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BLUE PRINT FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND FREEDOM

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Organized by the Human Rights Foundation and the University of Alberta

Edmonton, Alberta - November 26-28, 1998

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Two representatives of the Centre attended the International Conference celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *Blueprint for Peace, Justice and Freedom*, organized by the Canadian Human Rights Foundation and the University of Alberta, which was held in Edmonton, on November 26-28, 1998.

Over 1200 delegates from more than 30 countries, gathered to hear 68 speakers and chairpersons, discuss and assess progress respecting a great variety of world human rights issues. The Conference opened with greetings from Shirley McClellan, representing the province, Bill Smith, Edmonton's mayor, Yves Lafontaine, the President of the Canadian Human Rights Foundation, Roderick Fraser, the President and Vice Chancellor of the University of Alberta, and an address by Anne McLellan, Canada's Minister of Justice, who recognized that the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other similar instruments were just the first step of a process which requires that governments must give effect to guarantees in their own constitutional instruments, legislation, judicial decisions, and educational programs. The Minister acknowledged that social and economic inequality was Canada's biggest human rights challenge and pledged that the government would work hard to end it. She recognized the necessity of addressing the problem of family violence and the need to work toward the elimination of violence against women, a project which currently occupies the Centre.

The mornings included two programs of three concurrent sessions. On Friday, November 27, these included, *The Challenge of Different Cultures, Different Religions: "A Common Standard of Achievement for all Peoples and Nations?"* chaired by M.N. Venkatachaliah, Chair of the National Human Rights Commission, India; with speakers, Ujjal Dosanjh the Attorney General of B.C., Lim Kit Siang, Parliamentary Opposition Leader of Malaysia, Maxwell Yalden, member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee; *The Economy, the Environment and Human Rights, Cross Currents or Parallel Streams?*, chaired by Jim Edwards, President and CEO, Economic Development Edmonton, speakers Cindy Kenny-Gilday, Consultant on Aboriginal Rights, Canada, Eric P. Newell, Chairman and CEO, Syncrude Canada Ltd., and David Schindler, Professor, U of A.; *Global Security and Human Rights, The Case for Disarmament*, chaired by Yvonne Fritz, MLA, Alberta, and speakers, Fernando de Souza-Barros, Professor, University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Douglas Roche, Senator, Canada, and Geoffrey Pearson, National Vice President United Nations Association, Canada; *Human Rights and Transnational Corporations, People or Profits*, chaired by Allan Tupper, Professor, U. of A., speakers, Margot Franssen, President, the Body Shop, Owens Wiwa, Human Rights Activist, Nigeria, Warren Allmand, President, International Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Development; *Are we our Brothers' and Sisters' Keepers? The Role of Individuals and Non-Governmental Organizations*, chaired by David Kilgour, Secretary of State (Latin America and Africa) Government of Canada, speakers, Roger Clark, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada, Huguette Labelle, President, Canadian International Development Corporation, and Anne McGrath, Canadian Program Officer, OXFAM Canada; *Bioethics and Biotechnology, Building a Human Rights Framework*, chaired by Tim Caulfield, Research Director, Health Law Institute, U. of A., Solomon Benatar, Professor, Capetown Medical School, South Africa, Bartha M. Knoppers, Professor, Université de Montréal, Eric M. Meslin, National Bioethics Advisory Commission, USA, and Robert Sobsey, Professor, U. of A.

On Saturday, these included: *Human Rights and Responsibilities*, chaired by Steve Lee, Director for the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, speakers, J. Edward Broadbent, Professor, Simon Fraser University, Doan Viet Hoat, Human Rights Activist, Vietnam, and Wei Jingsheng, Human Rights Activist China; *Protecting Refugees from Persecution: The Right to Sanctuary*, chaired by David Matas, Regional Vice President, International Commission of Jurists, Canadian Section, speakers, Louis Kuol Arop, Human Rights Activist, Sudan, Anne Bayefsky, Director, Centre of Refugee Studies, York University, and Mary Jo Leddy, Romero House, Toronto; *Freedom of Expression in Multimedia Universe: Rights, Limits and Dangers*, chaired by Satya Das, Columnist, Edmonton Journal, speakers, Frances D'Souza, Executive Director, Article 19, The International Centre Against Censorship, United Kingdom, Goenawan Mohamed, Writer and Journalist, Indonesia, and William Thorsell, Editor in Chief, Globe and Mail; *Effective Remedies for Violations of Fundamental Rights: The Responsibilities of the State*, chaired by Charlach Mackintosh, Chief Commissioner, Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, speakers, Rosalie Abella, Justice Ontario Court of Appeal, Ricardo Cámara, Executive Secretary, National Human Rights Commission, Mexico, and M.N. Venkatachaliah, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission, India;

Sexuality, Discrimination, and Human Rights, chaired by David Schneiderman, Executive Director, Centre for Constitutional Studies, U. of A., speakers, Daniel Borrillo, Professor University of Paris, Svend Robinson, M.P., Burnaby-Douglas BC, and Cynthia Petersen, Human Rights Lawyer, Toronto.

