

Routine Proceedings

• (1530)

STATUS OF WOMEN

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Hon. Mary Collins (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister responsible for Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, I rise with pride today to join with women across the country and around the world to recognize International Women's Day.

International Women's Day is an occasion for all of us to take a few minutes to pause and reflect on the progress of women toward equality in our society. We applaud the achievements of the past, we endorse the initiatives of the present and we look ahead to the challenges of the future.

International Women's Day was born over 80 years ago out of the struggle of women in the sweat-shops of the garment industry. They were working to achieve better pay and better working conditions. Clearly we have come a long way since the turn of the century, but we still have a long way to go.

History teaches us that many of the advances that women have made have come from solidarity. In Canada, women joined together over 60 years ago to fight for the right to be considered persons under Canada law.

Today, hundreds of national and local women's organizations are active in promoting all aspects of women's rights. In partnership with government, labour and other sectors, they have been successful in bringing issues of concern to women to the forefront of the national conscience because women's issues must become society's issues.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, we must never lose sight of the achievements of women who have contributed to the richness and vitality of Canadian life. I was therefore pleased this morning to announce that October would be women's history month in Canada.

We chose October because it was on October 18, 1929, after a long hard struggle, that Canadian women won a victory in the "Persons Case" that made them eligible for the Senate.

[*English*]

Women's History Month will promote public awareness of achievements like the persons case, achievements that are significant but often forgotten.

Women's History Month will encourage Canadians to reflect upon and celebrate women's contribution to our history as a nation and as a people.

Women's History Month will remind us of the initiatives of the present that are built upon the accomplishments of the past. Thus, Women's History Month will help foster a better understanding of the diverse roles that women play in contemporary society.

Canada is also proud of its record of achievement for women both domestically and internationally. We are making important progress toward equality on many fronts.

The government has put violence against women at the top of the public agenda. What began as a grassroots women's movement with its origins in rape crisis centres and shelters for battered women has now moved on to the national stage with the establishment of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women which is currently criss-crossing the country and talking to women and men and seeking solutions and preventive measures.

So we eagerly await the recommendations of the panel this December and to be able to move forward to solutions.

[*Translation*]

Last year, the parliamentary committee on health, welfare, social affairs, seniors and the status of women published recommendations on violence against women in its report entitled "The War on Women". The government responded in November with initiatives in prevention and education and changes to the legal system and to services for victims, offenders and members of their families.

In the past year, the House also passed stricter firearm control measures and proclaimed December 6, the anniversary of the massacre of 14 young women engineering students in Montreal, a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women.