

Some steps have also been taken towards recognizing the need for strict objectivity of investigation and reporting, based on universally-recognized standards of human rights. But deficiencies remain. These problems were most recently discussed in the Commission on Human Rights earlier this year in determining action in the case of Cuba. Despite the Commission's departure from well-established practices, it is our expectation that the debate on human rights in Cuba can proceed in the Commission based on dispassionate examination of existing evidence.

A different problem, though equally serious, is the problem of timeliness. Effectiveness in many situations demands a rapid and timely response. Over the past six months, for example, several thousand persons have died in Burma, many because of attacks by Burmese authorities on peaceful demonstrators. The Burmese people expressed their strong desire for a return to democracy through massive and peaceful demonstrations which were met with violent suppression. Human rights abuses continue to be reported in Burma, and the army is reportedly continuing to carry out torture and summary executions. At the next session of the Commission, discussion should once again be initiated on ways of responding rapidly to such situations, perhaps by way of an inter-sessional role for the bureau. This is more than a procedural reform; it would be a significant advance towards greater effectiveness.

Canada has always been concerned with the selectivity inherent in much of the U.N.'s work in the area of human rights. There is a disparity of treatment between those few countries subject to special procedures and those whose human rights situations remain largely beyond examination. The Soviet Union, for example, has never figured prominently on the Commission agenda. Now, there are prospects of real change within the USSR itself. The government has repeatedly declared its intention of introducing major legal and constitutional changes. There has been a measure of progress in the treatment of religious and minority groups, the release of some political prisoners and greater tolerance of dissent and criticism. However, there continue to be political and religious prisoners. Large numbers of family reunification cases are outstanding. Many long-term refuseniks continue to be denied their right to leave their country. While developments in the Soviet Union and some other states of Eastern Europe are encouraging, some other countries in the area seem unable even to acknowledge many of the most basic rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration. A case in point is Romania, which has yet to resolve satisfactorily the case of Professor Dumitru Mazilu.