
irritant in international relations, and a detriment to national interests.

Solemn commitments

This attitude is misguided for at least two important reasons. First, as in nineteenth-century Britain, a government such as ours cannot ignore human rights in foreign policy because of the pressure of public opinion — and I thank God for that. Secondly, the human rights element in foreign policy is firmly based on solemn commitments undertaken by states in many international agreements. If the members of the world community had not repeatedly taken the trouble to elaborate often complicated conventions on human rights, it would be easier — not easy but easier — to argue that human rights should not be part of foreign policy. But the treaties are there, the obligations are undeniable, and in so committing themselves governments have raised expectations that they will have to live up to.

A treaty, after all, is a treaty, whether about human rights, trade or defence. By becoming a party to a treaty, a state takes on certain obligations for which it is accountable to the international community. The law of human rights is not different from any other branch of international law in this respect. Human rights treaties, of course, are applied internally, for the benefit of individual citizens. But still the commitments are *vis-à-vis* other states. This alone would make human rights a proper subject for discussion in interstate relations. This alone would justify raising issues of human rights violations in other countries. For every party to a treaty on human rights actually invites other parties to examine its conduct in this way, while assuming the right to examine their conduct too.

The covenants

The most important and comprehensive human rights agreements are the two covenants: one on civil and political rights, the other on economic, social and cultural rights. They entered into force for Canada in 1976, as did the optional protocol to the first covenant. The covenants represent a further elaboration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. The Declaration, which sets out the basic rights recognized by all states, is not itself a treaty but a resolution of the UN, yet many authorities now consider it a binding part of customary international law.

The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights specifically recognizes that full implementation of such rights can only be achieved progressively. Both this covenant and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights oblige Canada to report to international agencies, in the first case to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and in the second case to the Human Rights Committee. The first Canadian report to the Human Rights Committee was considered in 1980. It was the longest and, in my opinion, the best so far submitted by any country. Each province, as you know, contributed a section to the report. This made the report longer but at the same time more interesting than those from unitary states. You will recall, of course, that Article 50 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires that "the provisions of the present Covenant shall extend to all parts of federal states without any limitations or exceptions".

The members of the committee, who represent almost every region of the world, subjected the Canadian report to close scrutiny. While the report was highly praised,
