Wednesday, November 28, 2007

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

Statements by Members

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Halifax West.

[Members sang the national anthem]

The Speaker: The hon. member for New Westminster--Coquitlam.

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Violence Against Women
Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, shockingly, violence against women still permeates our society. We are in the middle of The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence and fast approaching—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for New Westminster--Coquitlam.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, shockingly, violence against women still permeates our society. We are in the middle of The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence and fast approaching December 6, a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. It was my private member's bill that created this day, so it has particular significance for me.

Later today, members of Parliament will stand in the House of Commons and vote on a motion which calls upon Japan to offer a formal, sincere and unequivocal apology to the women forced into sexual slavery during the second world war. Several of these so-called comfort women are on Parliament Hill today, and one cannot help but be moved to tears by their terrible stories.

A vote in favour of this motion would be a vote in support of not only these women but all women across the world who have experienced unspeakable violence just because they are women. I urge all members to vote in favour of this motion. It is simply the right thing to do.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

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Violence Against Women

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, during the second world war, 15 year old girls were subjected to torture and rape by countless men from the Japanese army for weeks, months and years on end. Over 200,000 women suffered through that kind of torture.

Four of the survivors of sexual slavery are on Parliament Hill today asking us to join them in asking Japan to give a formal sincere apology. Will Canada be on the side of the comfort women? Will we take a stand?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her interest in this matter and I believe the House will be seized of this matter shortly.

I, too, have had an opportunity, along with many members, to meet with these living witnesses to an unthinkable evil that happened some 60 years ago. We commend them for their courage, bravery and dignity considering what terrible things took place.

They inspire us all, I hope, in all parties, to join together in combating contemporary forms of slavery, sexual servitude and human trafficking.
Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I have faith that all ordinary Canadians and all members of Parliament will join together and say no to violence against women and support the comfort women.

In the words of some of the victims,

[Member spoke in Cantonese]

[English]

What I just said is that rewriting history is not the answer to a lasting peace and it is not the answer to justice and reconciliation.

When will the Prime Minister publicly ask and encourage the government of Japan to formally and sincerely apologize to these comfort women?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister and the current and former foreign ministers have raised and discussed this matter with their counterparts in Japan.

We in Canada truly believe that as Canadians we acknowledge moments of injustice in our own history but these women come to this country with a story that needs to be heard because we need to learn from the lessons of history to ensure they are not repeated.

We need to do everything we can to be inspired by them to redouble our efforts in fighting similar kinds of violence against women and against children to ensure these things never again occur.

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(1515)

Human Rights
human rights and democratic institutions, and the securing of prosperity for the people of both countries and the international community; and

v. That the Government of Canada should therefore encourage the Government of Japan to abandon any statement which devalues the expression of regret from the Kono Statement of 1993; to clearly and publicly refute any claims that the sexual enslavement and trafficking of the 'comfort women' for the Japanese Imperial Forces never occurred; to take full responsibility for the involvement of the Japanese Imperial Forces in the system of forced prostitution, including through a formal and sincere apology expressed in the Diet to all of those who were victims; and to continue to address those affected in a spirit of reconciliation.

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The Speaker:

Does the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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