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Ottawa Journal: a life sentence means a sentence for life

As Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, ?Canadians want a country where justice, real justice, is at the heart of our legal system, where the hope for rehabilitation is balanced with appropriate punishment and prevention and with compassion for law-abiding people and their families.?

This is just one reason why our Government made a commitment in the 2013 Speech from the Throne to ensure a life sentence for Canada's most hardened criminals means exactly that ? a sentence for life.

Our Government is following through on this commitment and is introducing legislation to amend the Criminal Code to ensure that Canada's most heinous criminals ? those whose actions means we cannot risk permitting them on our streets ? remain imprisoned for the rest of their natural lives with no chance of parole.

This will include those convicted of high treason, as well as for first degree murders involving: sexual assault, kidnapping or forcible confinement, terrorism, the killing of police officers or corrections officers, or any first degree murders that are found to be particularly brutal in nature.

At the same time, to address constitutional concerns, this legislation will permit a criminal serving life without parole to apply to the Minister of Public Safety for exceptional release after no less than 35 years. As Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, ?This is not parole. Unlike parole, decisions will not rest with an appointed board, but with the federal cabinet, men and women fully accountable to their fellow citizens and to the families of the victims of these crimes.?

This is legislation that builds on our Government's record of protecting Canadians and putting victims first. For example, we've strengthened the law regarding people deemed not criminally responsible for violent acts. We repealed the faint hope clause that allowed for the application of early parole. Plus, we created mandatory prison sentences for violent offences, such as sexual crimes against children.

Meanwhile, to ensure the rights of victims come before the rights of criminals, we introduced our Victims' Bill of Rights. We also recently announced our Government will introduce legislation that would end the practice of making early release available for repeat violent offenders.

Our Government is working to hold violent offenders accountable, enhance the rights of victims, and help keep families and communities safe.

By David Tilson, MP