

Oral Questions

In terms of the present situation of famine threat, as one organization has said, it is more the result of war rather than the weather. I know that the minister has been working with her colleagues and attempting to find some solution to this. I believe she met with a number of her counterparts in New York earlier this week and developed a set of principles. Could she tell us what she thinks these principles might achieve and what they represent in terms of some resolution of this very serious crisis.

[Translation]

Hon. Monique Landry (Minister for External Relations): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the hon. member for this question and his abiding interest in the situation in Ethiopia.

According to our assessment, the aid now in place is not sufficient to reach all the people in the stricken areas. It seems there are still millions of people who will not be reached. Despite Canada's continuing efforts, I felt that for humanitarian reasons we had to do more, and that is why, on behalf of Canada, I took the initiative in co-ordinating the drafting of a statement of principles—in fact, a code of conduct—for the purpose of guaranteeing delivery of food to people in the stricken areas.

This statement of principles, endorsed by the Common Market countries, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and the United States, is an appeal to the parties to the conflict to, first of all, suspend hostilities; guarantee safe delivery of aid by neutral agencies such as NGOs, international organizations and the churches; recognize the role of the United Nations in food delivery; and abstain from all military attacks on food convoys. I repeat, all these countries endorse this initiative for humanitarian reasons, and the Soviet Union, although it did not endorse the statement, did endorse the intent of the recommendations. I hope this new initiative will make it possible to open new corridors so that we can deliver larger quantities of food to people in the famine-stricken areas.

* * *

[English]

COMMUNICATIONS

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, the government has once again ignored the local and human impact of its budget by jacking up the fees that cities and towns across Canada must pay to operate

emergency radios for fire, ambulance and police across this land.

In the city of Côte St. Luc, in my own riding of Mount Royal, they expect their fees will increase by 1,000 per cent. The government has put its hand right into the taxpayers' pockets.

My question is directed to the Minister of Finance. Why has the government decided to increase this exorbitant and unconscionable tax on public safety?

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

The fees in question were established under the Radio Act amendments, which the hon. member, as I recall, spoke to, dealt with and made a contribution to in 1986 and 1987. In 1987, the law was passed which provides for no discrimination and no artificial subsidization of users of scarce radio frequencies across the country.

In no way will there be any adverse impact upon public safety with this move. The municipalities and organizations in question have had three years forewarning and have had ample opportunity to budget for these changes. I should point out as well that 20 per cent of municipalities across the country have had reductions in the user fees.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask the minister a supplementary question. I have some doubts about that figure. I remember when we debated that bill, Mr. Speaker, I said that we would have such a situation. Now we are faced with a 1,000 per cent increase.

Is the Finance Minister prepared to promise today to withdraw this dangerous indirect tax which threatens the effectiveness of these essential lines of communication for police, fire and ambulance services for the public? Is the Finance Minister prepared to make that commitment?

[English]

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to recall that while percentage increases may seem rather inordinate, the fact of the matter is that cities such as my own which used several hundred radio transmitters and receivers, were liable to pay only \$288 per year whereas, private, charitable and safety organiza-