

representing more than 500 organizations representing hundreds and thousands of Canadian women.

The government, in a failed attempt to control the agenda of women, refused to take part in a similar session, preferring instead to try to allow only a handful of NAC members to meet with only three ministers in closed-door sessions.

Why did the government refuse to take part in this important public dialogue with NAC delegates today? What has it got to hide? Why is it so ashamed of its record when it comes to fighting for the rights of women?

Hon. Mary Collins (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister responsible for Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, the government's record with respect to women in this country is second to none and you are very familiar with our advances. We meet with representatives of women's organizations on an ongoing basis. We had hoped to have the opportunity to meet with representatives of NAC this morning. In fact, the executive had agreed to do so, but I understand the general membership decided not to proceed.

I will continue to look for opportunities to have constructive dialogue with representatives of NAC and with other women's organizations, where both sides can tell their story and both sides can listen.

We have entered into those kinds of discussions with groups such as the National Council of Women of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women, the Canadian Federation of University Women, and the Canadian Catholic Women's League. I look forward to opportunities of meeting with representatives of NAC during the coming year hopefully to build a constructive, positive relationship.

[Translation]

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer was certainly not clear and convincing. Why did the government refuse to hold a public meeting? Why was there only a closed-door session, in which only the three women in cabinet met the representatives of this important group?

I repeat, why didn't the government organize public meetings including the Minister of National Health and Welfare and the Secretary of State, two ministers who play a key role in developing policies concerning women?

Oral Questions

Why didn't the government organize a public meeting with all delegates of the National Action Committee, like the opposition did?

[English]

Hon. Mary Collins (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister responsible for Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, as I have already indicated, it is our feeling that a public meeting is not productive unless there is a full opportunity for both sides to tell their story and for both sides to listen.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare recently met with representatives of NAC and is away from Ottawa today. The Secretary of State is also away from Ottawa. He has indicated he would be prepared to meet with representatives of NAC at a mutually acceptable date later this month.

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PUBLIC SERVICE

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the opposition parties found it possible to be present today. Furthermore, they found it possible to have a dialogue with the representatives of NAC.

I want to turn to a specific case of lack of concern by the government for the rights of women. I am talking about the case of Mary Pitawanakwat. She was fired by the government two years after she complained of facing sexual and racial harassment in her job as a social development officer with the federal Department of Secretary of State.

Why has the government been attempting to obtain a Federal Court order to block her efforts to have the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal deal with her complaints on their merits? Will the government drop these efforts and allow the commission to get on with the job of ruling on these complaints on their merits?

Does the government not realize that, if it continues with these efforts to block this case being heard, it is in direct contradiction with its own national campaign against racial discrimination and for the promotion of affirmative action for the rights of women and natives?

Hon. Mary Collins (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister responsible for Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, I know that case is before my colleagues for consideration. I met Mary a few weeks ago. I am sure