on December 10, 1948, it immediately established itself as the fundamental expression of the highest hopes and ideals of the human spirit. It remains so to this day.

For most of these 41 years, however, the anniversary of the declaration has served more as a reminder of how far human action has fallen short of its principles than of their attainment. If this year is different, it is because today we have reason to believe and hope that the balance is, at long last, beginning to change.

In recent weeks we have witnessed extraordinary events. In Brazil and in Uruguay there were held the first free elections in years. In Namibia and in South Africa developments which, while they have far yet to go, cannot be ignored. India, the world's largest democracy,

went to the polls and again reaffirmed the triumph of freely-elected representative government.

[*Translation*]

What can we say, Mr. Speaker, about the events in eastern Europe?

It would be pointless to try to describe in a few words the images and feelings which come to us every day from Warsaw, Budapest, Sophia, Berlin, Prague and other cities and which have so much immediate personal significance for so many Canadians.

[*English*]

What will not fail, what is undeniable, is the need for freedom and the need for dignity, the need for those equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family which lie at the heart of the universal declaration itself. They have proven stronger and more enduring than either the instruments of repression or the blandishments of states and institutions which have so long denied these rights.

No less important is the vision and compassion with which this great journey is beginning. In Leipzig, on November 9, the same night that the Berlin wall finally opened, the crowds answered the call of New Forum by the tens of thousands as they had on previous nights. They assembled not only to renew the call for change, they also met to observe and remember the events of 41 years earlier, November 9, 1938—Kristalnacht, Crystal Night—and what happens when a society forgets that human rights are inseparable, that they must belong to all or eventually they will belong to none.

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[*Translation*]

Disrespect and contempt for human rights can only lead to acts of barbarism, as the Declaration itself reminds us. It is very encouraging for the future that the new societies in eastern Europe are arising from a recognition of this.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, none of us can forget that full respect for human rights remains one of the major challenges of civilization.