



CANADA

# Debates of the Senate

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1st SESSION

• 39th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 143

• NUMBER 35

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## WORLD SIGHT DAY

Statement by:

**The Honourable Vivienne Poy**

**Thursday, October 5, 2006**

## THE SENATE

Thursday, October 5, 2006

### WORLD SIGHT DAY

**Hon. Vivienne Poy:** Honourable senators, World Sight Day is the second Thursday in October. Yesterday I attended a reception that highlighted the World Health Organization's campaign called Vision 2020, which aims to eliminate avoidable blindness by the year 2020.

Canada has pledged its support for this worthy cause. One in nine Canadians is affected by irreversible vision loss by age 65, but 80 per cent of it is avoidable. Our population is growing older and, as it does, more resources must be put toward treatment availability and accessibility; otherwise, seniors risk injuries, depression, loss of independence and death.

In Canada, the costs associated with vision loss are now estimated at \$2 billion per year. Worldwide, the number soars to more than \$28 billion.

Globally, 45 million people are blind and another 135 million have severe vision impairment. In developing countries, medical care is often available in urban areas only. There is a dire shortage of medical professionals who can provide treatment for eye disease, and there are very few community supports. Many people go blind due to untreated childhood illness and infections, and the blind are among the poorest of the poor.

Ninety per cent of the world's blind live in developing countries. Thankfully, there are organizations like ORBIS International to help countries meet this desperate need. This summer I had the opportunity to tour the ORBIS Flying Eye Hospital on their goodwill visit to Toronto. It was an amazing experience.

On this plane, surgeons perform operations that are simultaneously transmitted to classrooms attended by local doctors and health care workers who can ask questions during the operation.

ORBIS doctors and pilots are volunteers and many are from Canada. Their dedication is impressive. Since 1982, ORBIS has saved the sight of millions of people and helped to train more than 124,000 doctors and other eye care professionals in over 80 countries.

• (1430)

As we approach World Sight Day, I would like to invite all honourable senators to learn more about blindness in Canada and abroad, the work of organizations like ORBIS and the global initiative, Vision 2020. As we celebrate Thanksgiving with our families and friends, let us remember those who are less fortunate than we are.

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