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Eleventh Anniversary of Tiananmen Square Massacre

Statement by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

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THE SENATE

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CHINA

ELEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF TIANANMEN SQUARE MASSACRE

Hon. Vivienne Poy: Honourable senators, last Sunday, June 4, evoked horrible memories of the events that occurred in Tiananmen Square 11 years ago. Many of us watched the massacre of unarmed students and civilians on television, but few of us understood why the tragedy happened.

Deng Xiao Ping's motto of "Getting Rich is Glorious" unleashed carnivorous appetites in individuals in China, while political and social reforms were neglected. The fabric of society had come apart. For example, eminent university professors could not feed their families on salaries of \$200 to \$300 per month, in comparison to taxi drivers, whose licences could only be obtained with connections, making \$10,000 monthly. Everyone could see government officials and their cohorts amassing fortunes and living the high life. China had become a country owned by the political elite.

Traditionally, intellectuals in China bear the responsibility of society. Students petitioned the government for political reform and an end to official corruption. The support they received from the workers and the general population proved the existence of

tremendous discontent. Protests that started in 1986 had spread to over 80 cities, involving 600 tertiary institutions and nearly 3 million students by June 1989.

Events could have turned out very differently as many of us had hoped. The initial flip-flop of the leaders in Beijing was believed to be a power struggle among the leadership. Battalions were dispatched from different regions of the country, not only to disperse the crowds but also to guard against each other. The population in Tiananmen Square actually expected rubber bullets and water hoses. When the troops started firing and the tanks mowed people under, the crowd was taken by surprise. Subsequently, people in Beijing said that they could not believe that they could have been so brave, but to paraphrase Karl Marx, "they had nothing to lose but their chains."

Despite the official denial, the Chinese Democracy Movement recently set up a Web site showing an hour of television news clips of the events of 1989. Within the first four days, over 10,000 users in China had downloaded the information, and every day, hundreds of emotional e-mails have been received.

Honourable senators, Ya Ding, a young Chinese novelist living in exile in Paris, commented soon after the massacre, "An old man is dying, but a child is born." That child is democracy.
