

Private Members' Business

Canadians can be proud that we have played a role in the drafting and negotiating of this convention. It is imperative that we ensure that our own house is in order so that the rights guaranteed by this international charter are available to all Canadian children. It is important to clarify that this motion does not suggest a specific Canadian charter of rights for children. I am well aware of the jurisdictional problems involved in the detailed negotiations that must go on between the federal government and the provinces to achieve such a charter. It is imperative, however, that we begin negotiations with the provinces to pave the way for Canada to become a signatory to the United Nations convention when it is presented to the UN and for Canada to subsequently ratify the convention.

One of the difficulties we face is that in Canada, among the 10 provinces and two territories, there is a wide range of legislation for the protection and administration of children. Often the legislation varies, sometimes minimally but often substantially. For example, Canadians would agree that a child has a right to an education but education services and educational standards vary from province to province to the territories and falls within the jurisdiction of the provincial and territorial legislatures. In Ontario, children's programs are delivered by three different levels of government. They involve eight administrative bodies located within six government ministries with different criteria determining who gets what from whom. It is not the intent of this motion to provoke a debate on when a child exists. The Prime Minister has promised Canadians a debate on that question and it should quite properly be discussed at that time. In this and any following debate on this motion attention must not be diverted from the needs of Canadian children now.

In putting this discussion in the correct context, we must discuss the draft convention on the rights of the child that is expected to be adopted by the UN General Assembly at its forty-fourth session. In so doing, it is necessary to discuss the situation of children around the world.

It has been widely recognized that children have special needs during their physical and mental develop-

ment and therefore require special care, protection and their own rights.

The family plays a fundamental role in the education and development of the child. It is appalling that more than 40,000 children, primarily in developing countries, continue to die each day from common childhood diseases which we can prevent. It is of deep concern to all Canadians that millions of children live in extreme poverty, suffer from malnutrition, hunger, illness, maltreatment, environmental pollution and lack of social provisions for their physical and mental development.

We as Canadians should also be concerned that they are also the victims of war, are refugees, are homeless and that they suffer as a result of apartheid, other racial discrimination, or of colonial or foreign domination, that they are subject to neglect, physical abuse, abduction, illegal trafficking, drug abuse, or are exploited for the purposes of labour, prostitution or pornography. Even the most basic needs of children for food, clothing and shelter are not guaranteed anywhere in the world.

I mentioned earlier that 40,000 children a day die from starvation, diarrhoea from polluted water, and disease that could be stopped by a single vaccination. UNICEF calls this the silent emergency of 15 million avoidable child deaths each year. It is of particular concern, because the money required to provide adequate food and water, education, health and housing for everyone in the world has been established at \$17 billion. It is a huge sum of money. It is as much as the world spends on weapons every two weeks.

We in Canada cannot afford to be too smug or too complacent about conditions here at home. In Canada it is estimated that one child in five lives below the poverty line. One child in five lives in poverty in this great country of Canada. That is surely preventable.

The recent report of the Canadian Council on Social Development in its 1989 fact book on poverty pointed out that the poverty among young Canadian families has doubled since 1973. The report found that 30 per cent of those living in poverty in Canada are children. That is approximately 1.12 million Canadian children.

There is probably not a community in Canada where children are not among the largest users of food banks.