

S.O. 21

STATEMENTS PURSUANT TO S.O. 21

[English]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

REVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr. Jack Masters (Thunder Bay-Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, International Women's Day has been celebrated by women of all nations for more than 70 years. When International Women's Day was first celebrated in 1911, Canadian women in most provinces were still struggling for suffrage, and were not even considered persons in the eyes of the law.

Traditionally on this day Members of this House have taken time to acknowledge the legislative milestones that have been passed on the road to full equality and to remind us that there is still a way to go. We have learned that legislative action, while essential, does not automatically result in changes in ways of thinking.

I would like to focus on the initiatives presently under way in Canada as we look forward to the 1985 World Conference marking the end of the United Nations Decade for Women. As we celebrate International Women's Day, the U. N. Commission for the Status of Women is meeting in Vienna as the preparatory body for the 1985 World Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the U. N. Decade for Women.

My colleague, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, has just returned from these meetings, and has committed this country to the development of a new Canadian plan of action for the Status of Women. This plan, to be tabled at the 1985 World Conference, will cover two very essential periods of history.

I cannot over emphasize our ongoing commitment to the achievement of equality. The work that was started must continue. We view the participation of women in the public life of our country as essential. We join today with women from all countries—

Mr. Speaker: I regret to interrupt the Hon. Member, but his time has expired.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, today is International Women's Day. It may seem somewhat anachronistic that in this so-called age of equality we still have to designate a day to focus attention on the struggle for equal rights for women.

This day commemorates the events of March 8, 1908, when a fire in a New York garment factory caused the tragic deaths of female workers whose employers locked the doors during working hours. These women died because they were trapped.

Our society has come a long way since that time, but many women are still trapped by the economic and social realities of today. For instance, older women, trapped in poverty, because of inadequate or non-existent pensions; low income women, trapped in job ghettos with little or no hope of advancement, and single parent mothers, trapped in a daily struggle for survival because maintenance payments are not forthcoming for them and their children. Indian women have lost their status, trapped by discrimination and inequities not of their own making.

As long as these conditions persist there will be a need to call attention to the injustices still facing women. It is important to do so on March 8, International Women's day, but it is equally important to do so every other day of the year.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

MEASURES FOR ELIMINATION OF OBSTACLES TO EQUALITY

Mr. Michel Veillette (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, International Women's Day has been celebrated in all countries for more than seventy years. In fact, when the first International Women's Day was held in 1911, in most of our provinces Canadian women were still fighting for the right to vote and were not even considered to be persons in the eyes of the law. Traditionally, on March 8, Hon. Members take a few moments to consider what had to be done over the years to obtain full equality, and to reflect on what remains to be done. Mr. Speaker, we know from experience that, although essential, legislation alone does not necessarily bring about a change in thinking. Attitudes and behaviour solidly anchored in a society will change only under constant and increasing pressure.

Today, however, I would prefer to forget the past and draw the attention of the Hon. Members to current activities in Canada in preparation for the World Conference that will mark the end of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1985. On International Women's Day, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is meeting in Vienna, as the agency responsible for preparing the World Conference in 1985 that will review and evaluate the results of the United Nations Decade for Women.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Parliamentary Secretary. The Hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr. Domm).