



Statements and Speeches

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A DECADE FOR ACTION TO COMBAT RACISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

A Statement in the Social Committee of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, New York, by Mr. A.W. Sullivan, Canadian Representative, April 17, 1975.

The Canadian delegation wishes to make a few comments on the item under consideration, the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Social Discrimination. We are grateful to the Secretariat for the quality of the documentation that has been placed at our disposal. These documents are extremely useful in providing us with an outline of activities in progress or envisaged in the context of the Decade both within the UN system and at the governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental levels.

...Racism and racial discrimination are evils we must all work to eradicate, because they constitute an affront to the dignity of man and to the principles of equality enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments in the human rights field. We must struggle constantly to arrive at the elimination of all discrimination based on race and to rid ourselves, once and for all, of racial prejudices that have no basis of any kind. The Decade must provide for the conscious effort of the international community to work towards the achievement of such objectives. It should serve to focus public opinion, both national and international, on the problems of racial discrimination and the imperative need to find solutions within the shortest possible time.

Canada has always been entirely opposed to racial discrimination in any form it assumes, and has, in particular, condemned that odious form institutionalized in the policies and practices of *apartheid*, which unfortunately continues to flourish in South Africa. The racist regimes of South Africa and of Southern Rhodesia continue to pursue their reprehensible policies of discrimination and racial domination. Nonetheless, recent events relating to Southern Rhodesia and, to a certain extent, to Namibia, seem to us to provide a glimmer of hope, and may permit us to expect some positive evolution in the situation both so far as eventual abolition of a discriminatory system and the realization of self-determination in these territories are concerned. With regard to Namibia, I should like to mention that the Canadian Government recently welcomed Mr. Sean MacBride, the UN Commissioner for Namibia, to Ottawa. Mr. MacBride's visit

provided the opportunity for a thorough examination of the various aspects of the Namibian question.

The encouraging signs coming to light in these territories can surely be considered to some extent as the result of the constant action of this organization in its efforts to put an end to the unacceptable and degrading policies of racist regimes. They can also be attributed to the influence of recent developments in the territories under Portuguese administration. The decolonization now in progress was, however, primarily brought about by the will and resolute determination of the peoples of these territories to exercise their right to self-determination and independence. We applaud the rapid progress made in the past year by the Government of Portugal in bringing to an end its colonial system. We are pleased with the determination with which the Portuguese authorities are implementing their new policies.

The new countries emerging from the former Portuguese territories will require the support of the international community to help them to begin on a solid footing and to provide encouragement towards balanced economic and social development. In this context the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs announced, on April 11, a special mission to Angola and Mozambique, whose object will be to establish contact with the provisional governments and the leaders of these countries and to establish a basis for co-operation in all fields -- in particular, in the area of economic and social development.

...Racism and racial discrimination are not the preserve of any single region. As the distinguished Ambassador Salim of Tanzania stated so well during the meeting of the Credentials Committee at the last General Assembly, no country can declare itself free from this evil at one time or another. It consists, then, of a universal evil, which requires a universal effort to bring about its elimination. Governments of all countries must address themselves to the task and examine in depth their legislation and their social systems in order to bring about the removal of all traces of racial discrimination in any form. The responsibility of national governments is one that necessitates political will and continuous vigilance in rooting-out or preventing racism. We are all personally involved in the struggle, both at the international and national levels. The individual effort in the struggle is a key element that must not be neglected. The elimination of racism and racial discrimination cannot be achieved solely at the governmental level by legislation and information programs. We must also scrutinize our own lives in an effort to modify attitudes, change mentalities and reject prejudices of a discriminatory nature

based on race. It is essential that this struggle result in a personal evaluation of actions and attitudes. We are dealing with a sphere of daily interpersonal relations and activities in which it is essential that individuals be aware of the problem and conscious of their own responsibility in the quest for the eradication of this cancer that torments humanity.

...Canada has pursued and developed in the course of the months since the last session of the General Assembly certain activities in the context of the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.

With regard to information and public education, the Federal Government has sponsored a series of meetings with representatives of voluntary organizations with an interest in human rights, and in particular in the Decade, as evidenced by the numerous programs they have established. The Canadian Government has, in addition, recently published a brochure embodying the program of the Decade as well as texts of important UN declarations and documents on racial discrimination. In addition, at the request of the Government, radio stations have generously broadcast at regular intervals a series of publicity announcements against racial discrimination. Emphasis was placed on broadcasting the messages on December 10 and similar emphasis will be given on August 10, the anniversary of the Canadian Bill of Rights. In the provinces, information programs have also been established, particularly within the school system.

The development of programs for the struggle against racism and racial discrimination at the national level has been the object of continuing consultations between the different levels of government, and federal authorities, for their part, have under study new programs designed to promote a better understanding between different ethnic groups. I should like to mention that, at a conference called last November in Victoria, B.C., of provincial ministers responsible for human rights, the problem of racial discrimination was discussed.

In terminating this intervention, may I add that we have excellent grounds to believe that Canada will have in the very near future its own Commission on Human Rights. An organization of this kind would parallel those already existing in the majority of the provinces.

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