

Mr. Speaker, I rise today, on behalf of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, who was unable to fly to Ottawa this morning because of the snowstorm, to announce the government's decision about Canada's participation in the United Nations' peacekeeping operation in Cyprus.

After extensive consultation with the United Nations, Greece and Turkey, as well as Greek and Turkish Cypriots, the government has informed the Secretary-General of the United Nations that Canada will withdraw its troops from Cyprus beginning in June of 1993, the withdrawal to be completed by September.

For the past 28 years -- in fact from the very beginning of the UN peacekeeping operation in Cyprus -- thousands of Canadian men and women have displayed extraordinary competence, fairness and calm under pressure in the cause of peace. Their presence in Cyprus has been a powerful symbol of Canada's commitment to peace and security in the world. It has been a source of honour and pride, not only for those serving there, but for all Canadians.

I am sure I speak for all members of this House and for all Canadians when I say to these Canadian men and women, as well as to their families, that Canada owes them a large debt of gratitude for their dedication, their professionalism, and to those who died in the service of peace, their sacrifice.

Beyond our contribution of troops and equipment, Canada has spared no effort to help the Secretary-General find a peaceful solution to the dispute. Mrs. McDougall visited Cyprus, Greece and Turkey in May of this year to press all parties concerned to work with the Secretary-General to that end. She renewed our plea to Cypriots at the UN General Assembly in September and indicated that our patience was running short.

We were deeply disappointed that the discussions under the Secretary-General's guidance have not been successful. In a unanimous resolution on November 25, the Security Council stated that "the present status quo is not acceptable."

The government has also taken into account the report of, and appreciates the efforts of a group of parliamentarians, led by the Honourable Member for Don Valley East, who provided Mrs. McDougall with useful information on the current situation in Cyprus.

After 28 years of service in Cyprus, after 28 years of watching both sides in the dispute either being unable or unwilling to negotiate a political solution, after 28 years of significant expenditures to maintain troops and equipment in that region without any measurable progress, it was time to face facts and come to certain conclusions.

Mr. Speaker, our experience in Cyprus has taught us many lessons. One of the most important is that parties to a dispute must understand that there are limits to the duration of any peacekeeping operation.