

*Statements by Ministers*

The Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) met with the Mexican Ambassador last night to offer him our condolences and to inform him of the measures the Government of Canada has now taken to provide assistance.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has two concerns.

First, regarding the victims in Mexico: we want to help them, and that is why last night I announced that the Canadian International Development Agency was making \$1 million available to organizations experienced in relief work. We expect to receive specific requests from these organizations within the next few hours, as soon as requirements have been specified. A CIDA expert on emergency relief has left for Mexico and she will be reporting to us on the situation.

Second, regarding thousands of Canadians who are worried about close relatives or friends in Mexico and whom we want to reassure as soon as possible.

Emergency procedures provided for this type of disaster are now in effect. As of yesterday afternoon, the Operations Centre at the Department of External Affairs is on a 24-hour schedule. The Centre's telephone number has been announced by the media, and I will repeat it here: area code 613-996-8885.

People who are worried about Canadians in Mexico can call the Centre and leave the names of the persons about whom they want to obtain information.

A team of six consular officers from the Department of External Affairs left Canada at 10:30 this morning to go and assist our embassy staff. They will be responsible for helping all Canadians who need assistance. The officers are fluent in Spanish and know Mexico very well. As information becomes available, it will be transmitted to the relatives and friends in Canada who contacted us.

[English]

**Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Official Opposition, I rise to express shock and concern at the news of the tragic earthquake disaster in Mexico. I also want to express sympathy to the people of Mexico and, in particular, to all those who lost loved ones because of this disaster.

At least since 1981, when the President of Mexico paid an official visit to our country, we have had a special relationship with Mexico, a relationship involving growing closeness in many ways. Therefore, news of a disaster, like the earthquake that struck Mexico yesterday, comes as a matter of special concern to Canadians both in human terms and because of that deep and wide special relationship.

We are pleased to hear of the emergency measures announced by the Minister for External Relations (Mrs. Vézina). I would like to ask the Minister whether the Government could give serious consideration to increasing the special aid fund which she announced yesterday. The news of the

extent of the damage created by the earthquake indicates that it is of catastrophic proportions. Certainly the Government should be looking at the matter of urgency, as to what more we could do, not only by providing funds but by providing such things as mobile homes, medical supplies, communications equipment, and technical experts in a whole host of areas not just medical doctors but also engineering and construction people.

Second, it is necessary for the Government to confirm that it is doing everything possible to assist Canadians who may be stranded in Mexico because of the earthquake. It may well be necessary for special evacuation measures to be taken, possibly involving planes of the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as special communications networks in addition to what the Minister has announced.

To conclude, on behalf of the Official Opposition, I want to express our shock and concern at the extent of the tragedy connected with the catastrophic earthquake that struck Mexico yesterday, as well as to express our deepest sympathy to the people of Mexico, in particular to those who lost members of their family, friends and relatives in this earthquake.

[Translation]

We wish to extend our heartfelt condolences to the people of Mexico and assure them that the Canadian Government will make a sizeable financial contribution to help them through this emergency.

[English]

**Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan-Malahat-The Islands):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister's statement must be regarded as nothing more than a preliminary expression of sympathy for the disaster that has overtaken the people of Mexico. As I said in my statement under the provisions of Standing Order 22 this morning, the people of Canada want to extend practical help and not just sympathy.

One million dollars from CIDA to help NGOs with their relief activities cannot, in any way, be regarded as a considered response from Canada to Mexico in this time of tragedy. The earthquake has done billions of dollars of damage to Mexico. Buildings have been destroyed. Transportation and communication links have been disrupted. As the Minister knows, following any earthquake there are problems with sanitation and disease. These problems will be much greater in Mexico City with a population of 18 million people. Considering this devastation, unless today's announcement is followed quickly, and I stress the word "quickly", by the announcement of a much more comprehensive program, the \$1 million will be an insult to the people of Mexico in this time of tragedy.

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A more comprehensive program would include at least two components. The first would be a matching dollar for dollar program with recognized relief agencies. Many Canadians will want to make direct contributions to an aid program, and our Government should encourage it by matching dollar for dollar.