

Oral Questions

• (1445)

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday I asked why Glenda Simms, the past president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, was being kept on the government payroll and going on irrelevant junkets when her position is now defunct. The Prime Minister responded by saying that he was giving her time to adjust to the new reality.

The government is throwing 45,000 civil servants out of work. They, like many other Canadians, will have to adjust to their new reality, so why does Simms get special treatment? Is this another example of Liberal double standards?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the President of the Treasury Board has made sure the people who are to be let go because of the cuts will have good payments made to them. An agreement was negotiated by the union to make sure there will be some help for them to adjust.

It is part of the policy of the government to make sure it is not the end from one day to the other. We do that for all the bureaucrats and for that woman too.

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, 45,000 civil servants did not get a trip to the Philippines to have fun in the sun.

The government appointed Simms in January when it knew it was going to disband the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Simms wasted taxpayers' money on questionable expenses during her tenure as head of the council. Now the government is allowing her to waste even more money on this needless and frivolous trip to the Philippines.

Will the Prime Minister demonstrate to Canadians he cares about government waste, cancel the junket and terminate Simms appointment?

Hon. Sheila Finestone (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Dr. Simms, at the invitation of international agencies, has been invited to speak on Canada's very fine programs to ensure equality for all people, including employment equity for women.

She has also been asked to address the issues of sexual harassment in the workplace, for which Canada is doing a fairly good job to date. She is addressing these programs and policies in the Philippines where she has been invited to speak. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has agreed that Canada, as a role model, should speak in international fora of this nature. We are very proud she is going to represent us.

[Translation]

BURUNDI

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Yesterday, the President of Burundi alluded to the threat of a double genocide when he said that something must be done about the similarities between the current situation in his country and what happened in Rwanda. Four hundreds Hutus, mostly women and children, are said to have been slaughtered last week by the Burundese army and by armed groups of Tutsis, in the Gasorwe region.

Will the minister tell us what the Canadian government intends to do following the plea for help made by the Burundi President?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will understand that any solution to the precarious situation in Burundi must absolutely be based on a reconciliation of the parties involved.

This is why the Union of African States, as well as the Francophonie, which met in Paris last week, decided to send ministerial missions to meet with the parties to try to make them understand that reconciliation is essential. We are confident that these preventive diplomacy efforts will give positive results.

The hon. member is seeking a military solution, but that is not what government authorities want. The hon. member's suggestion has not been made by government authorities. The solution proposed by the ministers of the Francophonie is precisely the one requested by the Burundi government official.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the minister recognize that, beyond the nice assurances and comments on reconciliation, it is urgent to take concrete action, which includes the rapid setting up of a monitoring group in Burundi, as requested by the Burundi ambassador to Canada?

• (1450)

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just said to the hon. member that, even though the Burundi ambassador may have made such a request, Burundi government officials did not.

I just got back from a meeting of ministers of the Francophonie, where the Burundi situation was discussed and where we heard from a representative of the government of Burundi. What that government official asked for, and what we will do, is this: first, send a ministerial mission to attempt a reconciliation; second, send a group of experts to help local authorities solve their problems; third, provide humanitarian assistance, as Canada is always prepared to offer, to non-governmental orga-