

No. 53/55 HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Text of statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, broadcast over the CBC network on Human Rights Day, December 10, 1953.

On the pathway of human progress, certain great documents have served as mileposts. One was Britain's Magna Carta--which became the great Charter of personal and political liberty. It has guided the aspirations of men for freedom in many continents for seven hundred years. Another was the Declaration of Independence upon which rests the foundations of liberty in the United States, but whose influence has been universal.

Another document in this historic series was the United Nations Charter in which the nations agreed that one binding purpose of the world organization must be to promote and encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms. To show the way to the fulfilment of that purpose the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the General Assembly five years ago, on December 10, the day now known throughout the world as Human Rights Day. This Declaration sets a common standard of achievement toward which peoples and governments throughout the world can strive.

The road toward such achievement has not been easy. There have been disputes and disappointments in the discussions which have taken place concerning it at the United Nations. There have been differences and difficulties in our effort to translate into reality the high principles set forth in the Declaration. There have been disagreements and dissension over the best methods to be adopted and over the pace at which progress should be made.

Some countries, like my own, consider themselves fortunate in possessing traditions and being able to build on experience which simplifies the task of ensuring broad acceptance and support of the principles in the Declaration. But all countries face real difficulties in devising precise legal forms which will fit in with the existing pattern of their constitutional systems. All member countries of the United Nations have not been able to agree upon the form of the international instrument which should codify human rights and be binding on all those signing it. There have been a multitude of suggestions, often cancelling each other out.

It is not surprising, however, that we have not found it easy to arrive at a formula which will provide even the necessary minimum of satisfaction for all. In this and in other problems in the United Nations, we are bringing together peoples with widely different legal, economic and social backgrounds; with varied