

*Development Assistance*

it relates to the billions of dollars which cannot be spent on the other needs of the people of the world. These needs are numerous and vie for funds which are already limited. Some which come to mind immediately include medical research, education, environmental protection, housing, day care centres, and care for senior citizens. The connection between defence and development is not exactly a particular case, for the same link exists between any other two sectors affected by public spending. In every country efforts are made to grab every spare dollar from military appropriations, and people dream of the day when nations will feel secure enough to spend less on armaments.

A moment ago, Mr. Speaker, I said that the proposition of my colleague is interesting. As I see it, its best feature is its inherent originality based on an excellent basic principle.

The Hon. Member is quite right to suggest that Third World countries must be encouraged to reduce their military spending. The defence budget of developing countries is minimal when compared with their outlays for all other social endeavours, be it health, education or the environment. Canada can certainly help restore the balance and reverse the trend in Third World countries seeking to improve their defence, and it will do just that.

I commend the Hon. Member for suggesting that nations ought to be encouraged to cut down military expenditures, but his approach leaves me wondering. I think it is a good principle which is badly applied and raises a series of questions and problems.

First, taking money for aid out of the military budget of Canada could be a symbolic gesture, but it would also be an arbitrary reduction which would not take into account the real needs and costs of maintaining armed forces in Canada. It would be a mistake to think that our defence budget just sits there until it is put to good use. I believe that this is an important point.

Second, if we think about the recipients, it seems to me that the mechanism suggested would be perceived as a paternalistic gesture by the Third World, and even as an attempt to corrupt other countries. Developing countries are as sensitive as we are about their national sovereignty. They want to make their own decisions about matters which concern them, such as defence, in spite of our disapproval in many cases.

Third, the mechanism suggested would inevitably favour offending countries. It would reward those that have chosen to spend a lot for defence in the past and are now reducing somewhat their expenditures and completely ignore those that have allocated a large part of their resources to development for years and have kept their military budget very low.

Fourth, and this is a fundamental point in my opinion, this approach does nothing to attack the cause of the problem, that is the reason why developing countries spend too much for military purposes. It would only hide a few symptoms and could only be a symbolic gesture.

Why do so many Third World governments spend so much for their armed forces? Because they lack confidence, because they fear their neighbours or because of internal tensions or discontent on the part of their population. The causes are varied and therefore require a varied response.

Many aspects of Canada's foreign policy can help to deal with the root causes of the problem, and this is exactly what this Government has done and is still doing. For instance, we are trying to alleviate tensions and insecurity in Southern Africa by providing support to front-line countries and to the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference. On the other hand, we are also putting pressure on the South African Government to abolish apartheid and let its neighbours live in peace. In Central America, we have given our full support to the Contadora proposals and are now supporting the conditions for peace proposed by the leadership of countries in the region.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, governments spend too much money on armaments when they fear the reactions of the population, the reactions of people who are desperate and have nothing to lose. We are terrified at the way those governments make ill use of their powers, infringe upon human rights, and resort to weapons for domestic repression. In my view, the Canadian Government is not taking all the steps needed, two of which I would like to examine more closely.

First, we must increase our external help. We must make it more efficient, we must better target it to those who are the most in need, the most vulnerable. The Government's response to the report of our Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and External Trade is ample proof that such steps are being taken now. We are now going to decentralize our public development assistance mechanisms and transfer them to regional offices and we will make them more flexible. Also, we will further concentrate on fighting poverty and improving human resources in developing countries. All those improvements are aimed at giving those populations the hope of a better life, and the opportunity to contribute to the development of their countries, so as to lessen domestic tensions, and we hope that those governments will feel a lesser need to resort to armed repression.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we can also help in encouraging and supporting the growth of civic institutions and social values that still remain to be developed in some Third World countries, if they are to enjoy peace, stability and the respect of human rights. The Government response to the report of the Standing Committee outlines the policy followed by Canada in this very sensitive area, which is to take action which will not be punitive or lead to confrontation, but be positive, constructive and supportive.

I am glad that the Hon. Member saw fit to raise this very important issue, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the policies followed by the Canadian Government are helping to reduce the need for Third World countries to spend their meager financial resources on weapons. I approve the suggestion of