

The Vienna Declaration reaffirmed the basic premise of the universality of human rights. Last December's endorsement of the Vienna Declaration by the 184 member states of the United Nations General Assembly, and the subsequent decision to create the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, represents a historical advancement in the promotion of human rights worldwide. In my view, these results flow directly from a partnership built upon the common goals of governments and NGOs committed to strengthening the UN's role in protecting human rights. I am hoping that this NGO community will come forward with suggestions on how Canada can provide assistance to the new Office of the High Commissioner.

I represent a government that takes involvement in the United Nations seriously. We believe that full participation in a multilateral structure addressing crucial international issues of security, environment, development and human rights is an essential means through which both Canada's interests and values will be advanced.

One challenge that all member states of the United Nations now face is the revitalization of the human rights machinery. In Canada, we want to ensure that we are well-placed to make a positive contribution, and this is something we can work on together. With this in mind, the Minister of Foreign Affairs directed that Canada seek re-election to the Commission on Human Rights this year; the Prime Minister strongly supported that decision.

An important goal for Canada at the upcoming session of the Commission on Human Rights is to build upon the achievements of last year's Commission and the World Conference in promoting the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights. Solutions to the problem of violence against women are a priority within the borders of our own country, and Canada's leadership in recognizing violence as a violation of women's human rights led last month to the adoption of the UN Declaration on Violence Against Women. I must commend the NGO community for its support in this regard and assure you of the continued leadership of the Canadian government in pursuing the appointment of a UN special rapporteur.

Canada also wants to strengthen the UN's role in securing respect for the basic rights and freedoms of indigenous people in all parts of the world. We expect that the Commission will soon take up the draft declaration prepared by the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and Canada will play an active role in this exercise. Most importantly, the Canadian delegation will insist on full representation of indigenous representatives throughout the process.