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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL LAW AND CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY

A Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, to the International Law Association and Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Montreal, March 29, 1971.

...Perhaps I might begin this brief survey of current international legal developments by looking at the work of the United Nations, where so many of them have taken place. Since 1945 (admittedly with ups and downs, but with a definite ascending curve), the United Nations has been actively pursuing the goal of an international order based on the rule of law. In particular, the world organization has led the way in enshrining basic principles of human rights and human dignity in international documents and legal instruments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and on Civil and Political Rights, of 1966 and the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, also of 1966, are accomplishments of great significance. The Racial Discrimination Convention was ratified by Canada while the twenty-fifth United Nations General Assembly was meeting last autumn and we are now pursuing with the provinces the question of becoming a party to the International Covenants. These instruments, taken together with others dealing with refugees, relief and rehabilitation and the status of women, constitute, in a very real sense, an international human rights bill. Canada will continue to play a prominent role in all such international efforts to uphold and protect the fundamental rights of all peoples everywhere.

Another area of great importance is the development of international law relating to the environment. When we speak of the environment today, our minds automatically turn to pollution. However, the United Nations lawmaking activities in this field began with relatively unpolluted environmental regions such as outer space and the seabed. Only recently has the organization taken up the immense problems of the growing pollution of our soil, waters, and the air we breathe. The 28-nation United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, of which Canada is a member, was responsible for the drafting of what may be called the outer space "charter", the 1967 Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies. In addition to postulating