

Statements by Ministers

the new Official Languages Act and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. A Canada that at all times and in all circumstances works hard to eliminate racial discrimination at home and abroad.

[English]

A Canada, Mr. Speaker, that is able to face up to the mistakes of the past, and so become better prepared to face the challenges of the future.

I am tabling at this time the specific terms of the Government's historic agreement with the National Association of Japanese Canadians. I will meet later this morning with the President of the National Association of Japanese Canadians and some of his colleagues who are with him today to formalize this special agreement.

Most of us in our own lives have had occasion to regret certain things that we have done. Error is an ingredient of humanity, so too is apology and forgiveness. We all have learned from personal experience that as inadequate as apologies are they are the only way we can cleanse the past so that we may, as best we can, in good conscience face the future.

I know that I speak for Members on all sides of the House today in offering to Japanese Canadians the formal and sincere apology of this Parliament for those past injustices against them, against their families, and against their heritage, and our solemn commitment and undertaking to Canadians of every origin that such violations will never again in this country be countenanced or repeated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): It is an honour for me to rise on behalf of my colleagues in the Liberal Party caucus in response to the very historic announcement made only moments ago by the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). My Leader finds himself in Vancouver this morning and, unfortunately, will not be in a position to respond in kind on the floor of the House of Commons. However, he will be making a statement from Vancouver on this very historic announcement later in the day.

As the Prime Minister indicated, the Minister of State for Multiculturalism and Citizenship (Mr. Weiner) will be revealing the details of this redress package later today. I have yet to see those details, but I trust that they will be in keeping with the aspirations articulated so well for so long by the National Association of Japanese Canadians, and agreeable to the Japanese Canadian citizens and residents in that very proud community.

Towards that end, I am pleased today that the federal Government and this Parliament has moved to redress the injustices that were inflicted against an important and integral part of our Canadian society, Canadian citizens who happen to be of Japanese ancestry. In doing so, it closes the chapter of what was a very sad and sensitive memory in our history.

While one's home, land, and business once lost can never be replaced, and while being evicted from one's own community and separated from one's own family and friends leaves a deep and emotional scar that can never be completely erased from the soul of those Canadian citizens, today's commitment by Government and by Parliament will serve as best as possible to heal those very deep wounds and concerns.

Moreover, today's actions are underlined by an important and symbolic message, a message of fairness and justice for all, that this nation stands for equality for all Canadians, and that there can only be, and must only be, one first-class citizenship for all Canadians.

It is with a great sense of pride and history, therefore, that I am able to speak on behalf of my Party and join the Prime Minister in issuing this most important apology to the Japanese Canadian community of Canada.

It is not a sign of weakness for a country to render this apology. Instead, it is a sure sign of strength and a sign of reflection of our country's commitment to try wherever and however to right our wrongs, not merely for the sake of correcting the history books but, more important perhaps, to establish important standards that will serve Canadians today and future generations of Canadians tomorrow. In addition, today's actions are not so much about a multicultural issue as much as about an issue of Canadian justice.

In closing, I wish to pay a special tribute and commend Mr. Art Miki, his colleagues from the National Association of Japanese Canadians, and its members and friends in the Japanese Canadian community at large, for their never ending determination and deep belief in the cause that they carried so well for so long. Today's resolution, no doubt, is a tribute to their sense of purpose, but it is also an appropriate response to those who continue to question the legitimacy and motivation of the leadership of the National Association of Japanese Canadians.

It is also fitting that the Prime Minister pointed out the pivotal role played behind the scenes by our Hon. Speaker who, to I can say publicly to him, offered us a sense of encouragement in the day-to-day questions that we posed on the floor of the House of Commons over the last four years. I join in saluting our Hon. Speaker, and indeed the other Members of Parliament who may not be making a statement this morning but who nevertheless played a significant role.

Finally, on this historic day, we cannot forget the many Japanese Canadians who were interned but who are no longer with us, unfortunately. Their children refuse to forget the hardships of their forefathers. It would have been my hope, indeed it would have been our collective hope, that they too could be with us today to witness and be part of the day that they had dearly longed for.