

Family Dynamics, Ottawa, Canada

Honourable Senator Anne C. Cools

As a Canadian frontrunner in providing services to women, children, and families troubled by conflict and domestic violence, I acquired insight into the dynamics of families that were afflicted. My years of work in this field have given me deep knowledge of these distressed families, their suffering, and their very human need for healing and reconciliation.

Prior to the Senate, I had worked in these innovative social services, pioneering in domestic violence and its resolution. In 1974, I founded one of Canada's first shelters – *Women in Transition, Inc.*, a United Way Agency. I assisted in the establishment of several other such agencies in Ontario. In 1977, I co-organized Canada's first conference on domestic violence, entitled *Couples in Conflict*, with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (O.I.S.E.) and my Agency. The guest speaker was Richard Gelles, a foremost U.S. scholar in this area. I was also the field advisor to the York University doctoral student who wrote Canada's first PhD thesis on domestic violence.

My Senate work has included divorce law, child custody and access, as well as child support. I have consistently maintained that a divorce ruptures the relationship between spouses, but not the relationship between parents and their children. I have upheld the notion that post-divorce children are entitled to meaningful and continuing involvement with both their mothers and fathers. Too many ill-considered and ill-conceived public policies have dispossessed children of their fathers, and fathers of their children, never intended by the Canadian Parliament when it adopted the *Divorce Act* in 1986. The first interests of the child's several best interests is the child's interest in his/her own relationship with both parents. For decades, I have held a strong interest in this subject matter. My Senate work on divorce, custody, and access led to the creation of the Special Joint Senate-House of Commons Committee on Child Custody and Access. In 1998, this Special Committee travelled across Canada, held hearings and heard over five hundred witnesses, and was well supported by the public, whose interest was great. The report, *For the Sake of the Children*, recommended shared parenting and the concept of parenting as an act of human sharing. It also upheld the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of children for relationships with their parents, both mothers and fathers.

My discussions with Professor Kenedy made clear that the 2011 roundtable and symposium was much needed. I assembled some of Canada's distinguished scholars and academics in these fields, which are still understudied and unexplored. It is still not well understood that violence is not a gendered characteristic, and that men and women are equally capable of, and do commit, violence equally to each other. These human characteristics are not gendered. Men and women are equally capable of doing good and evil, and are equally capable of being good parents and bad parents. Human love, affection, and the care of children are human qualities, not gendered ones. I thank those who participated in the roundtable and symposium, as well as those who contributed their work to this issue. This collection of referred scholarly work contributes to our knowledge of family violence, divorce, custody, access and their resolution. These articles will add to the comprehension of these human problems, and their consequences for family dynamics and familial relationships.