

—there tends to be agreement that young girls put pressure on mothers to do it.

As long as such social pressures continue to exist, the Criminal Code is of limited value in this fight. I understand the argument that a specific provision of the code would draw greater public attention to the offence, but we must recognize that education is the best tool to make Canadians understand the barbarity of this custom.

To recap, the existing Criminal Code provisions are adequate in so far as the problem can be addressed through the code. A progressive and an aggressive campaign of public information is crucial.

• (1845)

The attorney general in Ontario has a task force on female genital mutilation. We have to study the recommendations and at this point I look forward and will not rule out having a specific Criminal Code offence on this issue.

I am very grateful to the member for allowing me to add my voice with women and men in this country and around the world and say this is a barbaric practice that has to be stopped. I am very glad we have people willing to stand up and talk very openly about these issues which have been for too long left undebated.

I really appreciate being able to stand in a public forum like this to discuss something so normally sensitive an issue and say with conviction this is an issue that violates our human rights. I am proud Canada is speaking out about this. I put my support behind whatever tools are out there to eradicate this offence.

I will give very hard thought to how I will vote on this issue because I have not yet made up my mind as to whether I will vote in support of the existing Criminal Code amendments. I know they are useful. I have concerns about limiting the length of time and I wish the members opposite to know those concerns.

[Translation]

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse, BQ): Madam Speaker, first of all, I wish to commend the hon. member for Québec for putting forward this bill and convincing the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to make it a votable item. This issue speaks to our fundamental values. I also wish to thank the hon. member for providing me with extensive documentation on the subject.

This issue concerns me as a citizen and a parliamentarian, of course, but also as the father of a 16-year old daughter. I shudder at the thought that, had she been born in a different country, in a different culture, she could have been subjected to the same treatment.

It is surprising and even astounding that the Canadian Criminal Code criminalizes cockfights but contains no specific provi-

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sions against female genital mutilation, because it is indeed a form of mutilation. We should not fool ourselves or try to hide behind euphemisms. Female circumcision is simply a euphemism designed to take the edge off a cruel reality. There is no comparison between male circumcision, which can even be a religious rite in some regards, and female genital mutilation. We talked earlier about the full or partial excision of the clitoris. We talked about infibulation, in which healthy organs are mutilated on purpose.

There is something absolutely outrageous about this procedure, and I was surprised to hear my colleague, the hon. member for London West, say earlier that the current provisions of the Criminal Code may be adequate, since they cover bodily harm and assaults causing bodily harm. The problem is that these provisions have been in the Criminal Code for a long time. They have been there for so long that people from other cultures who come to Canada and engage in female genital mutilation do not feel at all that they are guilty of causing bodily harm or of assault causing bodily harm.

These people feel, rightly or wrongly, that they are acting in accordance with their culture. The time has come to send them a clear message. We certainly have no mandate to become cultural imperialists, but we can say: "From the moment you cross the Canadian border, here is what the Parliament of Canada has to say. As long as you are on Canadian territory, you must adopt the following value, which we have adopted as our own—if you mutilate the genital organs of a woman, you are guilty of an indictable offence". I will come back later to the penalty which could be imposed.

• (1850)

This is the message that we should first and above all send, a clear, cultural message that, although we accept certain multi-cultural values, and many are acceptable, we have to draw the line somewhere, and we draw it here. We must say: We do not want any of this going on in our country. All the better if others follow our example and take the same legislative approach as we have. But we must send the message loud and clear that we have zero tolerance when it comes to the mutilation of female genital organs. We must make sure that everybody gets the message, because we are not only targeting people from other cultures; we are also targeting people on the inside, people who are culturally already Canadians and who, for one reason or another, are looking for excuses for shirking their responsibilities.

The criminalization of genital mutilation of female persons would involve the application of section 21 of the Criminal Code under which everyone is party to an offence who actually commits it, which includes conspiring to commit the offence, being an accessory and attempting to commit the offence. This