

REPORT ON THE FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Highlights

The UN Commission on Human Rights held its forty-seventh session in Geneva from January 28 to March 8, attracting representatives of some 120 countries and an equal number of non-governmental organizations. A total of 82 resolutions were adopted, 66 of them by consensus. In addition to the more than 1,200 delegates and observers, the session was addressed by the president of the Ukrainian SSR and nine foreign ministers.

In many ways, it was a landmark session, and perhaps the most productive in recent years. If the mood of CHR 46 had been marked by euphoria at the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the release of Nelson Mandela, this was replaced at CHR 47 by the sobering reality of the Gulf War and the Soviet crackdown on the Baltic Republics.

While the Gulf situation affected much of the Commission's work, it also provided unprecedented opportunities to speak out on human rights in that part of the world. It allowed for a separate sub-item on the agenda entitled "Human Rights in Occupied Kuwait" and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur with the mandate to examine the human rights violations committed by the occupying forces of Iraq.

Furthermore, after five years of failed attempts, a resolution on human rights violations in Iraq itself was passed; a Special Rapporteur for Iraq was also appointed.

Another breakthrough at this year's session was a consensus Chairman's statement chastising the government of the USSR for its actions in Latvia and Lithuania. This was the first time in the Commission's history that it has taken action on reported human rights abuses in the Soviet Union.

Canada played an effective role at CHR 47; members of our delegation spoke on 15 different issues and we co-sponsored some 20 resolutions, taking the lead role on five of them. In addition, Canada contributed to the successful conclusion of the Baltic discussions with respect to the chairman's statement.

South Africa

Movement from both Africans and the Western Group (WEOG) allowed for a consensus resolution on the situation in South Africa for the first time since this issue was put on the CHR agenda. This was in no small measure the result of recent announcements by the South African government and the willingness of many at CHR to work towards a consensus.