

Government Orders

[Translation]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The sitting of the House will therefore be suspended until around 10 p.m. The bells will ring for 15 minutes to announce that the sitting has resumed.

The sitting of the House was suspended at 8.13 p.m.

[English]

SITTING RESUMED

The House resumed at 10.10 p.m.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, hon. members will know that military action began in the Persian Gulf today, as announced at 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

President Bush called me beforehand to apprise me that he had authorized such action. We understand at the moment that the participants of this first wave included forces from the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

The fighting is a direct consequence of Saddam Hussein's determination to maintain his brutal occupation and his illegal annexation of Kuwait in defiance of world opinion. He has chosen to ignore the numerous opportunities that were open to him to withdraw. He has had 167 days since his illegal and brutal invasion of Kuwait on August 2, and 48 full days since the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 678 on November 29.

In all of that time, with all of the requests, with all of the appeals from leaders around the world, his answer has been no. Resolution 678 provided a pause for peace and gave Saddam Hussein one final opportunity to comply with the will of the world community, as duly expressed through the United Nations. He refused again and again to take that opportunity. Diplomacy has been given every chance to end this conflict peacefully, but regrettably has failed in the face of Saddam Hussein's intransigence. That same intransigence and his indifference to the suffering of his own people, especially the children, made it clear that sanctions alone were not going to force him to leave Kuwait.

There has not been a single iota of interest on his part in complying with the United Nations directives. The time has regrettably come therefore to act in the

interests of preserving world order and in safeguarding the effectiveness of the United Nations. A failure by the world community to act would have undermined the United Nations, turned a blind eye to naked aggression, condoned violations of international law and encouraged other potential aggressors to defy world opinion in the pursuit of their own criminal ambitions. If Canada had stood aside, we would have betrayed our own national interests, repudiated our own responsibilities and dishonoured our own traditions.

Canada did not stand aside in two world wars and Korea. Canada, and in particular the Secretary of State for External Affairs, did not stand aside from the hard work of seeking a peaceful end to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and, Mr. Speaker, Canada is not standing aside tonight from giving effect to the United Nations resolutions.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mulroney: We have joined with other UN members in expelling Saddam Hussein from Kuwait by force. At this moment our CF-18s are flying combat air patrol in the northern Persian Gulf, protecting Canadian and allied ships and personnel in the gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. Canadian ships are now engaged in the company of others, in playing a vital role in assuring the support of the seaborne arm of the coalition in the Persian Gulf.

Earlier this evening, the cabinet met and gave the Chief of the Defence Staff, General de Chastelain, authority for the Canadian forces to carry out sweep and escort missions over Kuwait and Iraq, if necessary and appropriate. All Canadian forces in the gulf will nevertheless remain under Canadian command.

I profoundly regret, as I am sure, do all members of this House, that it has come to this. It is with no satisfaction that we take up arms, because war is always a tragedy, but the greater tragedy would have been for criminal aggression to go unchecked.

I am sure that the safety of the Canadian service men and women in the gulf is uppermost in the minds of all members. Our hearts go out tonight to those families with loved ones, fathers or mothers, sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters, on duty in the Persian Gulf. These courageous men and women are braving great danger in the defence of the values and the interests of their entire country. They have our gratitude and our respect, and especially tonight, our prayers.