

Canada

Intervention under Item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention, General Debate, September 16, 2008

Monsieur le Président:

Le Conseil des droits de l'homme a une responsabilité spéciale lorsqu'il s'agit de répondre aux situations urgentes des droits de la personne. Le Canada estime que les situations suivantes nécessitent l'attention du Conseil.

La situation humanitaire et des droits de la personne au Soudan méritent une attention soutenue. Dans la région du Darfour, en particulier, les actes de violence et l'anarchie se produisent en toute impunité, ce qui compromet la distribution de l'aide humanitaire et entrave la mise en œuvre efficace des opérations de maintien de la paix. Le Canada exhorte le Conseil à continuer d'examiner activement la situation profondément troublante des droits de la personne au Soudan et, par l'intermédiaire du mandat du rapporteur spécial, à travailler avec le gouvernement soudanais à mettre en œuvre les recommandations formulées par le rapporteur spécial et le Groupe d'experts sur le Darfour.

Mr. President,

Canada notes the agreement between ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change, and welcomes the prospect for change in Zimbabwe. However, we recall that between the elections of March and June, more than 170 people were killed; thousands needed medical treatment as a result of state-sponsored political retribution; tens of thousands were internally displaced. The violence was systematic and directed largely at supporters of the political opposition. The causes were straightforward: an entrenched leadership has used the coercive powers of the state to safeguard their rule and privileges; respect for human rights and democratic principles are a direct casualty. Canada calls on the new government to implement policies which will improve the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. Canada fully supports an enhanced role for the UN in monitoring the human rights situation, and in assisting with recovery, once conditions are appropriate.

In light of the recent conflict in Georgia, it is imperative that Georgia and Russia both work to ensure respect for the human rights of internally displaced persons who have been removed from their homes and villages by this most recent conflict, and those who have not been allowed back to their homes over the last 16 years. Further, we call on all parties to ensure free and unhindered access by international humanitarian workers to all persons affected by the conflict in Georgia, including those in South Ossetia.

In Iran, respect for human rights is deteriorating. There remain confirmed instances of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as well as multiple public executions. Iran routinely executes minors and leads the world in juvenile executions. The Iranian government continues to persecute religious and ethnic minorities, including the arbitrary arrest of seven Baha'i leaders in March and May. Women's rights are suppressed, and four activists were recently sentenced to jail for their writings. Iran has refused to acknowledge the repeated calls for attention to their human rights situation by the international community at five successive sessions of the UN General Assembly.

Canada has expressed its serious concerns about the human rights situation in Belarus since the presidential elections of March 2006. We note that the Government of Belarus has released a number of prominent political prisoners, including former presidential candidate Alexander Kazulin. Belarus has also agreed to allow both long-term and short-term observers, under the auspices of the OSCE, to observe the Parliamentary Elections on September 28th. Canada has contributed observers to the OSCE mission and urges Belarusian authorities to conduct free and fair elections.

Canada is disturbed by recent reports of increased pressure on journalists, unlawful killings, disappearances, and arbitrary arrests in Sri Lanka. We call on the Government of Sri Lanka to take further action to end human rights abuses and bring perpetrators to justice. Canada is also troubled by recent reports of limited humanitarian access to civilians in the Vanni region. We call on all parties to facilitate full and unhindered access for humanitarian workers to reach civilians in need, and ensure safe passage for all internally displaced persons.

Thank you, Mr. President.