

Canadian laws and values should not be so cheap that we are willing to make compromises for the sake of not offending the sensibilities of others. That should not simply be with regard to female genital mutilation but with regard to any cultural practice that contradicts Canadian laws as well as social and civil practices.

In answer to the above questions I suggest the following: that the only criteria which we as Canadians can use with regard to the judgment of an act are the common beliefs and laws of our land. If this were not the case we should be willing to tolerate all cultural practices from FGM to the cutting off of someone's hand when he or she is caught stealing or the physical abuse of women and children because it is culturally accepted elsewhere.

One might wish to argue at this point that clearly the above acts are either directly or indirectly in violation of our laws and cannot be permissible; therefore, the point is moot. I would suggest, however, that it is inconsistent to fund and encourage some cultural practices while criminalizing others. What we are saying to new Canadians is: "We encourage you to continue to live according to the standards and beliefs of your country of origin, but only those that we find palatable".

A Somali family may wish to have its daughter's genitalia removed because in its culture such a practice meets religious standards or preserves a sense of identity to their community or it is believed to help maintain cleanliness and health or it is believed to preserve virginity and family honour and prevent immorality.

• (1835)

As Canadians do we support such views? I suggest we do not. If we continue to advance the current multicultural policies that we do, we are facilitating a platform from which practices such as FGM can be justified.

I am not trying to imply that we prevent people from promoting their culture of origin privately. It is important in life to have continuity, to know where you are from and who and what has been instrumental in shaping the person that you are and will become.

By making the promotion of foreign cultures a matter of public policy, we are essentially saying that although we have values that are Canadian they do not need to be embraced by those immigrating to Canada as they already have cultural and moral framework that we encourage they uphold.

I wish to applaud the hon. member for coming forward with the proposed bill. I applaud her not only for what the bill means for the women who are subject to what I believe to be an inhuman act but also for the implicit statement it makes about Canada's values and beliefs.

Private Members' Business

As Canadians we must be clear in our condemnation of a practice that is so mutilating. We cannot continue to stand by as the international community perceives us as a nation which tolerates such abuse.

Finally, the Reform Party suggests that the current bill as proposed does not go far enough in its condemnation of the act. We recommend amending the bill at committee in the following manner, that Bill C-277 become an addition to section 267, rather than of section 244, of the Criminal Code. The bill would then read:

Bill C-277 is amended by adding the following after section 267:

267.1 A person who

(a) excises or otherwise mutilates, in whole or in part, the labia majora, labia minora or clitoris of a female person; or

(b) aids, abets, counsels or procures the performance by another person of any of the acts described in paragraph (a) is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.

The hon. member put forward five years. As it stands the bill will codify the act of female genital mutilation as an offence carrying a lesser charge that it might currently carry not codified. Presently a person performing the procedure in Canada could be charged under sections 267 or 268, assault causing bodily harm, but there is no codification.

I thank my hon. colleague from Quebec for having brought forward this most important piece of legislation.

Mrs. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very glad to have the opportunity to speak to this bill.

The perpetuation of the practice of female genital mutilation, while it may be confined to certain communities, has serious implications for all Canadians. Ultimately this is an issue of human rights. As such it concerns us all and we all share the responsibility for putting a stop to it.

When I came to Parliament Hill a year and a half ago I would never have foreseen myself speaking to such an issue. Today I stand here with my blinders removed, having been made to understand in some measure the brutality of this procedure and the devastating physical and emotional impact on the victims. I have risen in the Chamber to speak out on this issue before, as I did in Copenhagen at the interparliamentary union last fall.

It is imperative that we take the strongest possible stand opposing violence in all forms against women, both in Canada and around the world. Female circumcision, as it is so euphemistically called, is the manifestation of an oppressive patriarchal philosophy. It physically mutilates girls and young women, destroying their capacity in the future to enjoy normal sexual relations in order to ensure that they reach a marriageable age in the state of virginity.