

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS AND COHERENCE IN CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Almost 42 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the systematic brutalization of the human person across the spectrum of civil, political, social and economic practices remains a common occurrence in many nations of the world. Important progress in individual countries and regions has been spurred by a range of rights instruments and processes, stemming from the Declaration and often bearing the imprint of significant Canadian contributions. These efforts, however, have not always brought improvements in the underlying realities.

While immediate human suffering is the greatest cost of human rights abuse, it is not the only cost. Human rights are essential preconditions for economic and social development, for political participation and democracy, and for international peace. Without respect for human rights, life is not merely difficult. It is not fully human.

The persistence of systematic human rights abuse, therefore, compels supporters of human rights, everywhere in the world, to ask fundamental questions. Why has there not been greater progress? Are we doing enough? Are we doing the right things? Do human rights instruments have adequate weight, within the larger universe of international institutions and relations? In our view, these questions require urgent attention, thoughtful answers, and effective action.

Canadians, whose cultural roots and family connections embrace the globe, have a special role to play in seeing that international human rights issues receive the priority they deserve. This recognition, combined with the urgency and complexity of international human rights issues, is indeed the major reason for the creation of this Sub-Committee, which we believe can contribute to the effective resolution of these issues.

Since the formation of our Sub-Committee in December of last year, we have sought answers, in a series of hearings and briefing sessions, to basic questions about the impact of human rights considerations on Canadian foreign policy. This report sets out findings obtained thus far, and puts forward three major concerns which we have identified during the course of our work. These major concerns, in turn, provide the basis for our agenda of future and more detailed study, which we will be pursuing in the Fall.