

Let me tell you about breast cancer. Canada has the world's highest rate of breast cancer.

• (1605)

Finally, the incidence of this terrible disease has constantly increased since the 1960s. Each year, 15,000 new cases of breast cancer are diagnosed, and 5,000 women will die of it this year, that is, one every two hours.

In Quebec alone, 1,500 women will die of this terrible disease. In Canada and in Quebec, a woman has one chance out of ten to develop breast cancer.

A national study, which was published last Thursday, shows that 41 per cent of women in Canada and in Quebec consider breast cancer to be the main threat to their lives.

I think it is about time that we decide to overcome this disease. To do this, we must have a breast screening strategy taking into account both genetics and environmental factors.

This is exactly what emerged from the final report tabled last fall by the national forum on breast cancer in which the health minister took part. This report recommended that national practice directives be adopted immediately to enlighten doctors and promote research and job training. So far, nothing has been undertaken by the government in office.

There is also cardiovascular diseases, which are the main cause of death among women. Indeed, 40 per cent of women will die of cardiac arrest or of cardiovascular complications. Despite these alarming figures, the last budget resulted in cuts to the Tobacco Demand Reduction Strategy.

Resources allotted to this program will decrease from \$185 million to \$81 million. At the very least, this represents a \$104 million reduction, even though the number of smokers continues to rise, especially among women. We know that smoking increases the risks of cardiovascular complications. However, members will remember that tobacco control once was the health minister's favourite theme.

There were reports recently, and again today, in the media about the terrible problem relating to genital mutilation which is wreaking havoc in several countries around the world and is even practised here, in our society. The government is not addressing this crucial issue and we are wondering what it is waiting for.

Quebec has already showed leadership by announcing that it will criminalize this action and sue everyone guilty of genital mutilation. The federal government refuses to clearly add genital mutilation in the Criminal Code, despite the repeated requests made by the official opposition and the government of Quebec and the fact that several European countries and states in the U.S. have already taken such measures.

Supply

When can we expect a truly good health system for women? I still remember when birth control was not well known and was hard to get. I remember when women's diseases were considered a normal part of women's lives and their imaginary disorders. I remember when knives were used way too often. We only have to think about all the unnecessary hysterectomies that were performed.

Of course you will tell me that times have changed, that today's policies stress the importance of addressing social and economic problems recognized as being directly related to health. But how are words translated into action? Far from improving, the status of women is even deteriorating.

For years, women's health centres in Quebec have been repeating that the social and economic conditions of women, poverty, the double workload, violence and discrimination are all problems that a pill will not solve.

The solution for women is to eliminate poverty because there is a direct link between poverty and health. Statistics have clearly shown that low income people are sick more often than others.

• (1610)

In this year of tolerance, the International Women's Day that we celebrated last week compels us to have greater respect for ourselves and for others. Women have demonstrated throughout history that they have this extraordinary capacity to obtain a consensus. Our modern societies, whose only values now seem to be those generated by the globalization of economic and cultural markets, need more than ever the involvement of women as mediators.

In the name of profitability, our societies exclude more and more people and fuel the rise of several forms of fundamentalism. Because they are the very ones with the sensitivity and the ability to do it, women will have to assert themselves to lead a successful battle against poverty and radicalization.

I will close my remarks by addressing the women of Quebec, to whom I want to deliver this message. In a few months, we will have a crucial decision to make, a decision that will have a lasting impact on our future. My wish would be to see the women of Quebec taking part actively in this historic moment because no country can be built without the voice, the will and the consent of women. And the new society that we see rising on the horizon must include the women of Quebec.

Hon. Sheila Finestone (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the hon. member for being very realistic about the role of women in the political life of a society. They say that when men go into education it is for themselves, whereas women do it for their family, in other words, society.