

the United Nations system. We recommend further that Canada work to strengthen the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Native peoples throughout the world have been among the earliest and most cruelly abused victims of the denial of human rights.

In addition to the United Nations, we are convinced that there are other multilateral opportunities to develop an activist human rights policy. Canada should support and co-operate with the recently established human rights office in the Commonwealth Secretariat. Both inside and outside the Commonwealth, the government should collaborate on human rights issues with democratic middle powers among the developed and developing countries. Middle powers may be less likely to muddy the waters of human rights policy with geopolitical considerations and activities. Through close co-operation with developing countries, Canadian human rights policy will be sensitized to the perspectives and concerns of the Third World.

A second channel open to Canada in investigating and exposing human rights violations is the network of voluntary organizations working in this field. They range from national human rights bodies, whose members in some countries risk their lives to expose human rights violations, to international organizations that specialize in compiling and disseminating this information. In its submission to the committee, the Canadian Section (English-speaking) of Amnesty International—one of the most widely respected of the voluntary organizations—described the value of its partnership with the Canadian government.

We have watched with great satisfaction as the Canadian government has taken an activist approach to promoting human rights and opposing human rights violations in bilateral and multilateral fora. As a result, the Canadian section has often made the statement that we consider the Immigration Commission (dealing with refugees) and the Department of External Affairs our allies in the struggle for the international promotion and protection of human rights. (2)

The committee recommends strongly that an even closer collaboration with voluntary organizations become a central feature of the government's approach to human rights. In this regard, Edward Ratushny urged the government to establish a Human Rights Advisory Commission to serve as a regular channel of policy advice to the secretary of state for external affairs. We support this suggestion in principle, but note that there are several approaches to the functioning and composition of such a body. Accordingly we recommend that the government immediately investigate the most effective means of creating a Human Rights Advisory Commission.

The committee was pleased to hear testimony that Canadian officials are committed to an effective human rights policy. At the same time, we are aware of the pressures within the Department of External Affairs to attach priority to trade, security or political considerations and, in the process, to downplay support for human rights. To overcome this tendency, we recommend that the Department of External Affairs follow the example of the Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs in establishing in-service training and refresher courses in human rights for all its officers.

International human rights forums and non-governmental organizations are well established channels for Canada's promotion of human rights. There now exists a third channel and the opportunity to develop a more coherent and activist approach. A House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Rights has just been created. As it begins to develop the international side of its mandate, we recommend that the Committee examine with particular care alleged international cases of gross and systematic violations of human rights, especially where they involve countries where Canada has