

CLERK OF PETITIONS' REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the petition presented by Hon. Members on Thursday, October 17, 1985 meet the requirements of the Standing Orders as to form.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS—STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF STATE
(IMMIGRATION)

Hon. Walter McLean (Minister of State (Immigration)): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join with Members of the House on behalf of the Government to pay tribute to five Canadian women, Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby and Henrietta Muir Edwards.

It was through their strength of will in challenging an interpretation of the British North America Act that 56 years ago today Canadian women were recognized as persons.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLean: As a result, women gained the right to be appointed to the Senate and thus to participate fully in our parliamentary system of Government.

[Translation]

Today, eleven women sit in the Senate, twenty-seven are Members of the House, including six Ministers, and our Head of State is a woman.

[English]

But women's representation in Government is only one measure of what Canadian women have achieved, Mr. Speaker.

Women have proven their ability, commitment and stamina in every field of endeavour, in industry, the professions, the public sector, the arts, academia, in community work and the voluntary sector.

In business, women are making significant inroads. Women now make up 30 per cent of business owners in Canada, a growth of more than 20 per cent since the mid-1960s. I was particularly heartened by the results of a recent Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey, which showed that 42.6 per cent of women employed by Canadian small businesses hold management positions.

But women's struggle for equality is far from over. Women cannot be truly equal if the employer they approach for a job, or the bank manager they ask for a loan, or the coach of their child's hockey team possesses outdated notions of what women can do or, what is worse, what women should or should not do. Women cannot be equal while their career potential is hin-

Statements by Ministers

dered by the lack of affordable quality daycare and if in their older years they are dogged by the insecurity of an inadequate pension system. They cannot aspire to equality if they are left by men to battle for their rights by themselves.

My Government will not leave women to struggle alone. We have made a commitment to integrate women's concerns in all aspects of our policy formulation. We need only look to the two major economic conferences held earlier this year—the First Minister's Conference in February and the National Economic Summit in March—to see evidence of this commitment. For the first time ever, the special concerns of women received full prominence at the discussion table.

Since then, Mr. Speaker, we have undertaken an active program of legislative and policy changes. Our employment equity legislation is leading the way to improve the status of women in the workplace. We have focused on the needs of women in the redesign of our job creation and training programs. We have improved pensions for women to make them more equitable. We have outlawed the discriminatory aspects of the Indian Act, making it possible for 16,000 native women to regain band membership and status.

[Translation]

In the coming months we will deal with other problems of direct interest to women, among them the need to continue our concerted efforts to help women who are victims of family violence.

[English]

In these and many other areas, we are showing strong evidence of our commitment to the goal of full equality for women. This year marks the culmination of the United Nations Decade For Women dedicated to equality, development and peace. As a result of the activities of the last 10 years, there is now a much greater awareness of women's situations, greater advocacy of their rights and greater understanding of their contributions and concerns in Canada and in the rest of the world. The decade has firmly demonstrated that the integration of women in all aspects of society is essential, both for the advancement of women themselves and for the development of society as a whole.

We are now about to embark on the implementation of one of the most significant legacies of the decade for women, the forward-looking strategies that came out of that decade. These strategies, as Members of the House will know, were adopted at the United Nations World Conference on Women in Nairobi three months ago by an unprecedented consensus, a consensus that had eluded the two previous conferences in Mexico City and Copenhagen.

With the forward-looking strategies, all member states of the United Nations have, for the first time in history, pledged themselves to implement a set of strategies designed to enable women to participate fully in all aspects of society. They are, in effect, a blueprint for progress on women's issues for the rest of this century. The strategies are a tool women can use to encourage and indeed, I would suggest, demand Government action on their behalf.