

Special Debate

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, in opening the response on behalf of our caucus and our leader, let me say that we fully support the decision taken by the United Nations to authorize a mission of mercy and hope into Somalia.

It is an action we have been urging for the last several months. We recognized that the situation in Somalia was deteriorating, that the actions undertaken up to that point were not working, that the suffering was increasing and that the world was watching.

We welcome this initiative. We certainly support the decision by the government to have Canadian forces participate in this new multinational effort. We have been asking since last July that more effective action be taken in Somalia and that Canada take the lead in trying to promote this. We endorse fully the involvement and the contribution that our armed forces can make.

For me, one of the redeeming moments during the debate on the Constitution was when I, along with our leader, was asked to attend a group of Canadian forces leaving Kapyong Barracks to attend a peacekeeping mission in Croatia. It was at a time when the country was being racked and divided by questions about its own unity and its own sense of identity. We went into the barracks and talked to young men and women who came from all regions of Canada, spoke both official languages, represented a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds and who with one voice were saying they were proud to be going on behalf of this country. It was one of those moments that sticks in your mind and you will never forget.

Endorsing this action and supporting the Canadian participation also requires that this Parliament begin asking some serious questions on behalf of the Canadian people. One thing is very clear. As each day goes by, the United Nations and the participating members cross traditional lines. As the Secretary-General himself said just last Monday: "Experience has shown that this cannot be achieved by UN operations based on the accepted principles of peacekeeping".

The normal conventional wisdoms that have applied to Canadian peacekeeping missions since 1956 are being extended, changed and altered into something very new and very dramatic, something that carries far greater ramifications and consequences and puts into a new

dimension the notion of Canadians' role as part of international forces.

The minister said that we are now embarking on a peace enforcement action, a peacemaking action if you like, putting substantial new risks in the way of our forces and putting yet substantial new commitments that we are asking the Canadian people to support. We are breaking ground, we are going into uncharted waters, we are drawing a new map of international rules and procedures and organization for the sake of trying to fill the gap and void that has been created by the end of the cold war. We will be trying to put in place a different kind of international morality and international responsibility.

That is why it is so important and so crucial that such actions be endorsed fully by the Parliament of Canada, speaking for all the Canadian people. We cannot begin to assume automatically that these kinds of new initiatives which are moving Canada, along with other nations, into a substantial new role of intervention and enforcement, can take place without a consensus, without the agreement of the Canadian people. Let us be blunt about it. There will be new risks. There will be new dangers. There will be new tensions. We are putting young Canadian men and women into situations of high risk, of real danger to their lives.

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If we are going to continue to do this, we must ensure that it is based on a sound and broad understanding of what those risks are and what the consequences are, and an agreement by Canadians that they are prepared to take that initiative. There is only one way of doing that in our system. It has to be based on a fair and open debate in this Parliament and then approval of this forum.

That is why we have been urging the minister in letters and in comments and statements for several months now to bring these matters before Parliament so that consensus-building can begin to happen, that Canadians can begin to understand.

It was interesting in a speech the minister gave recently when she said Canadians must understand more about what is happening in their foreign policy, the way the world is changing and how it affects them. Yet time after time there has been a refusal or a reluctance to use Parliament as the forum for that education, for that consensus building.