



The 'world's banker to the poor,' Muhammed Yunus, addressing the audience after receiving an honorary degree as Doctor of Laws by the University of British Columbia. Yunus is a leader in the field of microcredit, an innovative program aimed at providing small loans to entrepreneurs too poor to qualify for traditional bank loans. MARTIN DEE / UBC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

'World's banker to the poor' receives honorary degree

By WAHIBA CHAIR
Special to The Epoch Times

For his outstanding work helping millions of people break out of the cycle of poverty, Dr. Muhammed Yunus has been given an honorary degree as Doctor of Laws by the University of British Columbia.

Founder and managing director of the Grameen Bank, Yunus had initially accepted the honor-

ary degree in 2006. But after he and the Grameen Bank were announced co-winners of the Nobel Peace the same year, the ceremony was postponed.

"What an honour for me and the people who worked very hard to make a dream come true," said Yunus, who received the award at a ceremony at the Chan Centre for Performing Arts in Vancouver last Friday.

Yunus is a leader in the field of microcredit, an innovative pro-

gram aimed at providing small loans to entrepreneurs too poor to qualify for traditional bank loans.

In his acceptance speech, Yunus said that "by extending credit to the poor, you can unlock the entrepreneurial spirit in people and let them break the cycle of poverty on their own."

Founded in Bangladesh in 1983, the Grameen (which means "village" in Bangla) Bank has extended credit to 7.44 million bor-

rowers through 2,488 branches which provide service in more than 96 per cent Bangladesh's villages.

The bank was founded on the principle of "credit as a human right." Its borrowers buy into four core values: discipline, unity, courage, and hard work. Ninety per cent of the shares are owned by the borrowers and the remainder by the government. The loans are made without any collateral.

A previous head of the Rural Economics Program at the University of Chittagong in Bangladesh, Yunus quit his academic life after the devastating 1974 famine.

"I was feeling totally useless teaching elegant and beautiful economics when people were dying outside next to me, so I stepped away to see if there was anything I could do to solve the problem," he said.

By lending \$27 to 42 villagers, he realized that a tiny amount of credit could help people and save them the humiliation of trying to borrow from traditional banks. This created momentum for his vision: "If you can make so many people happy with so little, why not do more?"

Regular banks reject two thirds of the world population, something Yunus calls "conventional stupidity."

The ceremony transitioned into a colloquium on Corporate Social Responsibility which included among others Yunus, UBC president Stephen Toope and Vancity Board of Directors Chair Patrice Pratt.

In 1998, Vancity implemented the peer lending program, inspired by Yunus's lending circle and which he later endorsed. Since then, Vancity's peer lending program has helped more than 1,000 low-income entrepreneurs.

"We have to look differently at the way we provide service" said Pratt.

In 1989, Yunus founded Grameen Trust, a non-profit NGO to help replicate his micro-credit program abroad through a Grameen Bank Replication Program (GBRP).

To date, the GBRP has supported 138 replication partners in 37 countries. "The goal is to create a self-sustaining micro-credit program" said Yunus.

In 2007, Grameen America, mainly owned by Grameen Trust, was established in New York City to serve poor aspiring entrepreneurs in the U.S. through small, low-interest loans, basic banking services, savings options and financial education.

Yunus received his degree as part of UBC's Centenary celebrations. He also participated in a Vancity hosted microcredit workshop and launched his Inaugural Michael Smith Memorial Nobel Lecture Series. In 2007, Yunus was named one of the 30 greatest entrepreneurs of all time.

Other UBC honorary degree recipients include The Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Iranian lawyer and human rights activist Shirin Ebadi.

Proposed bill to protect the unborn sparks debate

By SHARDA VAIDYANATH
Epoch Times Parliament Hill Reporter

What is the life of the unborn worth in Canada? A lot, if the response to a new bill is any indication.

Bill C-484, the Unborn Victims of Crime Act, was introduced last November and a majority vote at second reading — generally regarded as rare for private members' bills — sent it to the Justice and Human Rights Committee.

"My bill has become known and so we have people across party lines sending in petitions," says Conservative MP Ken Epp, who introduced the Bill.

Epp's bill would amend the Criminal Code by making it a criminal offence to harm or kill an unborn child "while committing or attempting to commit an offence against the mother."

Daphne Gilbert who teaches law at the University of Ottawa and specializes in criminal law, says currently there is virtually no law in Canada that grants legal status and rights to the unborn fetus/child.

So if a pregnant woman is murdered, it is not considered a double homicide.

While the Epp bill if passed could fill that gap in criminal law, those who oppose the bill inside and outside Parliament are worried about what they perceive as its potential to re-criminalize abortion.

