

*Adjournment Debate*

commitment we have put forward. On October 13, there was another extension of that support.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

**Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East):** Mr. Speaker, some months ago, I asked the minister to continue funding the Court Challenges Program. Since then I am happy to report that this program has been extended for five years, although a 10-year extension was requested.

The Court Challenges Program provides financial and legal support for litigation to test selected cases and establish precedents for protection of rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is an essential program for helping disadvantaged groups, including women, natives, visible minority and disabled persons, to achieve a greater degree of equality.

Several cases involving equality rights for women have set important precedents and more are pending. It was essential to extend the funding program since there have been few cases concerned with discrimination against visible minority persons processed.

Barriers to equality continue to exist and racial discrimination remains a most critical and regrettable problem in our country. Many people of colour, including recent immigrants and people who have been here for several generations, do not feel they are accepted as equal citizens in Canadian society. Over the last year racial intolerance and racist incidents have escalated dramatically. Results of February polls showed 54 per cent of Canadians felt there was an increase in racial intolerance.

A study by B'nai Brith found a dramatic 88 per cent increase in incidents of harassment. There were also many media reports of racial discrimination. Blacks and other visible minorities continue to be victims of discrimination and violence in schools and universities. Many job applicants were rejected and humiliated, and promotions were rare.

The percentage of native people in prisons far exceeds their proportion in the general population. Blacks complained about being easy targets for bullets of police officers. Racist pins and bumper stickers were circulated freely. Jewish graves were singled out for desecration.

In addressing a seminar on the rights of the child, John Turvey, a street worker in my riding, said: "Seventy per cent of the kids I see on the streets in the downtown eastside of Vancouver are aboriginal. They make up 5 per cent of the general population. We are a racist culture."

The federal government cannot maintain its innocence regarding racial discrimination. For 10 years an apology and redress for the historic racism of the Chinese head tax and the Chinese Exclusion Act has been outstanding.

Mr. Idris Ben-Tahir and Ms. Mary Pitawanakuat experienced racial harassment in the Public Service. The government's long delay in allowing Sikhs in the RCMP to wear turbans exacerbated overt racism. The government refused to reverse the recent CRTC decision which refused the only black format radio station in Canada, despite its obligations under the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

• (1805)

The inaction of both Quebec and federal governments to prevent and deal with overt racism during the Oka stand-off is a national disgrace. Images of burning natives in effigy, the Ku Klux Klan, racist slogans and rock-throwing are scars on our souls. The Prime Minister's promise of an investigation has been forgotten.

Systemic discrimination continues in the Public Service where only 2.9 per cent of federal employees were visible minorities, compared to 6.3 per cent in the general workforce, this despite a commitment to employment equity. Recently, the Secretary of State refused promised funding for a National Employment Equity Network conference, creating considerable hardship for participants who represented target groups.

I call on the government to make a concerted effort to eliminate racism and discrimination by strengthening and enforcing employment equity and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act by increasing funds so that the Human Rights Commission can do its job; and by increasing, rather than withdrawing funds from advocacy groups that are working for equality. Canada is a multi-racial, multicultural country where all citizens must be equal in reality, not just in rhetoric.