

SELF-DETERMINATION OF PEOPLES

Statement by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Paul Martin, made in the Third Committee, October 27, 1955.

The Canadian Delegation would like to take the opportunity afforded by the Third Committee's discussion of Article 1 of the Draft International Covenants on Human Rights to express some views on the question of self-determination of peoples and nations. I should perhaps explain that we wish to make these views known now rather than at a later stage, because they are of a fundamental nature and have a direct bearing both on Article 1 of the draft covenants and on the various proposals to be considered under the next item on the Committee's agenda.

I should like to refer first to the comments of the Canadian Government on the Draft Covenants on Human Rights, which are to be found in Document E/CN.4/694/ Addendum 6, dated March 10, 1954. Paragraph 8 of that document refers specifically to the self-determination articles in the two draft covenants. The Canadian position, as stated there, is that self-determination is a collective matter rather than an individual human right. We believe that this distinction is fully justified and we attach such importance to it that we find it necessary to adhere to our view that reference to self-determination of peoples is inappropriate in an international instrument dealing with individual human rights.

Views Shared

We share the view of those Governments which look upon self-determination more as a goal than as a right. In this connection, I should like to emphasize that we continue to believe that the development of "friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples"—recognized in the United Nations Charter—is a matter of the greatest importance and deserving of the fullest respect and support.

While this is still the guiding factor in our thinking, we have become conscious of the need for a fuller analysis of self-determination in the light of views expressed by other governments in various organs of the United Nations in recent years. We have been greatly concerned to find that our understanding of this provision in the United Nations Charter is somewhat different from that of some other governments. In fact, it has become increasingly clear to us that the nation—if I may call it that—of self-determination is susceptible of a number of varying interpretations. The dis-

cussions concerning self-determination in the Commission on Human Rights and in this Committee have merely served to emphasize these differences in interpretation and have not resulted in the universal approach which we believe to be essential before any further progress can be made in this field.

It is important, Mr. Chairman, before proceeding any further, to clarify one or two points so that there can be no possible misinterpretation of the position of the Canadian Delegation—and perhaps that of some other delegations who, it seems to me, share our views in this matter.

Division of Opinion

Given the nature of our organization and the obvious division of opinion on the subject of self-determination, I am led to ask very earnestly whether any group of nations represented in this Committee considers that further progress in finding an acceptable solution will be facilitated by an attempt to formulate or define so-called rights or principles which another group of nations is—for reasons which I will mention later—not prepared to accept. Is it not more in keeping with the spirit of our organization and, I would add, more practical and sensible to recognize that there are differences in approach to the subject? Would it not be better to attempt to seek solutions or arrangements which will narrow these differences and—without impairing the all important goodwill and understanding which should inspire our deliberations—make it possible for all of us to advance, agreed step by agreed step, towards mutually satisfactory arrangement?

Now I appreciate, Mr. Chairman, that those who regard self-determination as a right take their stand as a result of deep conviction—often in the light of bitter historical experience and under considerable and understandable pressure of public opinion. Is it unreasonable to appeal to fellow members of this organization, to approach differences with moderation and with a willingness to seek reasonable compromise; to consider that other countries which do not share their view on this particular subject are also motivated by the same high purposes, guided by long-established national traditions and a most earnest desire to do only what is right and fair?

This leads me, Mr. Chairman, to the crucial point. The members of this organization, when