

Within our development assistant programs, Canada has traditionally attached the highest priority to activities that attempt to reduce global poverty. It has been recognized that crime, violence and large-scale conflict often result in situations where poverty is most prevalent. Our government has stated that our goal is to provide 25 percent of our ODA [Official Development Assistance] to meet basic human needs and human resource development; to provide basic health and education; to work more closely to assist women who are the poorest principal providers of health, nutrition and education; and to provide sustainable development so that future generations may also know peace and security.

This government was elected on a promise of fiscal responsibility. While we are not in a position at this time to increase funding to our development assistance program, our goal remains the same -- to achieve a 0.7 percent ODA to GNP [gross national product] ratio. Despite this need for fiscal restraint, I do not believe that limited financial resources necessitate a reduction in effectiveness. Through creative, proactive and well-managed programs, our impact can even increase. Initiatives in human rights, for example, often administered on a small scale, can have a widespread impact. Our challenge is to administer all of our programs more effectively.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the impact of necessary change can be felt unequally by different groups in society. Canada is trying to respond to this reality by working with international financial institutions and through local governments to protect existing adjustment programs but mitigate negative impacts by launching new social programs to benefit those most directly affected by adjustment. We hope the foreign policy review will address this issue.

Canada has participated in adjustment efforts by trying to alleviate the debt burden. In 1985 we forgave all outstanding loans to the least-developed nations. From that point on, our official development assistance programs have been based upon grants, not the lending of money. Still, Africa's continuing debt burden severely handicaps its efforts at sustainable development. As a development partner, we need to consider how best to alleviate this burden. Success will assist in the creation of healthier African economies.

Mr. Speaker, now to Latin America. Canada is a country in and of the Americas. With the effects of globalization, Latin America and the Caribbean have become increasingly central to Canada's foreign policy. This region has already started upon fundamental economic, political and social change and modernization. Canada has a unique opportunity to share in this evolution and to help to shape it through positive collaboration. We are viewed as a