

instrument, if women use that power device sincerely, it will be the essence of how great our accomplishment can be.

I have travelled around the world. I have seen other societies, other groups across different nations. It sort of sets a stage for what we have in Canada. In our party we have the whole idea of equality of opportunity and I really believe in it. It is interesting when we think about people like Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of a former president of the United States, who said: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent". I feel that way about being a woman.

• (1055)

I feel that women have certain natural talents. That does not make us better than men. It just makes us as good as we can be. It gives us the capacity for nurturing, the capacity for co-operation, the capacity for vision, and the capacity for sharing. We are not keeping the power to ourselves but we are sharing the power. The use of a power in a very positive way is a dynamic that women bring to politics, to business and to social development. It is a different style. It is not better. It does not create inequity. It creates the greatest opportunity for women.

If we look back through history to when women in Canada received the right to vote, no one handed it to them. No one made us persons without the struggle of women. Women themselves went out and put up the fight to gain that right, to gain that recognition. We have fought some big battles. They are not battles between the sexes. They are battles for human dignity. They are battles of the individual fitting in society in a way that expresses true human rights and dignity: the right to work, the right to raise children in an environment that is safe and clean, and the right to raise our heads among others without feeling shame or disgrace even when there are problems. That is the kind of country we live in. That is the kind of democracy for which people fight and in fact in some countries for which people have died.

I come from a family in which women play a very predominate role. The men play an equal role in their own area, but I am talking about women today. I am not saying it is just our day. In fact all the men here today can have the honour of being honorary women if they so desire.

The whole issue of economic empowerment is a different dynamic. Many would say that business is a man's world. That is changing. We no longer have a single income society. We have a double income society. People are working, partnering and sharing. There are children to look after and there are competitive forces that impact on families, communities, regions and the country as a whole. Women are major contributors. Not only do women see the necessity of their positive participation. Men also see the positive contributions made by women. It is necessary. It is absolutely necessary.

Supply

Women make up 52 per cent of the population. I was in Copenhagen. Empowerment to me is reaching out and having the human experience of realizing the differences, of building tolerance, of building acceptance and of approving of people's differences linguistically, culturally, socially and economically. We are all people.

I was empowered by seeing other women. I had the opportunity to listen to female leaders and male leaders from around the world. On International Women's Day there was much mention that despite the fact women make up 52 per cent of the population they account for 70 per cent of the world's poor. If women account for 70 per cent of the world's poor, implicit in that is that children are involved. There are more women in female centred living circumstances or families than there are males.

We realize the imperative of empowering women. For instance, the government in making its appointments to boards and commissions is constantly vigilant and balancing the number of women appointed to boards and commissions, as are other members of this caucus and other members of the House. There is a balance. It is definitely a commitment of the Prime Minister and the cabinet.

• (1100)

There is still a greater opportunity for us to look at some of the most economically related boards, to look at the financial institutions and to be able to appoint women. There are women who are qualified, woman who have years of experience. I have met them, as have other members of the House. They are women with a lot of experience and equality of education, who have two or three degrees. They are women who are not bilingual, but multilingual.

They are multi-faceted women who have a whole range of talents to bring forward to the process, not only empowering their families and themselves but their communities and this country. There is definitely a role for ensuring that women get to the top in partnership with men. It is not either/or. It is better when they work together.

We also understand the right to be recognized as persons was not conferred on us by a special men's club that thought it was time to make women persons. That did not happen. Women took up the fight. Women won that right.

It is a powerful feeling on Persons day every year watching the women being recognized, outstanding citizens in this country, who have contributed not only to themselves but to their communities and to their country and maybe to the world in a sense by setting an example.

The right to vote was not conferred on women because someone decided. It was a hard fought battle. It was something women felt strongly about and they finally won the right to vote.