

Supply

I am convinced that women, when they see what is happening in Quebec, will certainly get involved in order to maintain their quality of life at an appropriate level and ensure better opportunities for the future in case Quebec separates and becomes independent.

We have travelled the same path. Women respect each other. Redefining borders will not help in any way. It will create a situation where poverty will be worse for women and their families.

I would like to ask a question of my colleague. When she says that we must follow up on what is happening in Quebec because it just ruled that the mutilation of female genital organs is a crime, I wonder if she was absent from the House when the Minister of Justice and myself ruled that our federal legislation would also consider such mutilation to be a criminal act? If we are presented with a case involving such an act, it will be tried and judged according to Canadian laws since it is a criminal act.

I am very happy to see that the Court of Quebec, or rather the Human Rights Commission, has ruled on that issue. I am also happy to see they agree with us on a point that has already been ruled on in the Canadian laws.

There is no need for lengthy analysis to find out that such a practice goes against Canadian values, that it is unacceptable to mutilate female genital organs and that people have to abide by our rules and standards, period. Certainly, for all women, whether they live in Quebec or in Ontario, whether they are from Nova Scotia or Newfoundland or Vancouver, British Columbia, this act of mutilation is unacceptable.

I am asking the hon. member a second question concerning the health issue. In order to eliminate poverty, we took some measures in favour of pregnant women. We also undertook some research on breast cancer, on heart diseases in women and on their prevention. Considering her great interest in that matter, I am convinced that, given her great interest for these matters, if she has other ideas to bring out at one time or another, she will assist the health committee of the House of Commons by making her comments, which will be greatly appreciated.

Is she ready to bring us other suggestions on this?

• (1615)

Mrs. Picard: Madam Speaker, regarding sexual organ mutilation, we note that it is not mentioned that this practice is criminal. Why does this practice still exist? As was noted earlier today, a physician had to perform surgery on young women. How is this still possible? He had to do nine operations. What can we do to stop that? The individuals who performed these barbarous acts on those young women are still running free. This practice is being performed in many places.

When people arrive in Canada, they do not know it is illegal in our country. They should be told, and the fact should be public knowledge. Steps must be taken to prevent that practice. This is happening here in Canada. In 1995, it is unbelievable that we still hear about those practices. In Toronto, a physician told me that he gets calls regularly from women who ask him to perform these operations on the sexual organs of their children. The Criminal Code must either be strengthened or other measures must be enacted because this situation is really alarming.

As far as—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but her time is up. The hon. member for Laval Centre has the floor.

Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Madam Speaker, allotted days on a motion of the official opposition provide special moments in this House, because, by making it possible to ask government about the real issues, they force parliamentarians to consider certain unavoidable realities.

The reality we are currently considering concerns more than half the population, since, today, we are assessing the government's action, or, rather, its inaction with respect to women.

On March 8, 1994, International Women's Day, the Bloc Québécois tabled the following motion in the House on an opposition day:

That this House urge the government to recognize the principle of economic equality between women and men and to implement measures, in areas of federal jurisdiction, to guarantee women equity in employment, wages and living conditions.

What has become of this a year later? Women in Canada and Quebec agree: for this government, it is a long way from the cup to the lips. There was not a hint of the grand principle of equity in the budget tabled by the Minister of Finance. And yet women here need real action.

It therefore makes sense for the opposition critic on the status of women to table a motion denouncing the federal government for its inaction in its areas of jurisdiction through its failure to adopt concrete measures to promote the equality of women.

The Bloc Québécois notes that the Liberal government has failed to keep the commitments it made with regard to promoting equality for women. One has only to look at the situation in various areas of social concern, including child care services, public housing and the struggle to prevent violence against women.

The Liberal government's latest decision to abolish the Advisory Council on the Status of Women is a clear indication of the cabinet's concern about women.

It appears that the government is no longer interested in hearing a voice independent of political power express the rightful claims of women. The council's credibility with various