

rise to deep concerns among the citizens about their continued security and tranquillity. I, as Minister of Justice, we as a government and as members of parliament have a responsibility to be fully aware of these problems and concerns. We must be prepared to bring forth and debate policies which are properly responsive to them. I say "properly" because criminal justice policies establish the moral tone of our society and must therefore be measured and reasoned responses.

Today, few would dispute that many people are deeply and genuinely concerned about the increasing incidence of criminal violence, the growing penetration of organized criminals in our midst, the number of accused or convicted offenders on the streets committing further crimes, and the difficulties the justice system is experiencing in coping with criminal activity.

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Third, Mr. Speaker, in bringing forth criminal justice policies it is incumbent upon me, as Minister of Justice, to ensure that they will be effective. The system must be equipped with the tools and means necessary to achieve the goals.

Specifically, the community, the police, the prosecutors, the courts and the correction services must have the capabilities to prevent, detect, apprehend, prosecute, incarcerate, control and rehabilitate the offenders. The sanctions must be strong enough to punish and deter. The most dangerous offenders must be effectively separated from society, for its protection.

All citizens must be given a real sense of personal responsibility in their own conduct, for ensuring their own safety and security. Citizens cannot assume that the peace of their community is none of their business, that it is something they can just push off on to the police and the politicians, and that their only contribution is to complain when things go wrong. In doing all of these things, it remains that the policies must build in proper safeguards to secure the rights of the individual, which has been the hallmark of the criminal justice system in Anglo-American jurisprudence.

The measures before the House, to which I will now turn, are designed to provide the tools and means to achieve these goals. The central objective of Bill C-83, the government's peace and security program, can be simply stated. It is to counter rising violence in our society without resort to violence itself in response, this to the end that law-abiding citizens will know a greater degree of security and safety while still preserving that critical balance in the scales of justice. This bill contains a number of important measures directed to that objective which will adapt our criminal justice system to respond in a more effective yet just way to the rising incidence of crime in Canada, particularly that of a violent or organized nature.

In addition to these legislative measures being prepared, there is a series of important administrative measures that have been announced and described by my colleague the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand), and which will be debated further by him in this House, relating to significant improvements in the police, parole and penitentiary services and facilities.

Measures Against Crime

There is also, of course, a second legislative measure, Bill C-84, which is not yet under debate, dealing with the penalties for murder. Since it will be the subject of subsequent debate in this chamber, I shall not, of course, debate it this afternoon but confine myself to simply noting that fact. That bill is but one of several measures in the program directed toward imposing strong and effective, but non-violent, penalties and controls for those who engage in serious acts of personal violence, including the ultimate violence of murder.

With regard to the new provisions and principles of Bill C-83, I should like, if I may, to discuss those provisions relating to gun control. The growing number of crimes, deaths and accidents involving the use of firearms is a very proper concern of citizens, one fully shared by the government and one that I trust this House will share. Every year sees a further increase in gun-related murders, robberies, suicides and accidents in Canada. In 1974, nearly 1,500 persons died of gunshot wounds, an increase of 30 per cent over the 1970 number. Firearms were used in one-half of Canada's murders and in at least one-third of the 15,000 robberies. They also account for over one-third of the annual suicides and many accidental deaths. No count is known of the number of non-fatal accidents caused by firearms.

These are clearly statistics that call for measures that will lead to a curtailment of the incidence of gun-related violence both of a criminal and non-criminal nature, while at the same time avoiding undue interference with legitimate ownership and use of common firearms. The government's policy on the control of firearms as set out in this bill is designed to achieve this goal through a series of reasoned legislative and administrative measures based upon the following principles: increased criminal liability for misuse of weapons; increased standards of care for ownership and use of weapons; decreased availability of firearms and ammunition; screening for fitness to possess and use firearms; increased police powers to seize weapons in dangerous situations; increased awareness of the dangers of firearms abuse. The measures are of a comprehensive nature, directed both to those who would use guns for criminal purposes and to others who in using them for legitimate ends must learn to do so with greater respect and care.

For those who use firearms as tools of their criminal trade, no registration or licensing system will effectively curb continued access to and use of weapons. For such criminals the real sanction is and must be denunciatory sentences. To this end, the maximum penalties for unlawful possession or use of ordinary as well as restricted and prohibited weapons are being substantially increased. In addition, any person henceforth convicted of using an offensive weapon while committing an indictable offence will receive a prison term above and beyond that for the indictable offence itself. That is to say, there will be a mandatory minimum sentence in those cases.

For citizens who wish to own or use common firearms for legitimate purposes, a number of control systems were considered closely by the government: total prohibition, firearms' depositories, gun registration and possessor licensing. They were the subject of a full study carried out by Dean Friedland for the government during 1975. Of these,