

Routine Proceedings

I am proud to say Canada played a leadership role in securing a strong agreement on the rights of women and girls in Beijing, which was signed by 189 nations attending the conference.

[English]

I am also proud to say that Canada's leadership on equality was recognized with two awards: a prestigious United Nations prize for advancing literacy, thanks to the initiatives in New Brunswick; and Canada was honoured with the global award for the most improvement in the status of women over the last decade. In making the award the International Federation of Business and Professional Women commended Canada for its steady and remarkable progress in advancing equality for women. This was acknowledged and awarded after 110 countries were carefully examined. Canada was not found wanting. Canada was found head of the pack.

The way to the future is clear. Canadians must continue that progress to a true partnership between women and men. This is imperative as we face an increasingly complex global society.

In closing, I want to extend my heartiest congratulations to the six women who were honoured today. Each of them were pioneers in their own way. Each of them fought against violence and fought for an integrated and accepting society. We owe them a great debt of gratitude. I extend them my best regards.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Quebec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak about this victory for women which my colleague, the hon. secretary of state, has pointed out was a concrete step toward equality for women. The 1929 legal victory was an important step in this egalitarian undertaking, I agree. It represented a significant milestone in terms of democracy.

Other victories followed, as we know, perhaps less striking ones but equally important: women's influx into the work force; improved education for women; their entry into non traditional employment; the creation of daycare services; their presence on various boards, I could go on and on. yes, Canadian women and Quebec women have made progress, and they must be congratulated and encouraged to continue.

I shall make use of this opportunity to explain to my colleagues why, very soon, Quebec women will be deciding to continue their progress on their own. Although they have made definite progress, as I have said, the women of Quebec will be able to progress a little faster on their own, with the weight of the federalist yoke lifted from their shoulders.

Quebec women will be well protected by the Quebec charter of human rights, which will reaffirm equality and the rights of women. They will continue to be well served by the civil law

system, under which they have equal status and equal rights with men.

In a sovereign Quebec, Quebec women will be ensured of the survival and the dynamism of their language and culture. They will no longer have to worry about the survival from generation to generation of things I know are of concern to them: culture, language, education, and employment. Quebec women will continue to progress under a democratic political regime, with an equal say in drafting the constitution of their new country, with their rights to equality reaffirmed.

Quebec women will make even more gains under a democratic Quebec, within a system in which social rights will be the focus of the state's actions. They will benefit from a family policy focused on their needs and those of their children, a policy free of the constraints imposed by the present federal system, which makes policy harmonization impossible.

Mrs. Finestone: Really.

Mrs. Gagnon (Québec): Please, madam secretary of state.

In a sovereign Quebec, free of Ottawa's centralizing goals, women will clearly benefit from a policy of full employment coupled with a social policy that reflects the effect of their participation in the working world. I am talking here of policy on child care, working conditions in keeping with family responsibilities and employment equity. Where are the daycare places so long promised by the federal government? They were promised, and we are still waiting. Yet we are paying the federal government to have these places created.

Quebec women will have the advantage of a unique system of manpower planning and training. They will have the benefit of a system that is decentralized in favour of the regions, the prime sources of human and business activity.

Finally, Quebec women will move far beyond the endless battles and constitutional red tape and will focus their energies on improving the quality of their life, that of their children, their husband and their fellow Quebecers. This was the request of the participants in the women's march on poverty, last June's bread and roses march, which was undertaken on behalf of all Quebec women. This is what the Government of Quebec is proposing and is committed to promoting.

In conclusion, Quebec women will quicken their step toward equality by dropping a level of government, which is preparing to sacrifice them on the altar of economics and which is preparing to impose cuts on their old age pension and unemployment insurance cheques, by tying these benefits to the family salary in the new reform of social programs. They will drop a level of government that is useless, costly and more concerned about the interests of major corporations than about the grocery bill of single parent families.