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CONFLICT, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

Human and Refugee Rights: New Challenges for Canada

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When I grabbed a belatedly-issued UN pass and rushed into a conference room in the morning of March 26, 1999, the meeting was already in full swing with a "passionate" intervention by The Hon. Hedy Fry, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women. Breaking down decades-old conventionalities, Ottawa sensibly sent a female minister to lead its large delegation to the 65th session of the Human Rights Committee, the monitoring body of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Hon. Fry introduced Canada's voluminous fourth periodic report to the Committee of 18 experts, and responded to a long list of issues which had been prepared by the Committee working group prior to the meeting. Teaming up with competent federal and provincial officials, she seemed confident and eloquent.

Canada is generally recognized as a leader in human rights. It was, therefore, not surprising that the delegation showed an array of measures adopted to give effect to the rights in the Covenant and the progress made in the enjoyment of those rights in this country.

Like many other state representatives, however, the Canadian delegation was not fully aware that the Human Rights Committee is not a fora for officials to only brag about their proud achievements in respective countries. In fact, a primary mandate of the Committee in examining periodic state reports is to identify the factors and difficulties affecting the full implementation of the Covenant and issue relevant recommendations with a view of inducing state parties to comply with the obliga-

tions provided therein. Thus, Justice Rosalyn Higgins, a former member of the Committee, points out that

[w]hile violations are manifestly more severe in certain places than in others, the Committee has yet to find a country fully conforming with its human rights obligations. (Higgins 1996)

She, then, laments the fact that very few countries treat contact with the Committee as "an opportunity to make sure that everything is as it should be, that things

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