

PRESS RELEASE



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Secretary of State for External Affairs
marks Human Rights Day

Today, December 10, 1966, member states of the United Nations mark the 18th anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and we in Canada, along with other nations across the world, should take stock of how these rights are respected and preserved in our own country which will next year celebrate its 100th birthday.

Although the Universal Declaration has not the binding force of law, the principles which it enshrines of freedom and equality in dignity and rights for all the human family are those towards which each of us, individually and as nations, must surely strive. The result of two years unceasing work by the newly created Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, the Declaration was adopted without a dissenting vote by the Third Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations meeting in Paris in 1948.

Having completed its work on the Universal Declaration, the Human Rights Commission then proceeded to the second, and perhaps most important, part of its task -- the preparation of the two draft Covenants on human rights, two legal instruments designed to embrace virtually all aspects of human rights such as civil liberties, the status of women, freedom of information, the prevention of discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, language or religion and rights related to education and trade union membership, to name only a few. The Covenants are designed as a means to give practical effect to the fundamental rights listed in the Declaration by creating legally binding obligations for all states which ratify them.

The Covenants have been debated in the General Assembly over the past several years. However, this year's anniversary of the Universal Declaration is perhaps of

special significance as the General Assembly is in the final stages of its consideration of the implementation articles and final clauses and it appears likely that it will complete its consideration of the two Covenants at this Session.

Another recent milestone in the human rights field was the approval late last year of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I am pleased to recall that Canada signed this important instrument several months ago and is now studying closely the question of Canadian ratification of the Convention.

Canada and Canadians have also played what we hope is a useful part in the preparations for the International Year for Human Rights in 1968. As I said in my statement to the General Assembly in September, "We have decided that the most useful contribution we could make would be to subject our own record and practices to critical examination, drawing on all the resources of the community for this purpose. Complacency is a disease we all suffer from. Our objective, therefore, will be to remove the vestiges of discrimination involving race, creed, or sex, and to strengthen protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms by a continuing process of education and by subjecting violations to exposure and public attention. I am confident that we will be able to carry out a programme of this kind successfully because of the enthusiastic support for the cause of human rights which is displayed by voluntary organizations in Canada".

We may take just pride in the work already accomplished by the United Nations to advance the cause of Human Rights. However, the approval of international and national legislation to guarantee the rights and liberties of men and women everywhere will be meaningless unless each and everyone of us are prepared to examine within our hearts and minds our own record in this field. We must strive unceasingly to put into practice the noble words of the opening paragraph of the preamble to the Universal Declaration that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".