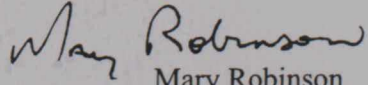


Foreword by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

In 1998, as we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration, the international community is challenged to renew its commitment to make the message of the Declaration a part of every person's daily life. The theme for the year, "All Human Rights for All," guides many initiatives being undertaken worldwide to raise human rights awareness through education and dissemination of information. I welcome these initiatives in the belief that full knowledge of human rights empowers people and indeed is the prerequisite for the enjoyment and effective defence of their basic human rights. These initiatives will also lead to the advancement of a global human rights culture — a major tool in shaping conditions not only for the full development of individuals but also for mutual respect and understanding between peoples and countries.

The international community, unfortunately, cannot take pride in its global human rights record. At the dawn of the 21st century, we continue to encounter formidable challenges including widespread poverty and famine, underdevelopment, inadequate health care and education systems, millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, violence against women and children, racial discrimination, summary executions and torture: all illustrative of the obstacles still to be overcome. No country's human rights record is perfect. Improvements are both possible and necessary in every part of the globe. Yet, there is a sound basis for hope. I see a growing worldwide movement for human rights; a renewed dedication to eradicating serious human rights violations and a willingness of countries to take ownership of the issue of their own human rights and to address internal capacity building. Governments and non-governmental organizations, regional and international organizations are joining their efforts in advocacy of human rights. Within the United Nations, following the call by the World Conference on Human Rights and under the leadership of the Secretary-General Kofi Annan, human rights are being mainstreamed in all the programmes and activities of the Organization.

I am pleased that during this anniversary year, considerable emphasis is being placed on the work of the United Nations in promoting and protecting human rights. I believe we will be able to make this work more effective with the support of all those who care. Our major goal is to assist governments and civil society in their efforts to promote and protect human rights. Activities of the United Nations human rights machinery, which includes intergovernmental and independent expert bodies, are of paramount importance to this end. On the initiative of the Government of Canada and with its support, Human Rights Internet has prepared the present volume, which contains a review of action undertaken by the machinery relating to human rights developments at the national level. I hope that this valuable publication, an important contribution to the commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration, will also bring about wider understanding of the work of the United Nations.


Mary Robinson
Geneva, 18 May 1998