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ORBIS CANADA

Statement by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

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THE SENATE

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Hon. Vivienne Poy: Honourable senators, one of the organizations that took part in yesterday's World Sight Day event on the Hill was ORBIS Canada, which is part of ORBIS International.

ORBIS was established in the 1970s to prevent and treat blindness in developing countries. There are 45 million blind people in the world today. One person goes blind every five seconds and one child goes blind every 60 seconds. The tragedy is that, with proper treatment, most blindness is preventable.

What distinguishes ORBIS Canada from other Canadian charities is that ORBIS is committed to local capacity-building through its Flying Eye Hospital. The hospital staff has trained thousands of local health care workers in more than 70 developing countries and has saved millions from blindness.

The ORBIS DC-10 jet aircraft is outfitted with a 48-seat mobile classroom and an operating room with a two-way audiovisual system that broadcasts both in the plane as well as to classrooms on the ground. Last year, ORBIS trained many health care practitioners, screened and treated millions and restored sight to

over 150,000 people through surgery. The cost of cataract surgery is only \$36 but the gift of sight is priceless.

Over the next 10 years, ORBIS will work toward the Vision 2020 goal of eliminating avoidable blindness by building paediatric and adult eye care centres in underserved areas and screening for eye disease in diabetics and people with glaucoma.

Honourable senators, as a member of the board of ORBIS Canada, I would like to point out that ORBIS is always looking for Canadian ophthalmologists and nurses, as well as medical students, to volunteer for the Flying Eye Hospital. Some of the volunteers are immigrants to Canada who are grateful to ORBIS for the work it does in their countries of origin.

One of the events senators could support is ORBIS' Pull for Sight. Thousands have come out in Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto and Halifax to participate in a team contest to pull a FedEx cargo plane a distance of 12 feet; FedEx is a major supporter of ORBIS. While many may not want to pull a plane, I encourage everyone to give the gift of sight by donating to the work of dedicated organizations such as ORBIS Canada.
