



Statements and Speeches

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THE CANADIAN APPROACH TO THE INTERNATIONAL PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

An Address by the Honourable Mark MacGuigan, Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Section of the International Commission of Jurists, Toronto, August 31, 1982

The international community will mark next year the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today I would like to anticipate that anniversary and review with you old problems and recent progress in the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world.

In a symposium sponsored by UNESCO [the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] in 1948, Jacques Maritain issued a warning that even now should be the daily watchword of those who profess attachment to the cause of human dignity.

What he said was this: "The function of language has been so much perverted, the truest words have been pressed into the service of so many lies, that even the noblest and most solemn declaration could not suffice to restore to the peoples faith in human rights. It is the implementation of these declarations which is sought from those who subscribe to them; it is the means of securing effective respect for human rights from states and governments that it is desired to guarantee."

A few months after Maritain wrote these words the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration, together with the UN Charter itself, gave a constitutional expression to the basic rights and freedoms of the human person. Since 1948 these rights and freedoms have been further defined in more than 20 conventions and covenants. Indeed that number more than doubles if we include the related agreements developed under the auspices of the International Labour Organization.

All these international instruments are major achievements in themselves. Each of them, we hope, brings us closer to conditions of true civilization and to the ideal of man's humanity to man. Yet each must be examined in the light of Maritain's admonition that faith in human rights can be restored only by implementation of those rights and not by their mere enumeration.

Regrettably — and perhaps inevitably — we have made more progress in enumeration than in implementation. It is a sad truth that even governments which have freely subscribed to international agreements on human rights can still be heard to claim

Human rights'
place in foreign
affairs