

Oral Questions

conduct as we draw near the end of the calendar year in which she has been serving as the leader of her party.

On the question of Ethiopia, first, the government certainly shares the very strong view that has been expressed by the member for Yukon with respect to our international obligations and we try hard to honour those. We try hard to honour those through ODA and we try hard to honour those through bringing an early and peaceful end to a conflict in the Gulf, whose principal victims are precisely the poor of developing countries who are faced with the double impact of high energy prices and the loss of remittances coming to their countries.

I am concerned and we are concerned about Ethiopia. There have been discussions raised by private members with regard to the value of a special trip by members of Parliament representing the three parties in the House to that region over the Christmas period. I believe that would be a useful undertaking. I intend to follow through on that suggestion.

We will then take a look at the specific recommendations that those members of Parliament may make to us upon their return.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate the point of the Secretary of State for External Affairs that perhaps there is a place for an independent review of the situation in Africa which is very serious. I would applaud that initiative.

I would like to say that there is an immediate problem that we know about right now. Oxfam Canada has estimated that a million tonnes of grain is needed in northern Ethiopia and a million tonnes of grain in the Sudan. Yet, it is also estimated that right here in Canada we are sitting with 33 million tonnes of surplus grain still in farmers' storage bins.

I would ask the Minister of Agriculture if the Canadian government consider purchasing that grain from Canadian farmers and donating it to those people who need it right now and cannot wait.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Monique Landry (Minister for External Relations): Mr. Speaker, as the Secretary of State for

External Affairs mentioned, we are indeed concerned about Ethiopia. My hon. colleague probably knows that an agreement to reopen the port of Massawa was finally reached between the Ethiopian government and the rebels. I think this shows that donor countries did try to bring the two sides to reopen the port so that the greatest number of people could be reached and helped. I personally met, a day or two ago, with a coalition of NGOs returning from Ethiopia and discussed with them so as to respond effectively to the Ethiopian crisis in the months to come. We will also go on cooperating, as we did last year, with the international community and the Canadian NGOs through which most of our food aid reaches the Ethiopian people, to provide as much assistance as possible to the Ethiopians.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, our world has completely changed during the year now drawing to a close. But what we must realize as well is that the world is not only a big market but also a big family. I have just referred to the famine which is destroying certain regions of Africa while we here in Canada stare at huge accumulating wheat surpluses. My question is simple: Will the government give these surpluses to the people who are now starving in Africa?

Hon. Monique Landry (Minister for External Relations): Surely, Mr. Speaker, my colleague is aware that if we are to provide assistance and food to distressed people in Ethiopia the donor countries have to co-ordinate their efforts to make sure that food assistance does get to the people. That would be our first consideration. We have assistance budgets and, as I have shown in recent years, we are prepared to buy the food and ship it to Ethiopia. I am sure my colleague knows that the on-going war often made it impossible for us to reach the people involved. In the past few years we agreed to deliver food through the means available to us and other donor countries, either via the south road or through cross border operations. But it is not a simple matter of shipping more wheat and foodstuffs, we have to make sure assistance will get to the people.

This is why I sought the co-operation of non-government organizations to gather the necessary information and bring pressure to bear on the party involved. Our efforts have been successful in the case of the re-opening of the Massaoua harbour. This amounts to a major victory for the international community, because we