

A Commitment to Global Human Dignity

Canadians believe that their duty to promote human rights, and to speak up when those rights are denied, extends beyond their own country. In a world where "outside" events are instantly and graphically communicated around the globe, no one can stand silent when rights are flagrantly violated — whether such violations occur next door, or thousands of miles away.

Opportunities to take effective action may be limited. But whenever and wherever those in power deny human dignity, Canadians react with outrage. They are determined to take whatever positive action is possible. And this determination is shared by the Government of Canada.

Canada's credibility when speaking out on human rights has been earned through many years of consistent, forceful human rights activism. In the 1920s, Canada was a leader in the League of Nations' efforts to protect the rights of minorities. In the 1940s, Prime Minister Mackenzie King argued strongly and effectively for including human rights as a priority in

Canada and the United Nations

The United Nations is one of the most important forums for the international promotion of human rights. Over the years Canadian officials have worked tirelessly in the UN to establish sound, enduring human rights principles and to codify these principles in international law. Canada played an important role in developing the UN's International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights, as well as a wide range of supplementary conventions and declarations on specific rights and freedoms.

Although much of the UN's standard-setting work on human rights now has been completed, Canada still maintains a leading role in developing codes in areas not sufficiently covered by existing standards, such as the rights of children, aboriginal peoples, and human rights defenders.

Since the abuses of human rights today are due most often to a lack of compliance on the part of governments with existing norms, not because new norms are needed, Canada now is focusing increased efforts on developing ways to implement and check the standards that have already been established.

In recent years, meetings by UN bodies set up to monitor adherence to international instruments in the field of human rights have sometimes been cancelled or curtailed because of lack of funds.



Photo: Denis Drever

Challenging apartheid and destabilization, Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, addresses the third Commonwealth Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe.

The international promotion of human rights is a fundamental and integral part of Canadian foreign policy. When confronting the abuse of human rights, the Canadian government is committed to helping the victims — working for the earliest possible improvement in the conditions imposed on them. In the long term, Canada's goal is to ensure that all nations live up to internationally agreed standards of human rights.

the United Nations Charter. Another Canadian, John Humphrey, was one of the architects of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the first Director of the UN Human Rights Division. Throughout this century, Canada has taken a clear, unequivocal stand against any government that would deny a citizen's basic rights and freedoms.