

Special Debate

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe Paré (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am taking part in this debate on maintaining peacekeepers in Bosnia and Croatia more out of a sense of duty than of pleasure.

• (2050)

More out of a sense of duty, because it is impossible to remain indifferent to the drama taking place in the former Yugoslavia. It is not for pleasure, because the government is putting us in a very awkward situation. It is claiming to consult us, but we know that the UN mandate ends in 24 hours.

Moreover, the government never really took steps to inform the House of the results of earlier peacekeeping missions. Finally, it probably made its decision to renew the mandate several weeks ago.

They better not try to say that the Minister of Foreign Affairs consulted us seriously on March 14, asking us our opinion on the fly. They also better not say that our criticism of the government is criticism of Canadian peacekeepers.

The Leader of the Opposition was very clear on this point. He paid homage to Canadian peacekeepers for their courage, their devotion and their professionalism. I therefore ask the hon. Liberal member to distinguish between criticism of the government and criticism of the peacekeepers. In fact, there is no criticism of the peacekeepers.

We have just reviewed Canadian foreign policy. Throughout our meetings, the former Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, now a senator, made light of Canada's situation describing Canada as the UN's emergency service. We have just issued a statement of policy. In the fall, the government issued its defence policy. Is there anything really different in the process we are starting today? Not a thing. It is the same as before.

At the San Francisco conference, which led to the establishment of the UN on June 26, 1945, following the second world War, people wanted to ensure that history would not repeat itself. Unfortunately, we have to admit that history has repeated itself. The UN charter introduced a new idea of universal security, and it was a Canadian politician, Lester B. Pearson, who, in the end, created peace missions as we know them today.

The new face of war and the increasing number of areas of conflict around the world require action by the international community. Finding ways to regulate and ensure international peace and security is one of Canada's responsibilities as well. Canada, a country renowned the world over as a leader in peacekeeping missions, can hardly run for cover now.

This debate also allows us to reflect on a certain number of subjects more or less on the periphery of the issue at hand. I would like to begin by reflecting on the role that television plays

on the international community's responsibility. As much as we denounce the gratuitous violence typical of today's television shows, we must recognize that the journalists covering international issues heighten awareness in the international community, and in Canada, of the situation reigning in countries in conflict.

On this issue, I think that MPs cannot simply follow public opinion. It would be too easy to conduct surveys and then to apply the decision corresponding exactly to what Canadians and Quebecers want to see. MPs have a role to play in shaping public opinion and they cannot hedge on this issue indefinitely.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of renewing the peacekeeping mandate in Bosnia and Croatia, but I am in full agreement with the reservations which my colleagues have already expressed. I think that we should react to this situation in the way that we would if we were to see a person in distress.

• (2055)

If I were at home in my apartment and heard gunshots in the next apartment, I could not just shrug it off. Why should we then close our eyes and refuse to act when it comes to the international scene?

The role of peacekeepers is extremely important. It is essential in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They bring food and medical supplies, among other things, to people who are undeniably the victims in the situation.

They also ensure that some lines of communication remain open, without which life would become unbearable. They also logistically support NGOs like the Red Cross and the High Commissioner's Office for Refugees, which play a crucial role which could not possibly be undertaken without the peacekeepers.

Finally, regarding the need for the mission, everybody recognizes that if we pulled out of Bosnia, we would leave behind a void which would be filled with massive fireworks, it would literally be hell on earth.

I said earlier that we had begun to review Canadian foreign policy. We must realize that borders are a thing of the past. There is no denying the interdependencies between peoples. When someone pollutes the environment elsewhere, we in Canada are affected. Poverty in developing countries is also our problem because we all are responsible for what happens in the world. We cannot remain passive when we see human rights being violated. Population migrations always end up affecting us.

Some 50 Bosnian refugees recently immigrated to my riding. We cannot close our eyes and say: "It is none of our business. If they want to fight, let them fight among themselves". No. We have a moral and ethical responsibility in these matters.