

I think it fair to say today that perhaps more than ever before people within the Commonwealth, leaders within the Commonwealth, are questioning the direction, the focus and the objectives of the Commonwealth itself.

Just today at a luncheon hosted by the Speaker with High Commissioners from the Commonwealth, Senators, members of this House, we heard from the Dean of the Commonwealth High Commissioners, the High Commissioner of Ghana, who spoke eloquently about the particular challenge that faces the people of the Commonwealth, the challenge of grinding poverty and injustice that faces too many of our member nations.

At the most recent conference of heads of government of Commonwealth, which was held last fall in Harare, Zimbabwe, leaders of the Commonwealth had an opportunity to clearly state their commitment to fundamental human rights, to a serious implementation of those principles.

A special working body headed by Flora MacDonald stated that the Commonwealth's record with respect to human rights has, in many instances, left a great deal to be desired. Despite a clear challenge by the working party headed by Flora MacDonald, the Commonwealth did not respond. Instead, the closing declaration of the Commonwealth in Harare was, in the words of Flora MacDonald, full of pious words that were inadequate to deal with the flagrant abuses that take place in Commonwealth countries.

Let us be clear when we talk about human rights. We are speaking of traditional civil and political rights, rights which are brutally suppressed in too many member nations of the Commonwealth. We are also speaking of economic, social and cultural rights. It is here where there are great challenges remaining. The fact is that while Canada on the one hand supports a clear commitment to democracy, to the rule of law, to freedom of speech and freedom of association, too frequently Canada within the World Bank, within the IMF, also supports policies of structural adjustment which increase the gap between rich and poor.

Surely as Canadians we recognize that the right to decent health care, housing, a proper diet are just as

fundamental, just as important, as the right to the traditional civil and political rights.

As the very distinguished Canadian scholar Frank Scott has pointed out, the trappings of democracy hang loosely on an emaciated body politic. It is essential that our government play a leadership role within the Commonwealth in ensuring that the Commonwealth means business when it comes to human rights, that there is a mechanism for implementation

Particularly in this year of the international conference on the environment in Rio de Janeiro in June, we must recognize that human rights must include the right to a clean and sustainable environment as well.

I recently returned from travelling in a number of Commonwealth countries such as Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia and I very much regret that in each of those countries there are serious human rights abuses that continue.

In the context of Malaysia, for example, repressive security laws are in existence. As well, we know that the right to protection of the environment, the rain forest in Sarawak, is being devastated and the very survival of indigenous peoples, particularly the Penan Indians, is at stake.

I think it is time that while we recognize the contribution the Commonwealth has made, we also have to recognize that the Commonwealth is becoming an increasingly irrelevant institution. Unless it finds its bearings, unless it recognizes the challenge that lies ahead with respect to human rights in the broadest sense of the world, it will continue to be merely an old boys club of the former colonies. Surely that is not acceptable.

I say in closing that Canada will be taking part in hosting the Commonwealth Games in Victoria in 1994 in the constituency of my colleague from Victoria. I would hope that by 1994 Canada would recognize that our most significant commitment in the Commonwealth can be a reaffirmation of the principles of democracy, peace, of the rule of law, of true respect for human rights and equality, of a clean environment. These must be the values that guide the Commonwealth if it is not to fade into total irrelevance.