

the Canadian Council for International Co-operation. All these bodies have said that they, in their own way, in their own banking activities, will make it clear that they will no longer use certain banks, nor will they encourage their memberships to use them, until they make a definite move away from the present policy of providing economic support for South Africa.

I have read the reports in recent years of meetings between these groups and the banks in an effort in a patient way to obtain a clear account of the policy which is being followed. Those efforts were unsuccessful. Indeed one of the ridiculous anomalies of the present situation is that one can sometimes find out more about Canadian banking activities from reports of the United States Congress than from reports made available in this country either directly or through institutions which are under the jurisdiction of parliament to which public disclosure ought to be made.

I will just say a few words more with respect to the bill itself. Its purpose is to identify countries where the violation of human rights is occurring in a gross and continuing way to an extent clearly unacceptable even upon the basis of the most minimal standards. I realize there is an ethnocentric concern in some minds as to whether or not one group of people can make a decision with regard to a violation of human rights occurring among another group of people or in another country. Arguments can be raised as to distinctions between violations of human rights as opposed to the restriction of civil liberties and social opportunities.

I am calling attention this afternoon to the increasing number of governments and regimes, dictatorships on both the right and the left, which make a point, both as policy and daily practice, of violating the rights of their own citizens by arresting them without warning, imprisoning them without any recourse to legal protection, submitting them to torture, and executing them in many cases, to say nothing of the circumstances in which hundreds, sometimes thousands of people, disappear without trace. With many of these countries we have important economic relationships. They include Indonesia where, according to Amnesty International, there are between 50,000 and 100,000 political prisoners. They include Brazil, Argentina, and some of the Soviet countries with which we have tried to be reasonable at recent meetings in Belgrade, meetings which have quite obviously failed.

This legislative proposal is calling for some kind of responsibility in international affairs similar to that which we all accept with respect to our domestic affairs. In view of the wide interest and concern expressed on this subject I hope there will be an opportunity at the end of our discussion this afternoon to refer the subject matter to the Standing Committee on External Affairs where the bill could be scrutinized, and before which witnesses can be heard, so as to enable satisfactory recommendations to be made to the House for effective government action.

Mr. W. Kenneth Robinson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, we have before us a bill the purpose of which would appear to be to prevent Canadian aid by grant or loan to countries which, in

accordance with the views of certain international non-governmental organizations, have consistently violated human rights. It would also restrict trade with such countries.

As hon. members will appreciate, the problem of finding appropriate and effective methods of ensuring greater respect for human rights is one of the most delicate issues in foreign policy, one which we are constantly seeking to resolve. In this respect I believe that the government and the sponsors of this bill share certain common objectives, though we may not agree on the most effective means of attaining our goal.

In addressing this issue I believe it would help our understanding of the problem if I were first to say a few words about the Canadian government's general approach to date on the human rights issue as it relates to development assistance and to export financing assistance. As a general rule, we have not directly linked these matters with the internal policies of the governments in question, since it is intended by such programs that the people of the countries concerned should, in the long run, be the beneficiaries of the aid and assistance offered. At the same time, however, we have also found it appropriate to remind governments, by both bilateral and multilateral means, of our expectation with regard to the protection of human rights.

On the trade side, with respect to our dealings in peaceful goods, we have normally followed a business oriented approach which we have considered to be in line with normal commercial practices. We have, with very few exceptions, regarded the export of Canadian goods and services as the highest priority.

As for our development assistance, over 80 per cent in any event goes to the poorest countries and indeed to the poorest people within those countries; it is focused on basic human needs. We believe that to restrict the aid program on the basis of human rights criteria relative to the performance of governments would simply penalize the poor and would therefore be counter-productive in terms of the ultimate goals of the aid program.

Two recent exceptions, one relating to aid and the other to economic assistance, have been Uganda and South Africa. Although the nature of the "continuing and gross violations of human rights" in the two countries are quite different, the two situations shared one aspect in common—a near global consensus in the UN on the fact that the violations deserved condemnation, i.e. mass murder and torture in the case of Uganda, and apartheid in South Africa. Out of this emerged a further consensus on the relative importance of human rights to the issue and on the kind of action to take. This justified the Canadian government to act, leading to cessation of aid in the instance of Uganda and to the elimination of any Canadian government sponsored export assistance to South Africa.

In the case of Uganda, human rights violations were both evident and persistent, and in effect dictated the temporary end of any meaningful relationship with that country. It was also relevant, however, that the administration of an aid program had, in any case, been made impossible by the chaotic internal situation there, due in large part to continuing human rights violations. As for South Africa, the apartheid issue was