

*Special Debate*

In fact, and I say this with great regret, last Friday when the question was posed by a member of this caucus to the minister about what Canada's intentions were, she did not answer the question but went outside of Parliament to hold a press conference in which the very same matters were addressed.

Trust cannot be built if Parliament is disregarded. A new sense of understanding and comprehension and support and willingness cannot begin to develop if the government evades its own commitment in this Chamber. It is not the Chamber itself that is important, it is what the Chamber represents, which is 26 million Canadians who want to be involved and need to be involved in some basic way in helping to find this new world responsibility that Canada is undertaking.

Canadians have serious questions. Colleagues of mine today have come to me and I have also received calls and letters asking what does this commitment involve? Will Canadian troops be fully supported? Will they have proper equipment? Will they have proper backup of command and logistics and supplies?

These are questions, honest questions, concerned questions by relatives, mothers and friends about troops that are being sent over.

That is why it is absolutely essential and crucial that one of the changes required is the democratization of the way we make decisions, especially on crucial issues where we are committing our forces into risky, dangerous, new situations.

I would hope at some point we can get a commitment from this minister to do that, to begin to democratize the way decisions are made on these crucial matters and to use Parliament as the forum in which it was traditionally and originally intended, not to evade it or ignore, or go around it but to use it in faith as a way of developing a fundamental agreement, a contract if you like, between Canadians in these times of trouble.

Serious questions must be raised concerning the mixed signals that we receive from this government. Just last Wednesday the Minister of Finance brought down a mini budget which contained further substantial reductions in maintenance funds for the department of defence. It did not change the capital expenditures. It did not alter the purchase of helicopters or submarines or anything else, but it changed the operating method. Yet it was just the week before that that the minister of defence said the

Canadian commitment to peacekeeping must be pulled back, pulled in, shrunken because there was not enough money to support our efforts.

We have had Canadian generals saying we cannot do any more because there are not sufficient funds to do it. We have reached our capacity, the full scope of our actions, yet the government shrinks its budget and reduces that commitment even further.

We are making promises, commitments if you like, for a role that the world needs, wants and recognizes Canada as having a competence and experience to play. At the same time we are substantially hindering, restricting and limiting the capacity to author and mount a peacekeeping measure.

It means we fundamentally need to have closer synergy between our defence policy and our foreign policy. We have to change the priorities of our defence establishment away from cold war priorities to peacemaking priorities and make sure there is sufficient budget and resources allocated to make that happen. That is another set of questions that needs to be worked out in serious debate and dialogue in this Parliament as to what is this new role and how we properly reallocate and reassign resources to make it happen.

Perhaps a fundamental question is being posed across the country today after the announcement, as I believe is being asked in other national capitals and other countries: If we are prepared to break traditional peacekeeping roles to provide an armed force for the protection of humanitarian efforts in Somalia, when are we going to do the same in Bosnia? Are we prepared to do the same in Liberia?

In other words, there are other areas of intense conflict, human suffering, tragedy and hunger in which there is a compelling need for international involvement and intervention. Does this set precedent or are we picking and choosing between which tragedy we will attempt to respond to?

This morning we held a major round table of Canadians to deal with the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina representing a wide variety of interest groups and experts with incredibly different points of view. They did agree on one thing, that the present UN role in Bosnia has come to a stalemate and has to be re-energized, reset and re-established in a more effective way. That is