



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 52/58

HUMAN RIGHTS

Statement made on December 17, 1952, by the Acting Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Paul Martin, made in the Third Committee, on Chapter V of the Report of the Economic and Social Council on Human Rights

Once more the Third Committee of the General Assembly is called upon to review the work accomplished by the various agencies of the United Nations in the field of human rights. I do not believe it necessary for me to stress here that the question of human rights has become one of primary interest for the United Nations. The various agencies of this organization, taken together, devote close to half of their discussions to questions directly or indirectly related to this problem. Close to half of the resolutions adopted each year by the General Assembly and by the other agencies of the United Nations deal with the question of human rights. The delegation of Canada is in complete agreement with those delegations which insist that such a fundamental question can never receive too much attention. The question of human rights, after all, is the cornerstone of our Charter and has been proclaimed all over the world through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The numerous speeches that have been made within the United Nations since 1945 on this subject should not leave any doubt that the principle of the observance of human rights is accepted and recognized, without qualification, by all member states of the United Nations. The speeches made in this Committee in the course of the present session should, in fact, be sufficient in themselves to eliminate any doubt that could have existed as to the good intentions of governments in the field of human rights. In other words, the United Nations has been deluged with professions of faith and, to ascertain this, one has only to read, for example, the summary records of the Commission on Human Rights and of the sub-commission on the prevention of discrimination and the protection of minorities.

And yet if we glance at the introduction to the Report of the Economic and Social Council for the year 1951-52, we read the following:

"In the field of human rights, in spite of the progress achieved, the United Nations cannot be satisfied with the present situation. There are large areas of the world where the observance of essential human rights, personal liberty, freedom of expression, freedom from discrimination are regressing".

The President of the General Assembly was referring to that same tragic problem when he stated recently, on the occasion of Human Rights Day, that the objectives and purposes of the United Nations would never be achieved until all discriminatory measures have been eliminated and persecution ended.

In the opinion of my delegation the President of the General Assembly has touched on one of the most unfortunate dilemmas presently facing the United Nations. For indeed if we compare some of the statements which are still being made within the United Nations with the events that are taking place in certain countries, we cannot help but think about that part of the New Testament which refers to the man who would take the mote from his neighbour's eye but could not see the beam in his own. To put it in plain language I want to refer to those representatives in this Committee who have busied themselves in the last two months with depicting the most gruesome pictures of the manner in which their neighbours have practised the observance of human rights while they themselves have shown by all evidence available that they are guilty of the most flagrant discriminations and of the most inhuman persecutions.

It is because of this ever-deepening gulf between the words spoken by these representatives and the actions of their governments that my delegation finds it necessary today to draw the attention of the members of this Committee more particularly to Section V of the chapter of the report under consideration. This section deals, as we know, with the question of the prevention of discrimination and the protection of minorities, and the events which have occurred in the course of the last year in certain countries do not allow us to pass it without notice.

It is not the first time that the representative of Canada at the United Nations considers it necessary to make a statement of this kind. For myself, I have personally had occasion to protest, in the name of the people of Canada, at the Ad Hoc Committee of the fourth session of the General Assembly, against a venal disregard of human rights and of the fundamental principles of freedom which was then current in Bulgaria, Hungary and Roumania. Since then, at practically every session of the General Assembly and even of the agencies of the United Nations, we have heard the voices of many delegates raised in protest against the fate dealt behind the Iron Curtain to these basic principles of justice and liberty. One would have hoped that under such a pressure of protest, the governments concerned would have lent an ear and that the wishes of the free people would have been heard in some degree at least.

Alas as we all know, the reaction was quite different and is still quite different. Not only have discriminatory measures continued to exist in the three countries which I have just mentioned but they have even spread to the other countries of the Soviet bloc. Not only has the intensity of the discriminatory measures and of the persecutions not decreased but it has reached such a level of frenzy that it can easily be compared to that which existed in the darkest hours of the Nazi and Fascist regimes.

I think it is important in order to understand the extent of the responsibility which weighs on these governments, to recall the efforts of the United Nations in the course of the last three years in an attempt to put an end to the suffering of those who have had the misfortune to become victims of these persecutions. Let us recall, first, the proposal submitted in 1949 in the course of the second part of the third session of the General Assembly by Bolivia and Australia, the title of which read as follows:

"Having regard to the provisions of the Charter and of the peace treaties, the question of the observance in Bulgaria and Hungary of human rights and fundamental freedoms including questions of religious and civil liberties with specific reference to recent trials of church leaders".

