

Mr. Chairman,

We are assembled today for this debate on human rights violations in all parts of the world for a simple reason: human rights are fundamental values which we are all obliged to promote and protect. This is not an issue of interference in the internal affairs of others. Sovereignty confers no license to abuse people. Just as domestic violence can no longer be considered a private matter under national law, so domestic violence of another kind is no longer an internal matter under international law. Our task here must be viewed as a common quest for the universal application of human rights standards.

Mr. Chairman,

War and civil conflict breed violations of human rights. And violations of human rights breed war or civil conflict. The situation in many parts of Africa offers all too many examples of this vicious circle. Some African countries, such as Sierra Leone and Liberia, are slowly heading towards democratic elections, after years of conflicts and human rights abuses. Others, such as Somalia, continue to suffer, with no solution in sight.

Canada is particularly troubled by the situation in Nigeria. Since General Abacha came to power in 1993, after annulling the most fair and peaceful elections in Nigeria's history, his regime has disbanded all elected bodies, jailed democratic leaders, closed newspapers, repressed labour unions and minorities, given itself absolute legal power and immunity, and abolished the right of habeas corpus. Now it has outraged the collective conscience of the world with the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and other human rights defenders. Inhumanity is perhaps never uglier than when it takes on the trappings but not the substance of the judicial process. Canada condemns this action in the strongest terms and will support Commonwealth and UN measures to promote full respect for human rights in Nigeria.

In the Sudan, we remain concerned about the prolonged civil war in the South and widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict. We have noted the call by the Organization of African Unity for the Sudan to stop supporting terrorist activities, while also noting that the Government of the Sudan has released political prisoners. And we continue to be disturbed by Sudan's persistent refusal to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur.

The international community has condemned extremist factions in Burundi seeking to undermine political stability and increase ethnic tensions. Canada encourages all political parties in Burundi to step up their efforts to avert a calamity. We are convinced of the need for preventive action, particularly in the form of international human rights monitors and technical assistance.

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