

Oral Questions

The very people who are putting crack and cocaine in the hands of the children in our school yards are the same people today who are using the Canadian passport as a calling card.

When was the government made aware of this situation? Which ministers were aware of it? Why has nothing been done about this horrible situation?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is assuming far too much. The Canadian Passport Office has been aware of the fraudulent passport cases that were outlined in the article and it reported them promptly to the RCMP.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the minister says that it is not a very big problem. According to the *Montreal Gazette* this morning, the list of people who got these illegal passports reads like a directory of the international drug trade.

Who is running the department of passports in Canada? Is it the Colombian drug dealers? Which ministers were aware of this? Why has nothing been done? When will the Prime Minister take his job seriously for once in our lives?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I will not respond in the way I am thoroughly tempted to respond.

I have asked for a full report on this situation because, as I said in response to his first question, I do take the situation very seriously. I have asked my department for a full report.

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about crime. They want our cities and communities safe. Yet today Canadians are outraged to learn that organized crime world-wide is using Canadian passports issued by External Affairs to conduct illegal activities all over the world. The minister has confirmed that she is investigating.

Why has this government allowed the Canadian passport, a symbol of our proud country, to be used as a calling card for international criminals?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, we issue 1.2 million passports a year. There are 6 million in circulation.

Security is our highest priority in the issue of passports. Eighty-three per cent of our passports are issued personally to those who apply for them.

I have asked for a full report on any allegations that have been made that this situation is a difficult one.

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, the minister says that security is a prime responsibility—

Mrs. McDougall: I said it was a priority.

Mr. Wappel: Priority, that is fine, as it should be. The minister has known since 1989, or her predecessor has known since 1989, from reports by the RCMP that this matter has been going on two full years.

What has taken so long to begin the investigation? Why are you investigating now? If you had started your investigations in 1989 when you should have done so, why is the matter still going on?

Mr. Speaker: I have to ask the hon. member to address his questions through the Chair.

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, what I said was that I am told that the passport office had been made aware of some of these cases and reported them to the RCMP immediately—immediately, I said, they reported these incidents—and I have asked for a full report on the whole issue. I should also point out that the article in the *Gazette* says that this is not widespread.

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• (1430)

MIDDLE EAST

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I would like to personally thank the President of the Treasury Board for seeing an opportunity yesterday and for the good work he did. I would like to thank him on behalf of the New Democratic Party.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Ms. McLaughlin: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. News reports yesterday and today indicate that there could be potentially a very serious resumption of conflict in the Middle East. We are all concerned about Iraq's persistent refusal to agree to inspection of their nuclear sites.