

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

Secrétaire d'État
aux Affaires
extérieures

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AS DELIVERED

AN ADDRESS BY

THE HONOURABLE BARBARA McDOUGALL,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

TO THE

UNITED NATIONS WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

DELIVERED BY DOROTHY DOBBIE,

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

VIENNA, Austria
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Affaires extérieures et
Commerce extérieur Canada

External Affairs and
International Trade Canada

Canada

Madam President, Mr. Secretary-General, ministers, delegates,

I am here today representing Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, and I am delighted to do so because the eyes of the world are upon this conference.

The world is at a critical historic juncture. The Cold War has ended. More open and democratic societies have emerged in many parts of the world. The prospects have improved for a major leap forward in observance of human rights.

At the same time, violations of human rights -- torture, disappearances, summary executions, racism, denial of freedom of expression, rape and discrimination against women -- all continue unabated.

There is, less than 500 kilometres from this conference hall, a tragedy raging out of control which serves as a powerful reminder of the horrors that can be unleashed when human rights are abandoned.

Yet the battle for universal human rights has ignited a spark in virtually every corner of the world. And we must fan that spark into a flame.

Our decisions can challenge parliaments and reach into small villages. And so we must seize this chance to build a "worldwide culture of human rights" that can be a stronger bulwark against abuses, more effective than any law or any sanction.

Decisions alone, however, are not enough. Concrete and practical measures resulting in early improvements in human rights are what we need to see emerging from this conference.

So, Madam President, the United Nations Charter calling for "universal respect for ... human rights for all" set in train one of the most noble enterprises in the history of humankind.

The subsequent adoption of the International Bill of Rights and other human rights instruments over the past 45 years is one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations. It has inspired real progress in respect for human rights in many countries.

The right of all governments and of the international community to address human rights violations, wherever they may occur, is today beyond challenge. And the days when governments could claim sovereignty to justify abuses of human rights, those days have drawn to a close.

Reinforcing Commitment to Universality

Here in Vienna we must reaffirm the principle that has guided the United Nations throughout its history -- the principle of the

commitment to the universal character of basic human rights and freedoms.

We understand that democracy can take different forms, just as economic and social programs are shaped by different national circumstances. And we recognize that no society is perfect: the quest for rights and freedoms presents a never-ending challenge for all governments.

But human rights principles are universal -- they reflect the natural aspirations of all human beings. They do not, as some suggest, represent uniquely Western values. Freedom of opinion or speech, due process of law, or quality of all persons regardless of distinction, these are principles no less applicable to individuals in one part of the world than in any other part of the world. Torture is torture in anyone's language.

Human Rights: A Key to Peace and Development

The promotion and protection of human rights internationally is more than just a matter of values -- it is a matter of basic mutual interest. As Article 55 of the UN Charter makes clear, respect for human rights is a key to a more peaceful and prosperous world for all.

And as Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali has emphasized, "there has never been a more evident need for an integrated approach to the objectives of peace, democracy and human rights and the requirements of development."

All human rights, civil and political, economic, social and cultural are integral to sustainable development. There is no time for sterile debate about the relative importance of different human rights. This is no "either/or" proposition.

The United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, which Canada supported on adoption in 1986, underlines the responsibility of all countries and of the international community as a whole to strive for the realization of all universally recognized rights. There are encouraging signs. The latest United Nations Development Program Report on Human Development notes that "close to two-thirds of humankind now live in countries that are moving towards, or are already enjoying, democratic forms of government."

That report stands as testament to a simple reality: that a country's potential for social and economic development is inextricably linked to the freedom of its citizens to participate fully in all aspects of society.

Governments that are genuinely committed to protecting human rights should receive encouragement and assistance of the international community.

Since 1984, Canada has contributed over \$100 million to development assistance activities aimed at promoting civil and political rights, aimed at fostering democracy and building vibrant civil societies.

The United Nations must do more, much more, to assist developing countries and countries in Eastern and Central Europe to improve their institutions for administration of justice, and to promote free and fair elections.

And we need to encourage international financial institutions to review the implications of their policies and programs for human rights.

Among the initiatives Canada is actively promoting at this conference is the development of co-operation between independent national institutions, such as the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and the growing number of such institutions emerging in other parts of the world.

Enhancing the UN Human Rights System

The strengthening of the overall United Nations human rights system is the critical issue of this conference.