The Ad Hoc Committee on this occasion studied many draft resolutions which might have provided a solution to these problems of persecutions if only good faith had existed on the part of the Governments of Hungary, Roumania and Bulgaria. It was soon discovered, unfortunately, that this good faith was lacking and the General Assembly had to limit itself to a resolution which expressed the hope that measures would be applied in accordance with the peace treaties which might tend to rectify the situation which everyone deplored. In his declaration in support of the item tabled by Bolivia and Australia, the Canadian representative made a specific reference to the trial of Cardinal Mindszenty, to the persecution suffered by the Calvinist Church in Hungary and to the discriminatory measures taken against fifteen Protestant pastors in Bulgaria. The Canadian representative did not hesitate to explain further that, in the opinion of the Canadian Government, these persecutions were the natural outgrowth of Communism.

This same question was considered at the fourth session of the General Assembly in the fall of 1949, when the Assembly's attention was drawn to a similar situation existing in Roumania. The Governments of Bulgaria, Hungary and Roumania had rejected completely the charges made by the Allied Governments that they had violated the Peace Treaties. It was, therefore, necessary to appeal to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion on a number of specific questions which arose jointly from the articles of the peace treaties and from the refusal by the countries mentioned to answer to the accusations made against them.

The opinion handed down by the International Court of Justice left no doubt that an international dispute had arisen within the meaning of the peace treaties and that the Governments of Bulgaria, Hungary and Roumania were legally bound to appoint representatives to the Commission provided for by the treaties. We all know that the Governments of Bulgaria, Hungary and Roumania ignored completely the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The Ad Hoc Political Committee again discussed the question at the Fifth Assembly at New York in 1950. Unfortunately, it had become evident by that time that, without the voluntary co-operation of the governments

concerned, little progress could be expected in the efforts of the United Nations to put an end to the crying injustices which prevailed in those countries.

The last resolution of the General Assembly on this question was adopted at its fifth session. In more ways than one, this resolution was -- and we have to recognize it -- one of resignation and despair. At the same time, it left no doubt as to the feelings of world public opinion towards those governments which refused to recognize the principle of respect for human rights and which challenged in the most flagrant manner the authority of the United Nations and of the International Court of Justice.

This history of discriminatory measures and of persecutions which I have just outlined, I regret to say has gone from bad to worse since the last resolution was adopted by the General Assembly. It is now with the greatest regret that we realize that the good faith and the goodwill of those governments responsible for these persecutions have not shown any improvement. On the contrary, if there has been any change, I would say that it has been towards a greater absence of goodwill and of good faith. In the light of these considerations, my delegation is painfully aware of the futility at this moment of placing before the General Assembly any draft resolution or of inviting the United Nations or the Secretary-General to take specific action on the problem.

But the Canadian Delegation, nevertheless, desires to protest formally and with all its energy, before this Committee and before the United Nations, against the systematic persecutions which rage practically everywhere behind the Iron Curtain and which are disposing in the most horrible manner of millions of human beings whose only crime has been their desire to be free.

Like my own, a number of governments of the free world will no doubt wish, at this session, to raise their voices in protest against the deplorable, if not incomprehensible, actions of these governments and they will be able to cite much evidence in support of their allegations. I would not wish, therefore, to delay this Committee unduly by a detailed recital of everything that has taken place behind the Iron Curtain in violation of human rights since 1950.

Many delegates around this table have probably read the documentation recently submitted by the United Kingdom on the human rights violations in Bulgaria, Hungary and Roumania. Many among you, no doubt, have also had the opportunity of studying the well-documented reports periodically published by such organizations as the National Committee for a Free Europe. The reading of these various reports is frightening, inasmuch as the picture they give is one of brutality and inconceivable cruelty.

I should like, however, to say a few words about a trial which took place very recently in Bulgaria, the story of which will confirm the fact that the wave of terror which we deplored in 1949 is still persisting in those unfortunate countries, more implacable than ever. It is true that there will be little that is new or unexpected in the description which I am about to give you, since the trial followed a pattern which is unfortunately too well known. It followed the pattern designed to terrorize

satellite regimes, to punish them for their shortcomings, to compel greater sacrifices under the shadow of fear, to produce scapegoats and to provide an opportunity for the Soviet Union's favourite propaganda of hatred against states, organizations and individuals of the free world.

