

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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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.

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 notion -- if I may call it that -- of self-determination is susceptible of a number of varying interpretations. The discussions concerning self-determination in the Commission