

Canada is committed to a better future for women. We know that our commitment requires tremendous re-direction of financial resources. The assumptions of women's equal place in society, and their need for economic independence, points to a substantial revision of pensions, social security programs and taxation systems.

Moreover, for a better society with women as equal partners with men in its governing as well as in its functions and offices, men must share the responsibility of home and children. We commend the stress placed on this in the formulation of family responsibilities by the Program of Action.

By the end of the Decade we will have completed a careful review, with the provinces, of how all our social and economic policies promote or impede the possibility of women's economic independence.

There are, of course, many areas that cannot be legislated but good legislation can lead the way to changed attitudes in certain instances. Most prominent of these is the area of family responsibilities, the need for both parents to share the job of raising their children. This would require an examination of maternity leave provisions so that they can become parental leave.

Government cannot interfere in a family's sharing of assets during a marriage. However, it can, and will look at the ways in which the Income Tax Act encourages provisions for the economic security of the parent (usually the mother) who is caring for the children.

We are only beginning to understand the risks a woman takes when she leaves the work force to care for her children, or when a husband falls ill, dies, or the marriage fails. The overwhelming statistics describe the real poverty most of these women will suffer. Sixty-eight per cent of single parents' incomes is below the poverty line.

There is still a long way to go in providing the social supports, like child care. We still do not recognize the value of women's unpaid work in the home.

It is through women's economic independence that families will be strengthened. The burden of support will be shared. We intend to strive in this direction, although we know that old attitudes stand in the way, and new problems, such as economic restraints, or poor economic times, mitigate against the costly business of giving women their due. We know that equality comes with a price tag, but if the price is not paid, then our concerns are no more than lip-service, and women's economic position will continue to be perilous.

The struggle for equality, development and peace will be long — but as Nellie McClung, one of Canada's first fighters for women's suffrage, and from my own city of Winnipeg, said: "To bring this about — the even chance for everyone — is the plain and simple meaning of life."