

Oral Questions

value of that might be. We have looked into this matter very thoroughly and are satisfied with the conclusions.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, the minister says files were inadvertently destroyed. We are talking here about thousands and thousands of pounds, a small forest of files that were destroyed.

We recognize that the \$20,000 may be some effort to pay out the member of the other place so she does not say anything more about this, but what we see,—

Some hon. members: Order, order.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member knows perfectly well that that is an improper suggestion. I know he would want to withdraw it and then he can complete his question.

Mr. Riis: Obviously there has been a clandestine covering up—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Riis: Let me finish—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the hon. member could put his question directly and leave out the suppositions.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, my question to the Deputy Prime Minister is: in view of the fact that thousands of pounds of critical, sensitive documents mysteriously disappeared like the Al-Mashat letter, does the government not feel that a public inquiry would be appropriate to find out what went on in those critical hours before that free trade agreement was signed?

• (1150)

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, there was an investigation within our department. I have answered this question and I have no intention of pursuing it any further.

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EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have questions for the Secretary of State for External Affairs on two very urgent international humanitarian issues.

As the minister well knows, there are 4,500 Jews in Syria whose human rights are being violated. They are

not allowed to emigrate, arrest and torture are commonplace. In particular there is the desperate situation of a number of people, particularly the Swed brothers who have been in prison for over four years without any trial at all.

I want to ask the minister if she will make a direct request of the Prime Minister to appeal to President Assad of Syria to release these people as a demonstration of his own government's commitment to trying to find some peaceful solution in the Middle East.

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I think what is most important about the peace process in the Middle East is that the parties that are at the table pursue their discussions in what now is seen as a reasonably positive atmosphere.

In the case that the hon. member is referring to, we have been in constant touch with the Syrian authorities at the highest levels within the government regularly over the period of their incarceration, and indeed were successful in having those sentences reduced.

I will be very happy to look into it again and make further representations. We have been doing this fairly constantly and I am quite prepared to do it again.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I recognize that representation has been made, but we are asking that the Prime Minister himself make a direct appeal to his counterpart in Syria to try and release these people who are having their positions so desperately violated at the present time.

I would like to ask a supplementary on another humanitarian international question. We have all witnessed the siege of Dubrovnik and the over 60,000 people who are without water, without food and without any form of electricity. Limited humanitarian assistance was received last night but we know it is not nearly enough.

I would like to ask the minister if the Canadian government would make a direct appeal to member states of the United Nations and the European Community to undertake the kind of serious airlift of food and medicines, similar to what happened with the plight of the Kurds, and will Canada offer to directly participate in such an international effort?