

had been promised. This will not happen any longer, because the changes proposed today will ensure the application of clear and uniform criteria across the country.

[English]

The changes proposed by the witness protection program act will help ensure that both the applicants who enter the program and the RCMP which operates it have a clear understanding of their rights and obligations. The legislative initiative defines a range of protective services and benefits that can be provided. It makes the program more transparent and more accountable.

The process of how one gets into the program has been clearly defined.

• (1150)

A decision to admit an applicant to the RCMP SWPP, as it is called, will be based on the following factors: the potential contribution the witness source can make toward a particular police investigation; the nature of the offence under investigation; the nature of the risk to the individual; alternative methods of protection that are available; danger to the community if the individual is admitted to the program; the potential effects on any family relationships; the likelihood of the individual being able to adjust to the program, that is the maturity of that individual, the maturity of their judgment and other personal characteristics, as well as the cost of maintaining the individual in the program; and any other factor the commissioner of the RCMP may deem relevant.

Under the witness protection act there will be a clear decision making process to admit an individual into the program. In serious cases such as those requiring a change of identity or admission of a foreign applicant, the decision to admit an individual can only be made by the assistant commissioner in charge of the program. A decision to terminate protection must also be made by the assistant commissioner. In less serious cases the decision to admit an individual can be taken at the chief superintendent level. There are protections built into the legislation.

I am proud to say that more than any previous administration the government is committed to reducing violence in our society, specifically violence against women and crime motivated by hatred or bias against any of the vulnerable groups, particularly those which are listed in section 15 of the charter.

Violence is not a phenomenon that can be encompassed or dealt with in one big bold stroke. It is a complex problem with multiple causes and multiple effects. It touches all levels of society and all regions of the country. The whole program was worked out with all regions of the country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic, and that includes Quebec in the portrait. That is why the government is taking a comprehensive approach involving several federal departments.

### *Government Orders*

In the past year a whole series of measures have been tabled by ministers, reinforcing our commitment to address the problem of violence. As the solicitor general has said, the government has instituted many new measures to make our homes and our streets safer. Members will recall that in our red book, safe homes and safe streets was one of our major undertakings and a commitment which we have met with great sincerity and alacrity.

I mention a few measures which are extremely important to women: measures against criminal harassment, commonly called the anti-stalking law; the firearms control legislation; the reform of the sentencing process; and the reform of the Young Offenders Act.

[Translation]

These widely varying initiatives have one common goal: to reduce violence and crime in our society. That objective is set out clearly in the federal gender equality plan, moreover, prepared under the auspices of the commission on the status of women, reporting to me as secretary of state, and tabled early this summer. Cabinet has been solidly behind this undertaking.

The federal plan also calls for the Canadian government to undertake a comparative analysis by gender of all of these initiatives. A similar endorsement was given at the fourth international congress for women in Beijing. This comparative analysis by gender indicates how policies affect men and women differently. I must say that I see this as an eminently logical undertaking.

In some cases, these differences are central to policy and play a determinant role in its application. In others they have a minor impact and are only one of a series of factors that must be taken into consideration.

[English]

In the spirit of the federal plan for gender equality we must ensure that the specific needs of women who qualify are considered in the application of the RCMP sources and witness protection program. We have a tendency to think of the world of criminals and organized crime as a man's world, but that is not entirely true. Unfortunately hundreds of women are in contact with this violent world and many are dreaming of getting out of it, just like the men, if only they could do so safely.

• (1155)

These women could become vital sources of information for police and prosecutors. However they are vulnerable to fear, to intimidation and blackmail. They have to think not only about their own personal safety but in most cases they also have to be concerned with the protection of their children.

Women should know that under section 2 of the witness protection program act, protection may include relocation for themselves and their families, accommodation and change of identity, as well as counselling and financial support. The objective of the program is to ensure the safety and the security