

**SPEAKING NOTES
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**ON THE OCCASION OF A SPECIAL SCREENING OF THE DOCUMENTARY
“WOMEN IN SHROUD”
IN RECOGNITION OF *HUMAN RIGHTS DAY***

OTTAWA, DECEMBER 10, 2009

Ambassador Geerts,
Honourable Justices,
Honourable Senators and Members of Parliament,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we celebrate the sixty first anniversary of the adoption and proclamation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by the United Nations. December 10th was designated *Human Rights Day* two years later, in 1950.

The anniversary is also a celebration of international cooperation; the celebration of an historic achievement. Now translated into over 360 languages, the *Declaration* stands as the key expression of the world’s commitment to human rights. It established the basis for other, more detailed human rights instruments throughout the world. Constitutions and human rights legislation in many cases make reference to the *Declaration*. It influenced Canada’s *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and has been an important document for consideration by Canadian courts.

I am particularly pleased to note that Canada and my home province of New Brunswick played a role in the development of this touchstone of human rights, with John Peters Humphrey being one of the key individuals involved in drafting the document.

This year, the focus of Human Rights Day is on non-discrimination. “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. These first few famous words of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* set the basic premise of international human rights law.

The fight against discrimination remains a daily struggle for millions around the globe. As it states in the preamble, the *Universal Declaration* is meant to serve as “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this *Declaration* constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.”

Tonight's move, entitled *Women in Shroud*, brings into focus some of the extreme difficulties women still experience. It was directed by a Canadian, Farid Haerinejad, who currently works as a producer and editor for television and radio at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He has over ten years of experience in broadcast journalism for radio and television, both in Canada and internationally. Haerinejad's recent work has been internationally recognized and he was awarded a silver medal at the New York Film Festival. Haerinejad studied Russian language and literature in Moscow and broadcast journalism in Canada.

Canada has played a strong role internationally in the field of human rights, and that tradition continues. While our work in promoting human rights both at home and abroad is not yet finished, we celebrate the 61st anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in the knowledge that each year sees additional progress being made.

In closing, I want to thank you all for coming this evening and hope that you will find in tonight's special screening a reminder of the importance of human rights protections.