

# Statement

Secretary of  
State for  
External Affairs



# Déclaration

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extérieures

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## NOTES FOR A SPEECH BY

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

AT THE ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS

WITH THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

CONCERNING HUMAN RIGHTS

OTTAWA

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Affaires extérieures et  
Commerce extérieur Canada  
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International Trade Canada

Canada

For years, a large part of the work of this Commission focussed on human rights behind the Iron Curtain. More recently, in some of those countries that situation had been improving steadily. Now, suddenly, the focus is not simply upon the human rights abuses of oppressive regimes; the regimes themselves have been changed. Human rights performance and frameworks are being re-evaluated at the level of official policy and practice. All of us interested in freedom must help these new governments establish the stability and the standards that will make respect for human rights automatic. That may prove a greater challenge than bringing down the walls of attitude and tyranny, whose fall ended the decade so dramatically.

Many factors contributed to those dramatic exchanges in Eastern Europe. Certainly one of those factors was the abiding, even aggressive, interest of Canadians in international human rights. We celebrate those changes for the freedom and opportunity they bring to Europe; but they also demonstrate the worth of the work of the people at organizations in this room.

Those historic changes make that work more relevant, more urgent, because they demonstrate both the impact of oppressive regimes on individual human rights and, more importantly, the power of people who assert their basic rights against oppressive regimes. Nowhere, now, can any regime claim credibly that respect for human rights is an alien concept or an impossible luxury. The message from Eastern Europe is that those rationales no longer wash. That reality should help us in our continuing work.

More than many other parts of foreign policy, success in the field of human rights is intensely personal. You would all share my satisfaction in the success of Canada's efforts on behalf of Dimitri Mazilu, a Romanian UN official prevented by the previous Government in that country from leaving Romania and continuing his UN responsibilities. He is now the new Vice-President of Romania, and has eloquently thanked Canada for our support during his ordeal.

These consultations are the first held since Canada resumed our full membership on the Commission. As an observer, we had played an active role, but full membership, obviously, lets us do more. Canada co-sponsored 30 of the 75 resolutions adopted at the 45th session and we intend to be equally active this year.

Canada welcomes the fact that the countries of Eastern Europe, including the USSR, are becoming increasingly active and interested in human rights issues in multilateral fora. At last year's Commission session, Hungary took the unprecedented step of co-sponsoring a Resolution critical of Romania, a Warsaw Pact ally. We expect that this year's session will reflect significant changes in the way that various Eastern European States approach human rights issues in general.

New positions by East Bloc States may offset the increasing resort to "bloc voting" to prevent examinations of the human rights records of particular countries. Increasingly the issue of whether the human rights records of specific countries should be examined is not determined on merit but by the ability to muster support on the basis of regional solidarity and invocation of opposition to foreign intervention in internal affairs of States.

The resistance of so many States to international scrutiny is of profound concern to the Canadian Government. It raises directly the question as to how best to ensure that the human rights set down in so many documents are in fact put into practice. How can States be persuaded to comply with international human rights standards?

Over the last four decades, the international community has established a significant collection of human rights standards and an impressive array of protection mechanisms. These developments are very important. International instruments are crucial because they provide a benchmark, against which performance can be measured. Canada has always played an active role in standard-setting exercises and will continue to do so.

The time has come to move beyond standard-setting exercises and examine ways in which existing human rights instruments can be fully and effectively implemented. This concern has both short-term and long-term aspects. We want to be able to respond rapidly and effectively when faced by flagrant violations of human rights. In the longer-term, we wish to persuade more States to act in accordance with international human rights standards.

In Central America, for example, many countries have subscribed to various international human rights instruments. But such a step in itself has not protected people from human rights abuses. In organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States, Canada help improve the situation in those countries. In the last session of the General Assembly, Canada co-sponsored a resolution dealing with human rights in El Salvador, and the Canadian delegation will be dealing with this situation at the Commission as well.

Canadian delegations have taken the lead in putting forward resolutions aimed at effective implementation of human rights instruments. Canada has also taken the initiative in establishing and strengthening mechanisms to deal on an urgent basis with human rights abuses which may result in mass exoduses. We have supported UN efforts to publicize human rights standards globally and recognize the important role of non-governmental organizations. We have also strongly supported the UN Voluntary Fund for Advisory Services; we view advisory services as a key instrument in persuading States to improve their human rights performance. In this area, cooperation between governments and non-governmental organizations is critical.

Canada has taken concrete action in multilateral fora to put our belief in the importance of human rights into action. At the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Canada won support for a human rights initiative dealing with Commonwealth States. Similarly, we have supported human rights action with La Francophonie.

Our action at the multilateral level is a reflection of Canadian determination to put into practice the Canadian Government's affirmation that the international promotion of human rights is "an integral part of Canadian foreign policy". The Department of External Affairs and the Canadian Foreign Service have been assigned the task of implementing Canadian policy in this area and have taken steps to do so.

Non-governmental organizations have long recommended that human rights and foreign policy be integrated. This Department is interested in on-going dialogue with your organizations and welcome your suggestions, advice and initiatives. We find particularly valuable your analysis of human rights situations in various States, and we are happy that a full day to-morrow will be devoted to that task.

I have briefly listed some of the areas of concern to Canada in the area of human rights. During these consultations, the members of the Canadian delegation and other members of this Department will be listening closely to your suggestions and advice regarding ways in which protection of human rights can be enhanced.