The situation in the former Yugoslavia might be different if preventive diplomacy, as outlined in the Secretary-General's "Agenda for Peace," had been put into practice. The Secretary-General has proposed mechanisms to identify human rights problems that can trigger mass migrations and other forms of instability. This conference must endorse these proposals.

And we must enhance the effectiveness of the mechanisms we already have -- treaty bodies and rapporteurs, as well as the Commission on Human Rights itself. And, we must stop talking about an International Criminal Court and start taking the practical steps necessary to set it up.

There is also a need for much greater co-ordination and co-operation among various agencies involved with human rights. For example, the work of the International Labour Organization, which plays a crucial role in protecting the fundamental rights of workers worldwide, must be better integrated with that of other UN agencies.

The Human Rights Centre in Geneva should become a "centre of excellence" for the promotion and protection of human rights within the United Nations system.

A significantly greater proportion of the United Nations regular budget must be devoted to human rights -- the allocation of less than 1 percent of the UN's total budget to the centre is wholly inadequate considering that human rights is one of the main purposes of the United Nations under the Charter.

Canada therefore supports the appointment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights with the authority and the resources to ensure human rights are front and centre of United Nations efforts to promote peace and development for all.

Equality and Human Rights of Women

Madam President, not a single country treats women equally to men.

Around the world, women are beaten, bought, sold, mutilated and degraded simply because of their gender.

In Canada, according to our own statistics, 1 woman in 10 is beaten by her partner. Our government has set an ambitious target -- zero tolerance for violence against women. A Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, the most comprehensive inquiry of its kind in the world, will present its recommendations this summer.

Thousands of women from all over the world have gathered in Vienna to ensure that we -- the member states of the United Nations -- live up to our commitments under the UN Charter to reaffirm equality between men and women.

Canada salutes the courageous women whose tragic testimonies at yesterday's Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights bear witness to the urgent need for the international community to take strong action.

Canada has been actively pressing for action to bring the rights of women into the mainstream of the human rights system. The Ad Hoc War Crimes Tribunal must ensure effective prosecution of rape cases brought to its attention. Canada is also committed to the appointment of a special rapporteur on violence against women and other violations of women's human rights. We call upon this conference to give impetus to this proposal.

The General Assembly should adopt the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women at its fall session. A complaints mechanism should be established under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women to address individual violations under the convention.

And I am pleased to announce that the Government of Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency, will

provide support of up to \$500 000 to the Centre for Human Rights to enable a women's rights expert to assist in the all-important task of integrating the rights of women throughout the UN human rights system.

Rights of Persons in Vulnerable Groups

Madam President, if fundamental human rights are to be enjoyed equally by all people without distinction, the international community must devote more attention to those whose rights have been traditionally neglected.

The rights of children must be a priority concern for all nations. We must redouble our efforts to implement the Plan of Action adopted by the 1990 World Summit for Children, which Canada was proud to co-chair. And on this, the Day of the African Child, it is fitting to rededicate ourselves to the survival, protection and development of children.

Persons with disabilities experience continuing marginalization in society. If their potential is to be fully appreciated, our outdated attitudes must be challenged and changed.

It is also unacceptable that anyone, because of sexual orientation or HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] infection, be denied fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Indigenous Rights

Madam President, this conference will be commemorating the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. We must ensure that the world's Indigenous people can fulfil their legitimate aspirations to be fullfledged partners in the broader societies in which they live.

Canada looks forward to the completion of a draft Declaration on Indigenous Rights by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. We support the full participation of Indigenous representatives in the review of the draft declaration by member states. Our experience in Canada has demonstrated that the involvement of Indigenous people is essential to the development of solutions that are appropriate to their needs.

That is why Canada also supports the extension of the Working Group mandate to review developments and advise on the concerns of Indigenous people.

We shall all be coming together in the Commission on Human Rights to give consideration to the draft declaration. Let us do this under one agenda item to ensure that all facets of the situation of Indigenous people receive due attention. Because, Madam President, they have waited long enough.

The World Conference

These are Canada's main goals for this conference.

It will take every ounce of the international community's resolve to attain these objectives. Respect for universal human rights and fundamental freedoms is vital to the achievement of global peace, democracy and development.

I pledge Canada's unflagging commitment to work towards these goals with other nations, and with the global community of non-governmental organizations.

Thank you.