

Before I begin, I want to salute Senator Robert Hill of the International Democrat Union, Sir David Steele of Liberal International, and Dr. Peter Jankowitsch of Socialist International, for leading their organizations to this important meeting. I want to thank Ed Broadbent and the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development for organizing this conference. And I want to pay tribute to my colleague, Senator Al Graham, for his able work through the years in promoting the growth of Liberal International, and links with the other political nationals.

Let me say, on behalf of the Government of Canada, how honoured we are to have this important meeting take place in Canada. As you know, Canadians are ardent defenders of human rights and have always been involved in the struggle for human dignity and freedom worldwide.

This meeting of the four Internationals shows that regardless of our ideology, regardless of our party allegiance, the promotion and protection of human rights are fundamental values and are the primary objectives that must guide our actions. This is essential to the development of democratic societies, not only to enable them to live in peace among themselves, but to live in peace with their own citizens.

The fact that we find ourselves here in a spirit of co-operation and non-partisanship clearly demonstrates our joint commitment to seek ways of improving human rights protection. We are sending an important message.

All who, like us, work in the field of human rights know that good intentions alone will not set political prisoners free, end torture, gain recognition of the equality of minorities or enable refugees to return home.

Our words must be backed by action.

In my opinion, Canada is in a unique position to play an effective role in this regard. If other nations listen to us, it is because they recognize our long tradition of respect for the individual, a tradition which is among the world's strongest, and because they know that we are not trying to increase our influence at their expense.

Freedom, democracy and respect for human rights are not just objectives, they are also the instruments whereby the international community can achieve its objectives of peace, development and security.

A two-way relationship exists between peace and security on the one hand, and human rights and freedom on the other. War and civil conflict clearly give rise to the most basic violations. The poignant images from Central Africa remind us of this daily. Moreover, and Rwanda provides a cruel example, it is when