

Adjournment Debate

This is a very brief background. No doubt the parliamentary secretary to the minister will have more accurate information in his possession. What concerns me is a report that the shocking extent of the famine became known to the central government of Ethiopia on March 26 of this year, at which time it met in emergency session and sent out urgent appeals to international donors. Yet in his reply to me the minister said it was only in comparatively recent days that the government of Ethiopia admitted the extent of the famine. If my information is correct, knowledge of the situation was available seven months ago.

Was the Department of External Affairs aware of the need in March or June of last year? Was an appeal for assistance received by Canada at that time or, more specifically, when was an appeal received? Further reports indicate that a request for the diversion to the area of two grain ships from the United States was denied by the U.S. government on the ground that justification for such diversion must first be shown. I am curious whether any provisos were attached to the Canadian reply. I should like to know, too, why Canadian aid earmarked for Ethiopia via the United Nations was not received.

In his reply to me, the minister indicated that limited direct assistance had recently been sent through the Red Cross. I should like to know the nature of that assistance and how limited it was. Is it possible that relief shipments can be landed at the port of Asab on the Red Sea for distribution in the capital city of Dessye and places en route? Is it possible for relief to be brought by air to otherwise inaccessible parts of the province, and is such an operation being considered or carried out by any agency or any member of the international community, including Canada? Finally, I should like to know what the minister means when he says that other measures are being considered. What are those other measures?

I have no wish to embarrass the minister since I recognize this is an emergency which concerns many other nations besides Canada. Nevertheless, I am concerned, as all Canadians must be, about the plight of those who are stricken by famine in any area and I ask for an accounting of what this country has done and what it intends to do and, particularly, why it has taken so long to provide adequate relief.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre De Bané (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, first I

wish to congratulate the hon. member for having dealt with this issue. In my opinion, Canadians at large are not sufficiently concerned with those hunger and drought trials experienced in certain parts of the world and I feel that we should speak about them. This is why I congratulate the hon. member for having broached the question.

Canada has undertaken several years ago to contribute to the development of Ethiopia. At the present time, we are completing a geological survey of the Omo basin, in the southwestern part of the country. Moreover, we have just sent a team of veterinarians responsible for the control of the plague decimating the Ethiopian cattle.

The effect of the World Food Program is more directly related to the drought problem. Thus we have just shipped 10,000 tons of grain to Ethiopia. Canada has provided \$34 million for 1973 and 1974 under this assistance programme.

Finally, our country has recently given \$50,000 to the Red Cross for the relief program in Ethiopia. The Canadian International Development Agency has sent these funds through the Canadian Red Cross.

CIDA officials are now trying to determine the most appropriate means to contribute effectively, in the long and the short term, to the drought relief program in that country. We are also meeting with representatives from UN agencies already dealing with programs of this type in order to determine what kind of food is needed and how it can be delivered as soon as possible.

I should point out that the seriousness of the drought in Ethiopia was brought to our attention later than in the case of the western Sahara countries, to which Canada has already provided assistance amounting to \$10 million.

Finally, Canada has included Ethiopia in its list of countries requiring emergency help and has suggested to other donating countries that they do likewise. In fact, I believe that we were among the first donating countries to realize the serious situation of the Ethiopian people as a result of this natural disaster.

Since governments speak in terms of their budget, I think that the annual 17 per cent increase voted by Parliament during the last four years for the CIDA budget, which amounts this year to about \$560 million, shows how this government assumes its responsibilities towards developing countries and those hit by natural disasters.

Again I thank the hon. member for having raised this extremely important question.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.16 p.m.