

**THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE**

**Reflections on the 60th Anniversary of the adoption of the
*Universal Declaration of Human Rights***

December 10, 2008

December 10th, 2008 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations' adoption and proclamation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. December 10th is now designated *Human Rights Day*.

The anniversary is also a celebration of international cooperation; the celebration of an historic achievement. Now translated into over 360 languages, for 60 years, the *Declaration* has stood 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. It has been referenced in many constitutions and in human rights legislation. It influenced Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and has been an important document for consideration by Canadian courts.

Throughout my career – as professor at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, as chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, and as Senator and now Speaker of the Senate of Canada – I have always been aware that much of the progress the world has made in the field of human rights would not have been possible without the work of John Peters Humphrey, the man who wrote the first draft of the *Universal Declaration*. I am particularly pleased to note that my home province of New Brunswick played a role in the development of this touchstone of human rights.

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is written in plain language, is easy to understand, and yet speaks to the most fundamental rights that every human being should enjoy. It is certainly one of the most significant instruments produced in the history of the struggle for the assertion of human liberties. Pope John Paul II described the *Universal Declaration* as “one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time.”

This year’s theme for celebrating Human Rights Day is “Dignity and justice for all of us.”⁽¹⁾ This theme emphasizes the *Universal Declaration* as a commitment to the universal dignity and to the justice that applies to all persons. It reminds us of Article 1 of the *Declaration* which guarantees that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

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.”

I ask you to join me in recognizing this noteworthy anniversary and the important role that many Canadians, and Canada as a country, have played in promulgating Human Rights around the world.

⁽¹⁾ United Nations, Internet site, <http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/2007/> (accessed : 27 November 2008).