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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

**Motion requesting Government Support
for Taiwan's Request for Observer Status**

Speech by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

Thursday, June 5, 2003

THE SENATE

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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION— MOTION REQUESTING GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR TAIWAN'S REQUEST FOR OBSERVER STATUS— DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Di Nino, seconded by the Honourable Senator Atkins:

That the Senate call on the Government of Canada to support the request of the Government of Taiwan to obtain observer status at the World Health Organization (WHO).—(*Honourable Senator Poy*).

Hon. Vivienne Poy: Honourable senators, I am pleased to speak to the motion introduced by Senator Di Nino in support of Taiwan's request for observer status at the World Health Organization. As Senator Day stressed in his recent speech on this issue, the World Health Organization's mandate is the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health regardless of race, religion, political belief, and economic or social conditions. This preamble for the organization elevates health and human rights above politics.

As the recent outbreak of SARS has shown, the spread of disease is a global issue that requires international cooperation. Politics must take a back seat to health if we are to fight diseases such as SARS. As we all know, viruses and bacteria do not respect political affiliations or boundaries.

Canadians are integrally tied to Taiwan. Visa students, Taiwanese Canadians and international trade mean that we have daily interactions with the Taiwanese people. Approximately 150,000 Taiwanese visit Canada each year, in addition to the 150,000 Taiwanese immigrants and students living in Canada. Taiwan is also Canada's tenth largest trading partner and the world's sixteenth largest economy.

As Canadians concerned about our health and the health of people around the world, it is in our best interests as global citizens to support Taiwan's ready access to health information provided through the World Health Organization.

In recent months, Taiwan has had the third largest number of SARS cases. It also had a great deal of difficulty coping with the

spread of the disease, and the number of cases actually rose at the end of May, just as the cases in other affected areas were beginning to wane.

Unlike the rest of the world, Taiwan had very little help coping with the disease. World Health Organization officials arrived too late and provided too little information. Taiwan was not privy to all the data, warnings and reports being issued from the World Health Organization. Is it appropriate to deprive an area of the world of available supports when lives are at stake? I think not.

The fact of Taiwan obtaining status as an observer at the World Health Organization would not affect the sovereignty issue that has been a subject of dispute with The People's Republic of China. Organizations such as Rotary International, the Red Cross, the Holy See of the Roman Catholic Church, the Order of Malta and the Palestinian Liberation Organization have been granted observer status. Taiwan, with its advanced medical technology and research capacity has a major contribution to make to world health. Taiwan needs to have the means of exchanging information with the world community, including reports on its own health situation.

The World Health Organization is the natural conduit for health data. There has been unprecedented world support for Taiwan's request. The United States, the European Parliament, Japan and other countries, as well as medical associations around the world have supported this request. In fact, the U.S. Congress has repeatedly passed and presidents have repeatedly signed legislation directing the executive to undertake concerted efforts to bring about Taiwan's observer status at the WHO.

Yet despite the support from many powerful nations, the World Health Organization's annual assembly has repeatedly rejected Taiwan's request for observer status. Canada considers health care a fundamental human right, and so I believe that we have a role to play in ensuring that our government shows leadership on this issue.

Honourable senators, health crises are global crises. We cannot afford to be unprepared for the new diseases that are cropping up frequently. The only possible course of action is to work in cooperation with our neighbours, whoever they may be. The World Health Organization offers valuable experience and expertise in dealing with these issues. Politics cannot take precedence over health. Therefore, I would ask for your support in passing this motion.