Plenary sessions included keynote addresses by Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who spoke on *Human Rights and Foreign Policy*, and Francine Fournier, Assistant Director-General, Sector for Human Rights and Services, UNESCO, who spoke on *The Universality of Human Rights and Education for Human Rights*. On Friday, Lloyd Axworthy's address was followed by two plenary panel discussions, *Recognizing the Inherent Dignity and Rights of Women: A Mirage in the Distance?* chaired by Roberta Jamieson, Ombudsman of Ontario, speakers, Fatoumata Siré Diakit , President, Association pour le progr s et la d fense des droits des femmes maliennes, Mali, Michelle Falardeau-Ramsay, Chief Commissioner, Human Rights Commission, Canada, and Pamela Jefferies, Chief Commissioner, Human Rights Commission, New Zealand. On Saturday, there were two further plenary panels, on *Human Rights and Indigenous People: A Global Search for Justice*, chaired by J. Wilton Littlechild, Advisor to the United Nations on Aboriginal Issues, Canada, speakers, Jaun Le n, founder of the National Front of Human Rights Organizations of Guatemala, Olga Havnen, Human Rights Activist Australia, and Doreen Spence, Executive Director, Canadian Indigenous Women's Research Institute, and *Meeting the Challenges: Disability, Poverty and Children in Need*, chaired by Gary McPherson, Former Chair, Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Alberta, speakers, Midge Cuthill, Project Coordinator, Poverty In Action, Alberta, David Lepofsky, Counsel, Ministry of the Attorney General, Ontario, Zuhy Sayeed, President, Albert Association for Community Living. The Conference terminated with a resume of the proceedings by Professor Gerald Gall, one of the organizers of the Conference.

A special Youth Conference, *Leaders of Tomorrow- Awakening the World to Human Rights*, was also held on Saturday afternoon.

To summarize a conference with so much content in a few paragraphs is a daunting task. One general theme developed during the Conference: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been the basis of many constitutional and legislative instruments which protect human rights and freedoms throughout the world. This progress should be celebrated. However, speakers emphasize that in celebrating success, the world community cannot lose sight of the enormity of the work that remains to be done. Speakers reminded those attending that even in Canada, where basic human rights are protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the continued existence of poverty, and discrimination (especially as regards some women and aboriginals), continues to deprive many people of basic rights. Developments in biotechnology have outpaced the development of ethical principles to guide their use, and risk infringing basic human rights. Conflicts between protection of human rights and globalization and the development and extraction of natural resources were discussed. Ed Broadbent urged Canada to pass legislation making it an offence for a Canadian company to deny basic human rights to any worker employed by that company anywhere in the world. Human Rights Activists, some of whom had themselves suffered imprisonment for expressing their beliefs, reminded those gathered that in many nations, and despite express provisions in constitutional documents, millions are denied basic human rights and are being tortured and imprisoned for the expression of their beliefs. Several speakers, including Canada's Foreign Minister, Lloyd Axworthy, referred to the importance of the International Criminal Court to deal with breaches of humanitarian laws. Also discussed was the impact of the recent decision of the House of Lords in the Pinochet case. Justice Rosalie Abella reminded the audience of the distinction between civil rights and individual basic human rights. She advised that democratic rights, or the civil rights of the majority should not be permitted to diminish the basic human rights of the individual which permit the individual to work and live in the community without discrimination because of individual difference or diversity. Of necessity, this is just a sampling of the many challenging issues which were dealt with during the conference.

Undoubtedly, the highlight of the Conference came on Friday evening with the speeches by the Chief Justice of Canada, Antonio Lamer, Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Archbishop Emeritus, and Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa, Desmond Tutu. Chief Justice Lamer discussed the role of the judiciary in ensuring the protection of human rights as well as the educational role being played by Canadian Judges who are assisting judges from developing democracies in establishing judicial systems which respect principles of judicial independence and impartiality.

In her address, Mary Robinson indicated that despite many successes since the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, much work remained to be done. Stating that the main task which faced the world on the 50th anniversary was to breathe new life into the declaration to face the challenges of the future, she gave some examples of continuing problems: discrimination based on race and religion, trafficking in women and children, the lack of drinking water and basic medical care, illiteracy, and lack of education, and poverty.

Desmond Tutu, in a moving address, referred to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as beacon in the fight against apartheid. He thanked Canada for its opposition to apartheid, stating: "That victory would have been totally impossible without the miracle of your love and support." Desmond Tutu also spoke of the importance of the process of reconciliation, which South Africa is now undergoing, indicating that the objectives were to confront the past and, "to acknowledge wrong,,and find redemption and absolution in admitting to the evil which was done." He indicated that South Africa could have chosen another path wreaking revenge—by bringing criminal charges against the authors of apartheid, but that this would have condemned South Africa to repeating the past.