

Periods of plenty are periods when countries - like people - often avoid difficult choices. Periods of restraint are periods when hard and often painful choices have to be made. I don't need to remind you that this government - and this country - are in one of those tough periods now. We have a deficit to reduce. We have expenditures to cut. We have programs to make more effective and more efficient.

Times of restraint also concentrate the mind. They force all of us to ask the fundamental questions: Do we have our priorities right? Are the needs and aspirations of Canadians accurately reflected in the spending priorities of the government?

Many Canadians have been asking these fundamental questions about the money we spend on official development assistance - ODA. Some Canadians are troubled by the fact that we continue to assist other countries at a time when the government is being forced to curtail programs for Canadians. They wonder if it would not be more proper in a period of restraint to address the priorities of Canadians first, and only when these priorities are addressed to turn to the needs of others around the world.

These are serious concerns expressed by serious people. However, there is also a smaller number of Canadians seeking to capitalize on these concerns, as part of an ideological opposition to foreign aid. One such organization is the National Citizens Coalition which has funded a campaign designed to stoke opposition to foreign aid. As far as they are concerned, to give money and expertise and advice to people less fortunate than ourselves is wrong. It is an attitude they apply to less fortunate Canadians as well as to less fortunate people around the world. In a democracy, of course, groups like that have a perfect right to hold those views and propagate them. But they misinform Canadians about an important element of Canadian foreign policy, and I welcome the opportunity today to provide a different perspective.

I want to make two basic points. The first is that ODA is a reflection of the Canadian character. It is one way we express our sense of justice, of morality - our values as individuals and a society. My second point is that ODA is not charity. It is a prudent, long-term investment in Canada. It is something which means security for our country, jobs for Canadians, and money in the bank.

In Pakistan, Canada has contributed almost half a billion dollars over four decades to that country's energy sector. We were key players in Pakistan's first hydro dam, its first thermal power station and its first extra high voltage transmission line. Our projects there have helped Pakistan successfully and efficiently manage its energy resources and have encouraged Canadian industrial links with the energy sector in that country. Similar largescale energy projects have been mounted in India, Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana and Zimbabwe.