

*Private Members' Business*

How does that convention affect the debate within Canada? I think it is precisely that way. The hon. member herself referred to the high standards that are in that draft convention. I believe, to answer my own question, that this instrument developed through the comity of nations can serve as a bill of rights for children not only internationally but also domestically. We will go through the process to which she referred of seeing that all Canadian laws and policies reflect the new rights and obligations set out in that charter.

• (1750)

In the thirty-third Parliament I chaired a committee of this House on equality rights that went through essentially the same exercise dealing with Article 15 of the Charter. We looked at existing Canadian laws and programs to see that they in fact comply with the guarantees of equality enshrined in Article 15. A similar process is contemplated here.

I listened to the remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre who, unfortunately, put a negative cast on his remarks in referring to the government because the reality is that this country has taken a very active role in the development of this convention. He also gave a list of issues that affect the position of children in our society indicating which fall under federal and which fall under provincial jurisdiction. We are not hearing of that for the first time. Our government is more than mindful that these are mostly shared jurisdiction or provincial jurisdiction issues. That is why for some many months now the Government of Canada has worked closely with provincial governments to see that in the drafting of the convention itself their interests and concerns were adequately reflected. This is something that has been proceeding with care, pressing on toward this goal of having an instrument that can serve both the international community and, most assuredly, our own domestic situation with the best possible statement of the rights of children.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, we may ask here whether it is really necessary to have an international or national charter of children's rights. After all, children are human beings and as such should enjoy the rights provided in international instruments and national charters like our own Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Some states expt to have an international or national charter of children's rights. After all, children are human beings and as such should

enjoy the rights provided in international instruments and national charters like our own Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Some states expressed this opinion when the question of a convention on the rights of the child arose in the late 1970s.

Although we all agree that children enjoy the same basic rights as adults, we must still admit that they cannot exercise them all in the same way as adults and that furthermore, children require special protection much more than adults. The international community has recognized this fact since the beginning of the century. For example, The Hague Convention on the Laws of War adopted in 1907 is one of the first international instruments to deal with children's rights. This document and those that followed it set forth what protection must be given to children in wartime. The signatory states are required to provide this protection. The standards were considerably improved after the horrors of World War II, when the international community, meeting under the auspices of the Red Cross, wrote the four Geneva Conventions in 1949.

[English]

Outside of those specific areas of protection of children during armed conflict to which I have just referred, the international community took an early interest in the broader rights of the child. For example, in 1924, it was the League of Nations that adopted the first declaration of the rights of the child which, in these circles, is commonly referred to as the Declaration of Geneva. Although its content was only declaratory in nature, it did provide a necessary focus that has since guided the international community's work in this field of children's rights. It is worth noting that back in the mid-1920s a statement was made which says—and I think back to what the hon. member from British Columbia just said—that mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give—a simple, but a high standard. Sadly, in practice, that duty has often not been fulfilled.

It was because of those failings and the failings that other hon. members have documented here, Mr. Speaker, that the international community recognized it was necessary to ensure better protection for children. That is why in 1959 the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child went some way toward achieving the goal of setting standards. Still, by the 1970s, as new issues affecting children came to the attention of all of us, it was recognized that a number of those provisions were