If the fetus is something that can be harmed or killed, then by definition it must be a living being, in which case the legality of abortion may come into question if the bill becomes law.

Gilbert believes the bill is "an underhanded way of getting public consensus on laws dealing with abortion."

Arthur Schafer, director for the University of Manitoba's Centre for Professional and Applied Ethics, says, "Mr. Epp is re-opening the debate [on abortion] most Canadians don't want re-opened."

However, Epp says the bill is "very explicit. It has nothing to do with elective or consensual abortion; it has everything to do with a woman who is being attacked by an intruder or an ex-boyfriend or ex-husband..."

According to Margaret Somerville, founding director of the McGill Centre for Medicine and Ethics, Epp's bill "recognizes that the fetus exists. It doesn't say it's a human being, it doesn't say it's a person, it doesn't affect abortion legally at all."

Somerville says the bill could be "a turning point" for Canada's criminal laws regarding abortion and the status and rights of the unborn child.

"You've got people intention-

ally killing viable fetuses while in the uterus. If you manage to kill it, it's a non-event [legally] but if you brought it out and killed it a few seconds later, it's murder. It's ridiculous."

However, Somerville can see why it might alter people's perception on abortion. "This baby was in the same situation as the one you would abort so why does one exist and the other doesn't?"

During its second reading, some MPs who voted against the bill reflected that conflicted conscience Somerville mentions, such as Bloc Quebecois member Carole Freeman.

"Hidden behind what would seem to be a praiseworthy intention is a restriction on the right to abortion.... Like many parents, I find it regrettable that some women choose abortion. It is not something anyone wishes for. But women must make that choice for any number of reasons."

Another Bloc member, Raymond Gravel from Quebec, said he regards "human life as sacred and abortion as always being a tragedy in our society," yet he voted against the bill, as did NDP MP Irene Mathysen who said it would be an "international embarrassment" to remove a "woman's right to choose."

"The choice is no choice if there's only one choice," says Epp. "Anyone who stops and thinks about it says, yeah, we can't let that happen in our society, it's a woman's choice to have that child, we need to protect that in law."

In an October Environics poll that asked if killing or injuring a fetus should be a crime, 75 per cent of women and 68 per cent of men said they would support a fetal protection law. The percentage for the population as a whole stood at 72 per cent.

Experts say women are significantly more vulnerable to violent attacks during pregnancy and in recent months there have been several cases across Canada.

Epp's website reports voter support as Conservatives at 77 per cent, Liberals 71 per cent, Bloc 71 per cent and NDP 66 per cent.

Conservative MP Dave Van Kesteren reminded the House of a Supreme Court directive regarding the unborn child in the context of the 1988 Morgentaler ruling. Citing Justice Beetz's words he said:

"I am of the view that the protection of the foetus is, and as the Court of Appeal observed, always has been, a valid objective of Canadian criminal law... I think s.1 of the Charter authorizes reasonable limits to be put on a woman's right having regard to the state interest in the protection of the foetus."

No dates have been announced for the Justice Committee hearings and debate on the bill.

Spacewalk complete as "Dextre" tools up

HOUSTON (Reuters)—Dextre the Canadian-built, handyman space robot now has the tools of his trade and is ready for work.

Astronauts from the shuttle Endeavour outfitted the International Space Station's newly installed robotic maintenance man with tools and cameras during a spacewalk that ended early on Tuesday.

Veteran spacewalker Richard Linnehan and rookie Robert Behnken were back in the station after an outing of almost seven hours.

"It's a pretty awesome view just looking down on everything," Linnehan commented at one point as the duo floated in space over 200 miles above the planet.

It was the third of five spacewalks scheduled for Endeavour's busy 12-day visit to the orbital outpost.

It was not all smooth sailing. The astronauts battled to secure a science experiment outside of Europe's Columbus laboratory and in the end took it back to the shuttle's payload bay.

The robot, dubbed Dextre, was

assembled during the mission's second spacewalk. It resembles a humanoid stick figure with gangly 11-foot (3.4 meter) arms.

NASA says it will save astronauts from much of the routine maintenance they currently do on arduous and potentially dangerous spacewalks, enabling them to devote more time to the experiments and other scientific activities.

Later on Tuesday after their sleep period, the space crews will move Dextre by remote control to its base on the U.S. space laboratory Destiny.

The shuttle crew arrived at the station on Wednesday to install Dextre and deliver a storage room for an elaborate Japanese laboratory that is due to arrive during NASA's next shuttle mission in May.

NASA has 10 more flights planned to complete the \$100 billion space station and deliver supplies before the shuttles are retired in 2010. A final servicing call to the Hubble Space Telescope also is scheduled for late summer.

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