

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great honour for me, personally and as a Secretary of State for the Government of Canada, to address this Commission, which has played such a central role in the history of the United Nations.

Since its creation in 1946, the Commission on Human Rights has presided over a fundamental shift in the international norms concerning the behaviour of governments toward their own citizens. In the process, absolute sovereignty has been rendered as obsolete as absolute monarchy.

The International Bill of Human Rights and numerous other instruments elaborated by this Commission have established that the integrity and basic well-being of people in any country are a legitimate concern of all governments. This transformation – the recognition of individuals, as well as states, as subjects of international law – has represented a quantum leap in the evolution of international affairs, and stands as a priceless legacy of this Commission's first half-century's work.

But here, as in most other fields of international law, what remains to be done is the hard part – that is, to ensure effective, timely and universal respect for the human rights norms we have established. Canada sees this as one of the major concerns of our time and as the principal modern-day challenge of the Commission on Human Rights.

Over the past year in Canada, the Government, Parliamentarians, organizations and individuals, from all corners of the country and from all sectors of society, have together conducted a far-reaching assessment of Canada's interests and its place in the world. The considerations I have mentioned – the changing character of international relations, the evolving nature of state sovereignty, and the central importance of basic human values in world affairs – all played a pivotal role in the debate.

This week, the Government presented the conclusions it has drawn from this process, and affirmed that "human rights, good governance and democratic development are universal values that should find central expression in Canadian foreign policy." In the report tabled by Minister of Foreign Affairs André Ouellet in the House of Commons, the essence of Canada's approach was put as follows:

The Government regards respect for human rights not only as a fundamental value, but also as a crucial element in the development of democratic and prosperous societies at peace with each other. The essential challenge is to decide how we can best influence other governments to respect basic human rights. Our ultimate aim is not to punish countries and innocent populations whose governments abuse human rights, but rather to change behaviour and induce governments to respect their people's rights.... Canadian efforts to support human