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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Statement by:

The Honourable Diane Bellemare

Thursday, March 6, 2014

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Hon. Diane Bellemare: Honourable senators, I, too, would like to speak to International Women's Day, which will take place on Saturday, March 8. I would like to acknowledge the remarkable performance of our Canadian athletes in Sochi and, in particular, the performance of our young Canadian women who brought home 11 medals, including 7 gold. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work, energy and determination of women entrepreneurs in Canada. A growing number of women in Canada are embarking on the adventure of starting their own business, creating jobs for other women and for men, too.

Keep in mind that in 2011, 15.6 per cent of small and medium-sized businesses in Canada were owned by women. Indeed, women-owned businesses created 1.5 million jobs. As the Honourable Dr. Kellie Leitch, Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, said so well:

Entrepreneurs are the engines of growth, the creators of jobs and the drivers of innovation on which our economy relies, and so it makes sense to celebrate women business owners during International Women's Week 2014. These women make outstanding contributions to our economy every day and our Government is committed to supporting their success.

Even though we are seeing an increasing number of women entrepreneurs, they need an extra boost. The vast majority of women entrepreneurs — 77 per cent — are self-employed workers

without paid help, whose annual income falls below the average income.

Others are seasoned businesswomen. Aboriginal women are particularly remarkable. Indeed, 51 per cent of small and medium Aboriginal-owned businesses are owned, in whole or in part, by women.

Many Canadian women would like to get into business. According to a study done by the Bank of Montreal for International Women's Day in 2012, 71 per cent of Canadian women indicated that they would like to start their own business and 83 per cent of Canadian women said that having access to role models or mentors would be important to their success.

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That is why, in the most recent budget, our government made a commitment to undertake consultations in order to identify the best means to encourage women to start their own businesses and to support them through mentorship activities.

The Minister of Status of Women will hold these consultations as part of a campaign called "Strong Women, Strong Canada."

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to invite all Canadian entrepreneurs, especially women, to apply for one of the entrepreneurship awards sponsored by the Business Development Bank of Canada: the BDC Mentorship Award, the BDC Innovation Award, the BDC Entrepreneurial Resiliency Award and the BDC Entrepreneurship Champion.

Good luck to all female entrepreneurs. Good luck to everyone.