The particular trial of which I am about to speak took place this year from September 29 to October 3 and forty persons were brought before the tribunal. Among the six principal defendants were Dr. Evgen Bossilkov, Bishop of Nikopol and Senior Bishop of the Church in Bulgaria, and several leading educators. These six principal defendants were charged with having created an organization for the purpose of overthrowing the Bulgarian Government by means of a coup d'état and with the help of foreign intervention. The other defendants were accused of having aided their efforts in varying degree. All defendants, without exception, were found guilty. Four were sentenced to death; two, to twenty years' imprisonment.

These, in brief, are the bare facts of the case. Fortunately, in spite of the tight censorship which surrounds Bulgaria, there is available further evidence as to the way in which the trial was conducted which enables us to judge for ourselves how little the trials resemble the proceedings of a civilized court conducting an impartial enquiry.

From the beginning, the guilt of all the defendants was assumed by the Bulgarian press, in the speeches of Communist leaders and in the very wording of the indictment. The following statement by the Bulgarian Minister of the Interior, made just before the trial, is typical of the tone of the entire proceedings. "Let all who oppose the Communist regime know", he said, "that the People's Rule, through the divisions of the Ministry of the Interior, is able to put everyone where he belongs, and to deal mercilessly with all who try to hinder our efforts. Neither God nor their imperialist masters can help them".

The entire trial lasted only five days. On the first day all preliminary procedural questions were disposed of and the interrogations of the first fifteen defendants was completed. The witnesses, thirty in all, were all heard on the morning of the last day, when the Court not only heard the speeches of the counsels for the prosecution and the defence, but also delivered its verdict. And this in a trial in which there were no fewer than forty defendants!

No attempt was made to establish a convincing case on the basis of adequate evidence. Apart from the so-called confessions of some of the accused and the testimony of witnesses, many of whom were themselves prisoners, the material evidence produced to show that the defendants were preparing an underground resistance movement consisted of two small radio transmitters, one automatic carbine, two revolvers, one old hunting gun and some medical supplies. I believe the members of the Committee will agree with me that this is hardly the armament for a revolution!

This so-called trial was clearly another calculated attempt similar to those which have been made in other countries behind the Iron Curtain to crush the Christian churches in Bulgaria and reduce them to complete

subservience to the state. It was the culmination of the relentless persecution to which the Catholic Church as well as the other churches have been subjected during the last six months. By now, it is generally recognized that almost eighty per cent of the Catholic priests, for instance, in Bulgaria have been arrested or otherwise persecuted, and the one remaining Bishop, the Bishop of Sofia and Plovdiv, has finally been arrested as a result of the latest "revelations" which the Bulgarian Government has pretended to have obtained during the course of the trial which I have just described.

We are still uncertain as to the ultimate fate of all those persons who were judged at this trial. According to certain rumours which have reached us, some of these unfortunate victims have already been hanged. At the same time, we have reason to believe that some of them are still alive. In the present circumstances, we cannot afford to be too optimistic about the success of our representations; but, in the event that the Government of Bulgaria and its leaders still have a minimum sense of justice and humanity, we like to hope that our appeal will be heard and that it will be possible to save the lives of those persons who have been so crudely tried and so unjustly condemned to death.

This example I have just cited, like earlier persecutions, deportations and purges, is a further example of a ruthless attack upon that most precious of all freedoms -- the freedom of conscience -- which is, after all, the cornerstone of our civilization. For, indeed, we should never forget that the only crime of these people was to practice their religion and, in so doing, perhaps to oppose Communism spiritually and morally. The government responsible for this latest act of suppression of freedom of conscience is not represented in the United Nations and it is unlikely that the censored and controlled press will give the Bulgarian people an adequate or, indeed, any idea of the indignation and anger with which the freedom-loving world regards such mockeries of injustice which I have just described. For this reason my delegation wishes to call upon those governments which are members of the United Nations and which still maintain diplomatic or consular missions in Bulgaria to inform the Bulgarian authorities of these protests which are coming from all the peoples of the free nations, including the Canadian people, against this flagrant violation of the most elementary principles of humanity. Those who are guilty cannot close their eyes to the clamour of justice and of liberty.

S/C