

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation has already spoken on two themes which are central to any discussion of international human rights issues. These are the establishment of international standards in the field of human rights and the creation of effective implementation mechanisms to safeguard the enjoyment of human rights. Today, I wish to turn to more tangible issues of practice, and, in specific terms, to those situations which starkly demonstrate the gap between principle and practice, ideal and reality.

In the past decade, the work of this organization has evolved in emphasis, from standard-setting activities to thematic studies and country situations. Important standard-setting exercises remain, of course, to be completed. But to a greater extent than perhaps visualized only 10 years ago, we are focussing on specific problems and areas of concern. Today, on the agenda of the Commission on Human Rights, the ECOSOC and the General Assembly, more than twenty states and geographical regions are subject to continuing attention in one form or another. To some, this is a matter of satisfaction; to others it is a matter of concern. Canada's view is that the current agenda of the United Nations in this broad area should give rise to some hope that our work is gaining in scope and effectiveness. This must be accomplished not only with respect to country situations, but also our methods of addressing our concerns in all parts of the globe.

The situations before us present diverse problems of analysis and approach. And the prognosis is mixed with respect to our ability to contribute constructively to change. Some situations, like that in South Africa, have been on the agenda of the United Nations for decades. Others, such as in Afghanistan and Iran, are of relatively recent origin. These situations represent as well a variety of human rights difficulties. Some are the direct result of government policy and practice, in spite of and even in defiance of international standards and opinions. Others, are the result of tragic circumstances, in which governments are but one actor among many in a complex drama.

There are, however, unifying themes in the situations now before us. Government cooperation is one such issue, and my delegation is pleased to note that, after more than a decade of experience with the fact-finding role of the United Nations, only one state--Iran--refuses to extend the cooperation necessary for the Commission of Human Rights to perform its responsibilities.