

The case of Kampuchea is not unique in demonstrating that in the field of human rights the official record of the United Nations creates an illusion of much greater progress than we have managed to make. There is no dearth of promising language on the international statute books. Unfortunately the gap between promise and performance has not narrowed much. Reports of gross and persistent inhumanity continue to claim the attention of the world community. Governments continue to renege on commitments they have freely assumed in international instruments.

In short, we are still a long way from an international consensus on human rights. Historians will wonder why it should have been so. They will be hard put to explain how we could be very near a consensus on how to preserve the quality of our seas and yet unable to conduct so much as a civil dialogue on how to preserve the dignity of the human person. They will be hard put to explain how we had begun to redistribute resources internationally to sustain human beings in their material needs, but could not ensure that men and women would be free to exercise their most elementary human rights.

Here, as elsewhere, we have a choice. Human rights are a problem of international dimensions. Their recognition and promotion, as the Secretary General reminds us, "is a legitimate concern of the world community". The new prominence that human rights has acquired is part of the natural evolution of an international system. Like so many other concerns, the concern about human rights can no longer be contained behind national boundaries. It is not a matter of laying down to governments how they should fashion their political or economic systems. It is simply a matter of making certain that governments observe the fundamental decencies of civilized life to which they have all pledged allegiance.

The issue of human rights will not go away. We have a clear choice. We can decide that the United Nations must face the issue squarely, or we will be forced to go elsewhere to seek a tolerable international consensus. In the view of the Canadian Government the choice is clear. We believe that the United Nations is ideally equipped to evaluate objectively