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CANADA'S ACCESS TO MEDICINES REGIME

Statement by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

Wednesday, May 6, 2009

THE SENATE

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CANADA'S ACCESS TO MEDICINES REGIME

Hon. Vivienne Poy: Honourable senators, like Senator Goldstein, I rise today to speak on behalf of participants in the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign who are disappointed with this government's lack of commitment to make Canada's Access to Medicines Regime, CAMR, work in practice.

Unanimous support by all members of Parliament led to the passage of the CAMR legislation in 2004, which was designed, through compulsory licensing, to help countries acquire the low-cost generic medicines they needed to treat diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other life-threatening infections.

By amending the Patent Act to create exemptions to intellectual property rules, it was hoped that low-cost medicines would flow to those who were suffering and dying, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, this flow has not happened. As Senator Goldstein noted, CAMR has only exported a single AIDS drug to one country.

CAMR is not working, and it needs to be amended as proposed in Bill S-232, the legislation recently tabled in this chamber by Senator Goldstein.

• (1345)

The legislation, as it currently stands, puts roadblocks in the way of generic drug companies and non-governmental organizations, well beyond what is required by the World Trade Organization. The need for a more flexible, more open-ended approach to CAMR is evident without the strict, fixed quantities and time periods required under the current legislation.

Since there is no cure for HIV/AIDS, the treatments provided must be long-term and enduring. The current system acts as a disincentive to generic drug companies, importing countries, as well as NGOs to participate in CAMR.

Given the urgent need of those dying of HIV/AIDS in Africa on a daily basis, these obstacles cannot be justified. It is regrettable that Canada has passed legislation with good intentions that does not work in practice. The motto of Grandmothers to Grandmothers is: "We will not rest until they can rest."

Honourable senators, in Africa there is no rest for grandmothers who are increasingly caring for orphaned grandchildren whose parents have died in the HIV/AIDS epidemics. Let us extend a hand to the grandmothers of Africa and the many orphaned children they care for by passing Bill S-232, enabling CAMR to work in practice so that Canadian drug companies and NGOs can bring generic drugs to sub-Saharan Africa on a continuous basis.
