

Adjournment Debate

police, because if they do and it becomes public they risk losing their jobs. They risk rejection from their friends and family. It is only by effective human rights amendments that people will not have that fear of losing their jobs.

We know as well that the Canadian Armed Forces continues to discriminate against qualified and indeed outstanding men and women in the forces who happen to be gay or lesbian. These policies which are cruel and inhumane have caused tremendous pain and suffering for far too many members of the Canadian forces. For those who have been forced out, it shatters their lives. Others continue to live within the Armed Forces but live in fear that this essential part of their humanity is somehow going to be disclosed and their lives destroyed after many years of service.

Fortunately these policies of the forces are being challenged in the courts. Former Second Lieutenant Michelle Douglas, an outstanding officer described as one of the finest officers her commanding officer had ever seen, has had the courage to challenge the forces in the courts. Derek Dwyer, another young officer is similarly challenging this policy.

They should not be forced to the courts. Justice surely compels this government to end these policies which are so discriminatory.

The ad hoc committee on AIDS of this Parliament unanimously and strongly urged this government to keep the promise to amend human rights legislation to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation as a top priority.

The committee pointed out that failure to amend the legislation in this way would clearly impair the effectiveness of strategies to combat this terrible epidemic.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to briefly deal with the question that was raised earlier this week by the comments that were reported by the chairperson of the standing committee on the disabled, the member for Oxford. He indicated that the government and some Conservative backbenchers are afraid to proceed on amendments to the Human Rights Act because they do not want to open up this question of sexual orientation.

They are prepared to deal with the disabled, but God forbid that they should have to deal with equality and justice for lesbians and gay men in this country.

We are not talking about strangers. We are talking about our brothers, our sisters, our sons, our daughters, the people with whom we work, our neighbours. For God's sake, Mr. Speaker, I appeal to members of this House and to the government, and through the members of the government that are here in the House today, to finally keep the promise that was made, a promise that was made in response to the unanimous recommendation of an all-party committee to ensure justice and full equality under the Charter of Rights to all Canadians in this country. The time is long overdue for action.

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Burnaby—Kingsway has asked when the amendments to the Canadian Human Rights Act will be moved to give effect to the government's commitment to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

As noted by the hon. member, the government stated in *Toward Equality*, in response to the report of the parliamentary subcommittee on equality rights that it will "take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that sexual orientation is a prohibited ground of discrimination in relation to all areas of federal jurisdiction".

The hon. member noted the length of time that has passed since *Toward Equality* was tabled.

[*Translation*]

I would like to explain that the government has undertaken an in-depth review of the legislation. Sexual orientation is one of the many important issues now under consideration. Others include, for instance, the question as to whether human rights legislation should have precedence over other federal laws. We are also considering the possibility of introducing in the legislation the concept of reasonable accommodation, the abolition of mandatory retirement. It goes without saying that the government's decision on these issues is bound to have a strong impact on the lives of Canadians and, more generally, on our society as a whole.