

Canada

Intervention under Item 4 General Debate, March 13, 2008

Mr. President:

Canada is committed to the promotion and protection of human rights, in Canada and abroad. We recognize that no country, including Canada, has a perfect human rights record. That is why it is important that every country open their human rights records to scrutiny both domestically and internationally. Whether that international scrutiny is through discussion at this Council under Item 4 of the Council's Agenda, through cooperation with special procedures by way of open invitations, or through reporting on a regular and timely basis to the treaty bodies, it is critical that we discuss what are sometimes difficult issues. And we must do so openly, frankly, and in a respectful manner.

Implementation of human rights norms at the national level remains a critical priority - an urgent one in some situations. We welcome the emphasis given to this by the High Commissioner and her commitment to improving the tools available to assist States to bolster their national protection systems. The expansion of the Office's field presences to 47 is making a substantial difference in the protection and promotion of human rights. Canada once again salutes those countries that have memorandums of understanding with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for this tangible sign of their commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights.

However much work remains to be done. Zimbabwe continues to require the Council's urgent attention in view of the very serious human rights situation in that country. UNICEF has recently launched a campaign against child abuse in light of an increase of 40% in the last three years in the number of reported cases of children being raped in Zimbabwe. Canada is also deeply troubled by the systematic infringements of basic rights and freedoms committed by the Government of Zimbabwe. This has been particularly worrisome in the run-up to Zimbabwe's elections on March 20, 2008. The serious and ongoing violations of human rights in Zimbabwe clearly warrant the Council's continued attention and action.

The state of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remains a source of serious concern. Reports of egregious violations of basic human rights are continuing, including disregard for individual rights and freedoms, and the lack of due process under the rule of law. We are also disturbed by reports of harsh punishment of its citizens caught fleeing the country, and those who have been repatriated to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Nonetheless, Canada considers engagement with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea offers the best prospects for promoting an improvement in the human rights situation. Canada therefore encourages the DPRK to facilitate the

work of the UN Special Rapporteur, Vitit Muntarbhorn, on the Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in particular by accepting an early visit by the Special Rapporteur. Canada further supports renewal of this important mandate.

In Burma, Canada underlines the need for all concerned parties, including members of the democratic movement and ethnic minorities, to be included in the constitutional and electoral process. We call on Burma to take meaningful steps towards genuine democratic reform, and to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Burma, and to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Canada remains strongly supportive of the UN's efforts with respect to Burma, including the work of Special Envoy Gambari and Special Rapporteur Pinheiro.

We also wish to underline the great importance Canada places on freedom from all forms of discrimination, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion. The Baha'i are one religious group which faces particular discrimination in Iran, but others including Sunni Muslims, face unacceptable discrimination.

Canada remains very concerned by Iran's deteriorating human rights situation, including by the new draft Iranian penal code and the penalty of capital punishment it seeks to impose for apostasy, witchcraft and heresy. We call upon Iran to seriously and comprehensively address its human rights obligations under international and domestic law. This includes addressing confirmed instances of torture, the execution and persecution of minors, inhuman or degrading treatment, and arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders.

Thank you.