

# STATEMENT DISCOURS

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"Human rights and first  
principles"

Notes for an address by  
the Honourable Monique Landry,  
Minister for External Relations,  
to the Annual non-governmental  
organizations (NGO)  
consultations on Human Rights

OTTAWA

January 28, 1987.

Madame la Présidente,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind welcome ... and for the concern for human rights which has brought you together. I take great pleasure in being here, and seeing this gathering. It is sad to think that, today, in a great many countries, people who share your passion for freedom and human rights cannot do what we are doing - cannot express their thoughts, feelings and deepest personal values. It is sad indeed ... but it is also a reminder of just how important our discussions are. And it is an incentive to our efforts, a spur urging us onward to practical action.

As Minister for External Relations, and on behalf of the Department of External Affairs, I want to welcome you most warmly to the Pearson Building. Some of you have been here before on similar occasions; others are first-timers. As you may realize, the schedule itself reveals at least one important innovation: sessions for working groups to carry out intensive discussion on regional themes of interest to significant numbers of participants.

I am happy to say that these are the largest consultations on international human rights ever held here, with the most comprehensive agenda. And on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am happy to tell you that this growing interest and participation is noticed, appreciated and shared.

In fact, if I were allowed to make only one point in my speech ... if you were to recall only one sentence that I said ... I would want it to be this: the present government is putting a very strong emphasis on international human rights - stronger, I believe, than any previous Canadian government.

I think that a fair-minded, objective look at the record of the past couple of years will show that there has been less pussy-footing and more commitment - not just in rhetoric, but in policy and in action - than in the past.

For starters: when the Government put forward a policy paper on our international relations, two years ago, it described the defense of human rights - briefly but clearly - as "a moral and political imperative". Last year, the report of the Special Joint Committee on Canada's International Relations - the Simard/Hockin report - asked the Government to confirm its commitment and carry out an active human rights policy. And the Right Honourable Joe Clark tabled the Government's response, accepting those recommendations with enthusiasm. In fact, the key principle was put in these words: "human rights are and will remain a fundamental, integral part of Canadian foreign policy". That is, to me, a given, a basic, a first principle from which a great deal flows.

Human rights is an elusive subject that defies easy definition and refuses to be shut in any watertight compartment. It is, at the same

time, a very precise, technical specialization ... but also of one those universal themes that touches virtually every aspect of life. It is apartheid and torture, it is refugees and indigenous people, but it is also the way the world treats its women and young people.

Thus, we have diversified our efforts in this field over the past two years. And I can assure you that Canada has been far from passive, as the following points show:

- We have, as the media have noted, put the question of human rights among the major issues raised in high-level visits abroad.
- We have been vigorous, even outspoken, in emphasizing human rights questions and programs at the United Nations.
- We have shown consistent leadership in supporting human rights in all parts of the world.

And our clearcut policy has been expressed through decisive actions.

One small, specific example: a year ago, Mr. Clark took the unprecedented initiative of creating a one million dollar fund to assist the families of detainees in South Africa - and I am pleased to report that I have since renewed this for another year, and increased the amount by fifty per cent.

Another example, quite different in nature and scope ... Development assistance is linked in many ways to human rights - but it's a subtle connection that creates many dilemmas. I don't think Canadians want to indulge in self-righteousness by cutting off aid to countries where human rights are abused, at the expense of the very people whose rights are abused. But we have taken a very major initiative in another direction altogether, to redress ancient wrongs. The Canadian International Development Agency has become perhaps the first aid agency to adopt a full set of policies and procedures to give due attention to the role of women in the development of societies. We want to make very sure that women are agents as well as beneficiaries of development.

Where do we go next? This seems a relatively promising era for human rights, with substantial progress in Latin America and glimmers of hope even in unlikely parts of the world. It's a good time for consultation, and this Government has more than a token interest in what you think - is, in fact, eager to hear the advice of non-governmental organizations, and to work with you in creative cooperation.

You are all familiar with the land-mark work of the United Nations and other organizations in framing standards, instituting promotional programs and establishing machinery at the multilateral level. Canada supports this work. And a lot must still be done in fields as important as minority rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, and the right to promote human rights. But there is a serious gap here - a gap between the accomplishments of multilateral organizations in identifying violations of human rights, and their ability to do something about it. They haven't been able to build the institutional structures that would ensure that rights will be respected. I speak particularly of the experiences of countries now emerging from difficult, even catastrophic,

human rights situations. Surely, if we are prepared to criticize regimes which violate human rights, we must also be ready to come to the assistance of governments and peoples trying to re-establish respect for human rights.

This is an area where we have to translate our principles and words into practical action. There is a role for governments in framing programs in the international field which can help advance the cause of human rights. Equally, there is a role for non-governmental organizations, particularly those with the capacity to deliver programs in other countries. There are various ways in which such an approach could be taken. We could enhance existing programs in CIDA and other government departments, such as External Affairs, Justice or Secretary of State. Or we could create new organizations with specific mandates.

At present, for instance, we are considering a completely new departure - an initiative of great significance. The Government recently appointed two eminent Canadians, Mme Giselle Côté-Harper and Dr. John Courtney, to act as special rapporteurs in advising the government on the Simard/Hockin proposal to create an Institute of Human Rights and Democratic Development. There may be several avenues open to Canada; more than one agency could be involved; and non-governmental organizations and multilateral bodies in the field of human rights could play key roles. We need your experience, insights and ideas on how to proceed. The two rapporteurs will seek that from you in the course of the next few months.

The Government is strongly committed to an extensive and open process, leading to practical initiatives in the human rights field.

The proposed institute is only one of the many fronts on which we are now taking action. Following the submission of the Simard/Hockin Report, the Department of External Affairs initiated work on a training program in international human rights, open to government officials in this department, and others involved in human rights issues. We have made very clear our interest in closer consultative arrangements with NGOs. We have proved our commitment to helping to fund the various international efforts that are going on in support of human rights, in fields ranging from torture and the rights of indigenous people, in the case of External Affairs, to the integration of women into world development, in the case of CIDA. I can also confirm that Canada will seek election to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in 1988. These are areas on which I know there will be valuable discussion over the coming two days.

Once again, I welcome all participants to this meeting. Other members of the Government have been invited to spend parts of these two days with you, and my colleague and Parliamentary Secretary, Mr. Roger Clinch, will host today's luncheon.

On behalf of all members of the Government, I express our thanks to each and every one of you for having accepted our invitation. I can assure you that your concerns have for us a very profound value, because respect for human rights is a basic principle for the Government of

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Canada, as it is for the Canadian people. It is a first principle upon which we can hope to help build a better future and a better world.

Thank you.

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