

*Routine Proceedings*

We see women increasingly going into leadership roles. We are reminded again of the almost trebling of the numbers of women who now hold important positions throughout federal boards, agencies, commissions, and the federal judiciary. We now have a cabinet in which women comprise 20 per cent of the members.

One of the issues that is very close to my heart, and for so many women is a fundamentally important issue in achieving equality, is the issue of violence against women. Our government has applied a policy of zero tolerance toward violence against women both in principle and in action.

• (1540)

In the work of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women we will have the opportunity to set forward a national action plan. This is in addition to the over 1,300 projects which we have supported through the family violence initiative, which is helping to change and improve the lives of women and children in this country. Amendments to the gun control act, parole laws and Criminal Code provisions relating to sexual assault are all helping to provide better protection for women.

International Women's Day in 1993 is dedicated to ensuring that women's continuing efforts to achieve equality are taken account of both in the concept and practice of human rights. I applaud all those who are working to achieve that objective: women in this Chamber and women across the country operating within governments, in the private sector, in community organizations and women's groups at the grassroots level. They have all been part of this growing energy and this growing commitment. I applaud them for they are working to achieve that objective of ensuring equality for women both in Canada and around the world.

I know I share with all colleagues in this House the belief that this will come. It is our time and each of us will make a difference to ensure that it happens.

**Mrs. Beryl Gaffney (Nepean):** Mr. Speaker, I am also very pleased to speak on behalf of the opposition party in the House of Commons today on the occasion of International Women's Day 1993.

I listened very intently to the minister's remarks. I was pleased to learn that the theme chosen by the federal government for International Women's Day this year is

"Women's Rights are Human Rights". As the official opposition critic for human rights and associate critic for the status of women I have long maintained that these two portfolios are intricately related. I would like to take the opportunity to address the issue of human rights and women and look at how women are faring both domestically and internationally.

The rights to food, shelter, property, social security, health care, employment and religious and political freedom are women's basic human rights. The fact that women are the gender most likely to be denied these rights is indicative of the battle women throughout the world face.

Nowhere is the sad truth more apparent today than in the ongoing war in the former Yugoslavia. Every day more stories emerge detailing the atrocities being committed. Of grave concern is the systematic detention and gang rape of Muslim women in Bosnia. There is now proof that at least 20,000 Muslim Bosnian women have been terrorized, brutalized, forced to bear their attackers' children and often murdered. This constitutes a human rights violation of the highest magnitude.

Unfortunately the tragedy of Bosnia-Herzegovina is not an isolated case. In March 1991 Amnesty International released its report *Women in the Front Line, Human Rights Violations Against Women*. The report records the experiences of female survivors and casualties of human rights atrocities world-wide. Grave violations of human rights were found to have been committed by governments with widely varying ideologies in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Pacific, Europe and the Middle East. The report documents cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment, specifically directed at women. These abuses may affect their physical, mental and emotional well-being, their role in the family or their cultural environment. Women's rights must be a major element of Canada's international aid policy.

The minister outlined some of the ways her government has tried to enhance this policy, yet all too often we see countries with atrocious human rights records receiving huge amounts of Canadian aid. The minister mentioned some of the terrible statistics regarding women in the world the poverty and poor health, lack of education and child mortality rates. However, she forgot to mention that her own government is proposing a new