

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

### ENERGY, MINES AND RESOURCES—EIGHTH REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

**Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the Parties. I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That notwithstanding the usual practices of the House, if the House is not sitting when the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Energy, Mines and Resources is completed, the committee shall present its report by filing it with the Clerk of the House provided that the report shall then be deemed to have been laid upon the table.

**Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques):** Mr. Speaker, I think we will need further consultation on this. Perhaps we can return to it at a later time.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** There is, therefore, not unanimous consent.

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[Translation]

### FORGIVENESS OF CERTAIN OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE DEBTS ACT

#### MEASURE TO ENACT

**Hon. Monique Landry, (for the Secretary of State for External Affairs),** moved that Bill C-62, An act relating to the forgiveness of debts incurred or assumed in respect of certain official development assistance loans made by the Government of Canada to the Governments of Togo and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and also to the former East African Community, be the second time and, with unanimous consent, referred to a Committee of the Whole.

She said: Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to thank all Members of this House and, of course, the two opposition Parties for deciding to consider this Bill and help expedite its passage today. I must say I greatly appreciate your co-operation because this is a very important and pressing matter for the Government of Canada.

The purpose of this Bill is to forgive the debts incurred or assumed in respect of official development assistance to several African countries including Togo, Mauritania and the former East African Community.

I shall, if I may, outline briefly what is at issue here.

In the context of the North-South dialogue that took place at the Conference on International Economic Co-operation, in 1977 Canada decided to cancel debts incurred in respect of official development assistance by twelve countries included on the United Nations list of least developed countries. In December of that year, the Parliament of Canada enacted this decision.

### *Development Assistance Debts*

The Canadian measure was favourably received at the international level. Obliging the poorest countries on this planet to repay their loans was having a negative impact, both on the countries themselves and the international economic situation. Canada was among the first countries to both recognize this fact and take concrete measures to deal with the situation.

Ten years later, Canada is still leading the way in finding solutions to the problems of the neediest nations in terms of debt and development, especially in Africa's sub-Saharan region.

In February 1986, we announced that Canadian official development assistance would no longer be defined in terms of loans but in terms of grants. This meant that developing countries would no longer be placed in a debtor position vis-à-vis Canada. Since the money would be given in the form of grants, these sums would not have to be reimbursed.

However, more had to be done. The sub-Saharan countries were faced with an unprecedented human and economic crisis that had taken on incredible proportions.

In May 1986, my Government therefore announced to the United Nations a five-year moratorium on the development assistance debts incurred by Sub-Saharan African countries which had implemented structural readjustment programs. This meant that these countries did not have to make any payments to Canada for a five-year period. The non-repayment period could also be extended by another five years if the economy of these countries showed no sign of recovery, and this up to the year 2000 if necessary. The entire international community, and especially the African countries, welcomed this decision as being generous and humanitarian. Indeed, it reasserted the role of Canada as concerns the critical situation in Africa.

This Bill is the result of the official decision made by Canada in 1977 to cancel the development assistance debt of countries on the least-developed countries list established by the United Nations. Since then, two other African countries, Togo and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, have suffered such an economic crisis that they have been added to the list. To ensure that our policy as concerns these countries remains consistent, the Canadian Government believes that the development assistance debts of Togo and Mauritania must also be cancelled, as well as that of the former East African Community. I remind Hon. Members that this Community consisted of three countries of which two, Tanzania and Uganda, are also on the least-developed countries list.

I therefore hope, Madam Speaker, that the House will give all its attention to this Bill. It involves our international reputation. Also, and most important, these countries are being