

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 16, 1986

The House met at 11 a.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS

Hon. Monique Vézina (Minister for External Relations): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to inform the House this morning that in 1987, Canada will be celebrating the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, in accordance with Resolution 37/221 passed by the UN General Assembly on December 20, 1982.

We all realize that like many other countries, rich or poor, Canada has too many citizens who cannot afford decent housing. New Government policies announced in the House last December are aimed at making resources available to Canadian men and women who need them most, while providing for greater flexibility with respect to local conditions.

However, if we compare our situation with the rest of the world, Canadians are privileged indeed. Beyond our borders, in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, housing problems are of an entirely different nature. It is hard to find words to adequately describe how widespread and intense the problem is and the suffering it causes. I am therefore very pleased to announce that next year, the Canadian International Development Agency and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, in accordance with Canada's decision to support the objectives of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, will be taking part in a conference sponsored by the Canadian Committee of the International Council on Social Welfare and the Canadian Association of Housing and Renewal. This conference, which will deal with housing for the needy, will be held in the fall of 1987. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation is now looking into the possibility of financing further conferences and forums of this kind.

Mr. Speaker, Operation Africa 2000 which was launched by me in the House on May 6 of this year is an example of Canada's determination to help the people of Africa's rural areas to overcome famine and break out of the poverty cycle. Only a few days ago, at the Annual Convention of the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, I was very much impressed by the desire shown by representatives of our towns and cities to get involved in international development. The Federation has already launched a pilot project enabling

authorities from Third World towns and their Canadian counterparts to become better acquainted and exchange comments on their respective problems. This may result in useful co-operation.

Such initiatives, like others to be taken by Canada during the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, are only a first step. Nevertheless, they bring us closer to the day when every family and every human being will be able to have not only a decent diet, pure water, primary health care and education, but decent housing, as well.

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): As usual, Mr. Speaker, the Minister is always the exception which confirms the rule, and I want to thank her for advising us of her statement on Friday instead of following the tradition of her colleagues who tell us about a statement only an hour or half an hour before delivery. Again I commend and thank the Minister.

The only thing I deplore, and I am convinced the Minister feels the same way, is that we cannot devote more time this morning to the topic of the statement—she spoke for two and a half minutes, which will give me hardly four minutes on such a wide-ranging, significant and tragic issue. I know that the Minister and Hon. Members who are interested in this question regret this.

That being so, I can only support the initiative of the United Nations which have decided to set a year aside for reflection. However I must say that preparations were made for this International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

Those who watched television last night were once again made vividly aware of big problems the world over. Whether we are talking about slums, as she said herself, or *favelas* in Third World cities, I think the situation of the homeless is tragic.

Yet it is obvious that we too have people who are suffering, be they on Indian lands or in Vancouver, those people who were thrown out of low rental units to accommodate Expo visitors—it will be a success and I urge Canadians to go there—but this could be done only by moving homeless people. It is imperative that we reflect on this and make Governments aware that homeless people also deserve assistance.

But what does the Canadian example represent in light of what is going on throughout the world? Of course there is no common measure.

I have always said, as I did again last Friday evening here in the House when Africa was the topic of debate—and the