

nations, we were the first in peacekeeping and we remain respected because of what we do.

• (1815)

Peacekeeping is what we do well. We are asked to participate in missions around the world because other nations look to us for the expertise and skill required to perform the job of peacekeeping. Regrettably, we are often targeted by those who do not respect freedom and peace because we are, quite simply, the very best.

One hundred thousand Canadians have served in over 30 missions during the past 45 years. We have been asked because Canada has earned the respect and has acquired the skill to function as peacekeepers wherever we are required.

I find it troublesome to read that Bill C-295 would give up Canadian sovereign command of Canadian forces. As the parliamentary secretary said earlier, Canadian personnel serving on peace operations are always commanded by a Canadian. Our commanders are directly responsible to the Chief of Defence Staff for the Canadian contribution to the overall mission and tasks of any given operation abroad. The hon. member at this point has said that he has changed that. I am pleased to see that, because it was a real flaw in the bill.

The people of Guelph—Wellington are justifiably proud of our contribution to the history of peacekeeping. We support the concept of our troops promoting good relations and preventing genocide, acts of terrorism, and civil war. The Canadian flag has for many in the world been seen first on the shoulders of a peacekeeper in Somalia, Yugoslavia, Cyprus, and Central America. Our peacekeepers have served as care-givers, have rebuilt and maintained orphanages, and their families have organized food, clothing, and toy collections in order not only to keep the peace but to provide some comfort to innocent men, women, and children who suffer from acts of violence and war.

Many of those peacekeepers were born in Guelph—Wellington and have family in my community or they have studied at the University of Guelph. My constituents remind me that every peacekeeper is a hero.

The people of Guelph—Wellington want the overall control of our troops to be in the hands of the Canadian command.

Never before has a government so often sought the consultation of members of Parliament on issues of peacekeeping. We have on this issue, as we have on so many others, demonstrated our commitment to seek the views of all parliamentarians and their constituents.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence have listened and they will continue to do so. Actions have followed their seeking our advice on peacekeeping missions.

Private Members' Business

There are times, however, when the government needs to act without delay. In our rapidly changing world, when nationalism and religious fervour have risen to increasingly dangerous terms, the need for flexibility is paramount.

My constituents will continue to support the government in promoting world peace and development. We understand the complexities of this commitment. We know that peacekeeping is not without risk. We also know that as the makers of the concept of peacekeeping its success will continue as long as we play a vital role in its future. The current system works well. It allows the government maximum flexibility.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this legislation. I thank the House for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-295.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak on this private member's bill. It is certainly timely. I congratulate the hon. member for Fraser Valley East for bringing it forward at this time.

The current crisis in Bosnia has brought into sharp focus the need for Canadians to have clear criteria for the future of peacekeeping missions. That is exactly what Bill C-295 does.

Certainly we have heard in the House many times that we cannot go everywhere. We have heard that we have to be more accountable, we have to be more transparent, and of course we always have to be aware of the cost of such measures.

Let me review what has occurred in Bosnia to illustrate why we need a bill such as this.

Canadian troops first went to this war-torn country over two and a half years ago in the honest hope that they could provide assistance and humanitarian relief to the people of Bosnia. They also hoped to keep combatants apart and facilitate a negotiated peace for the region.

• (1820)

Unfortunately, these laudable goals were not backed up by a United Nations mandate that could get the job done. With no leadership from Ottawa, our peacekeepers have been left twisting in the wind.

Our peacekeepers are the best in the world and their service in Bosnia has been above and beyond the call of duty. They deserve to have modern equipment, a coherent government policy, decisive leadership from Ottawa, and a UN mandate that allows them to do their job properly. Unfortunately, the government has let them down in almost all these respects.

We have received most recently mixed messages. We have a defence minister who says we should consolidate, we should fight back, and he even condones air strikes. We have a foreign affairs minister who says let us leave it the way it is and hope we can return to the mandate, as long as they do not keep taking us