

Oral Questions

The trade and investment sanctions will be lifted when there are appropriate transitional mechanisms agreed to by all the parties. It is our hope that there will be an all-party conference in the near future, but we do not want to prejudge at this point what those transitional arrangements might be.

We are pleased to see some progress. We are looking for more, and once those transitional arrangements are in place, we will be happy to take further steps as outlined in the Commonwealth report.

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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

As the minister responsible for children, I would like to ask the minister a very simple question. Does the minister agree with his colleague, the Minister for International Trade, who last week claimed that no man, woman or child goes without adequate medical care, decent shelter or proper food in Canada, or does he believe the over 500 delegates at the Canada's children conference who told him today that it is a national scandal that there are over one million children living in poverty in Canada.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I would agree that as long as there is one child in this country having a problem with poverty or violence, there is a problem. I agree with that. I said that on Monday and I repeated it this morning. But the fact of the matter is, we have to find the answers. The answers have to be based upon the fact that we have the capacity to provide even more than \$15 billion a year by all departments of this government.

But I call on my friend to help me to find a way. He knows very well when 250,000 people lose their jobs in Ontario, it means more poor people, more poor children. If we can give these people a chance to find jobs in a good economy, we give a chance to the children of Canada.

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that from the minister. Perhaps the next time he is sitting beside the Minister for

International Trade in cabinet he could explain a few things to him and maybe we will see some solutions for Canada's children.

Later this year Canada will ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This convention commits Canada to recognizing "the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."

The government has capped social assistance contributions for over half of Canada's poor, deindexed critical social programs, cut back education, health funding and equalization payments and renege on its commitment regarding child care.

I ask the minister if he can explain to us how these measures will fulfil the commitments this government has undertaken under the UN convention.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I simply repeat the commitment I made at the United Nations, that we expect the convention to be ratified by the end of 1991. That is within this year. That was the undertaking I made on behalf of the Government of Canada and it will be respected.

One of the problems we have is to make sure it is accepted and implemented within areas of provincial jurisdiction. In Saskatchewan, for example, I believe we are still waiting for a response. I am sure that the new government, upon its swearing in, will deal with this on a priority basis. As soon as it signifies its intention to fully ratify the provisions that apply provincially, we will make certain the rest of it is done.

We view our commitment to children as an extremely high priority, not only for the government but for all members of the House. My hon. friend suggests that we have been cutting back. The Minister of Finance has just indicated, contrary to the contention, that transfer payments by the federal government to the provinces, transfers to children, to the elderly, to welfare and so on, have increased by 50 per cent in seven years. The total amount is some \$12.5 billion.

• (1450)

I want to point out to my hon. friend, when he is talking about the problems of children, these are not because we have cut back—perhaps as a nation we haven't done enough—but we have increased dramati-