

Work goes on now in the Councils of the United Nations where Canada is dedicated to enhancing the standards of International Human Rights. It is not an easy task. Many states resist international scrutiny or even the concept of international standards.

Minorities are the group most directly affected, because it is minority populations -- whether defined in religious, racial, ethnic or other terms -- who suffer the greatest discrimination and are the targets of the most systematic forms of persecution.

For 40 years, the world community has been considering effective ways to act on the question of minorities. When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted, the United Nations refrained from taking action on that question on the grounds that minority situations in each state were so different and so complex as to preclude universal definitions and treatment. But eighteen years later, when the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted, article 27 of that covenant guaranteed protection of the culture, religion and language of persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. More recently, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights has attempted to embark on a draft declaration on the rights of persons belonging to minority groups.

During the past year, Canada has closely followed the events in Soviet Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. We were deeply troubled by the tragic consequences of the tensions between neighbouring peoples. In this country we hold strongly to the belief that peoples of all ethnic backgrounds should be encouraged to find viable means to preserve their respective heritages and cultural identities. Indeed in Canada, people from a wide variety of backgrounds are enjoined to share a common citizenship without losing their distinctive heritage.

In the Soviet Union we are witnessing the hopeful beginnings of a transition to a freer, more open society with an enhanced respect for the rights of all its citizens. Among those rights are the creation of opportunities for people of different ethnic groups to exercise greater control over their own affairs and to preserve their particular cultures. In this regard, we will continue to press the Soviet Union to respect its international obligations by finding the appropriate means for its many nationalities to express their deepest concerns and protect their traditions: including those Armenians living in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The Soviet Union has undertaken open commitments to enhance economic and cultural development of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as to develop closer ties between the Armenian people of the region and the Republic of Armenia proper. This is a promising step which we trust will lead to better things.