

Mr. MacDonald (Rosedale): This is an interesting question. I suppose it is one of those situations where we need to get together and agree upon what the facts are. I am sure the Hon. Member is in agreement that, based on the experience of the last two decades, more and more of our tax dollars have gone unproductively to service a growing debt. Our capacity to deal with the problems that have been created—and we have heard a number of them; he has referred to one of them from his colleague, the Member from Kent—or any other problems will be increasingly restricted. Surely there is a direct interconnection between an economy that gets out of control and an economic system in which there is less and less ability to make important decisions, either to protect the social or environmental aspects of our society, and it is profoundly unhealthy. I find it difficult to believe the Member would argue that we can more readily deal with matters affecting the environment if we have less and less economic capacity to do so. That is not a convincing argument, but perhaps if he has a further opportunity, he could persuade me to his point of view.

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say how pleased we are to see the Member back in this House. We would certainly agree that he is a Canadian that has much to contribute, particularly in his field of knowledge, conditions in the Third World and particularly in Africa.

Therefore I would like to ask him what are his views on what I would consider the very serious cuts to official development assistance. As I understand it, about \$720 million would be cut from aid over the next two years. Does he not agree that cuts to programs, such as those that come under UNICEF, which help children in Africa and other parts of the world, would mean that children will die for lack of needed immunizations and food supplements? Does it not also mean that Canada's commitment made at the Decade of Women Conference in Nairobi of increasing our support for women in development, which means strengthening families and children in the next generation, will also be cut back?

What does this do to our international reputation, which we have been proud of as Canadians? The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) has made strong commitments that we would not decrease, but would increase support. When does he think, with this kind of regressive action,

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that Canada will ever achieve our promised goal of .7 per cent for development aid which, as a rich country, we can well afford in a world where so many are starving?

Mr. MacDonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for her kind words of welcome. She is quite right. The significance of the cuts that have been made to the Official Development Assistance Program are important. Naturally I, as well as many other Members, am not pleased that we have had to make this kind of reduction. But I also recognize the fact, because I had the occasion some years ago to sit around a cabinet table trying to make the same kinds of decisions, that when it comes to trying to get your household in order, there is not a great deal of flexibility. I do not know whether the Hon. Member has ever looked at the amount of available opportunities a Government has to reduce its expenditures, particularly in the first year.

Ms. Mitchell: Deferred taxation.

Mr. MacDonald (Rosedale): I am glad to hear the Member say she would prefer that there would be more taxation, but—

Ms. Mitchell: Deferred taxes could be collected, millions of dollars.

Mr. MacDonald: I am not sure which one she is referring to, but I do know that it is not an easy exercise. It is my belief that in this exercise great sensitivity has been taken with respect to the programs for people, which is what the Member has referred to. I am always concerned when there are reductions in global expenditures in budgets that it is not taken on the backs of those who are individually involved at the field level. I believe there is the opportunity, because within the over-all official development assistance, there are large budget items which can be rescheduled which are more in the nature of infrastructure than programs for people. These are the kinds of sensitive decisions that the people in CIDA, who have a good view of development responsibility, will take into account.

In response to the other question the Member raised, the sooner we meet the original target of .6 the better, but even with these reductions, Canada continues to be a major leader in international development assistance, particularly on the continent of Africa. I believe that is a position that we will continue without abatement.