

Routine Proceedings

great commitment and bravery. They are a credit to all Canadians.

The Americans have made a different choice. They have chosen to drop supplies from the air to reach villages isolated for months from any relief. This is a commendable initiative. It will supplement what is being done by land by countries like ours and we fully support them in their efforts.

We know that humanitarian assistance by itself will never be enough. Canada will continue to explore all means for bringing a quick and lasting end to this tragedy, despite many discouraging starts up until now.

We cannot allow the world to disintegrate once again into the basest forms of inhumanity. We must take the lessons of the century and put an end once and for all to the festering hatreds that continue to fuel the fires of war in the former Yugoslavia.

• (1515)

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the minister's appearance in the House to make these announcements. I am sure we can look forward to many more in the months ahead under the circumstances and we will certainly welcome this interest in putting forward and tabling in the House important declarations.

Let me also say that in terms of the recommendations or proposals being made by the minister for increased assistance for humanitarian purposes, we fully applaud this initiative and support this kind of effort. This is one of the areas in which Canada can continue to make an important contribution.

In saying that, I hope the minister would take into account some questions that arise out of the first part of her statement. The first issue is whether the government is in any way considering proposals made by a number of the Canadian cultural organizations that have friends and relatives in the former Yugoslavia and are very anxious to supply forms of assistance. In particular, I can think of the willingness of groups to offer medicine and foodstuffs but have so far not been able to develop any

co-operative relationship with the government to actually send to these areas.

One group I met with last week indicated it had accumulated a large amount of medicine to send and is utilizing United States aircraft, the U.S. government, to send these provisions and support. So far it has not been able to do it through Canadian auspices.

One of the clear questions I would raise, and in fact I would put it in the form of a request, is that the government seriously consider offering to use our transport aircraft to move into that area and to help in the delivery of those kinds of initiatives. I do not believe they should go necessarily in the areas of direct conflict. Certainly the suffering going on in the refugee camps in Croatia and other areas such as Hungary and the borders are very crucial. I think we can be of great help.

Another matter I would like to raise and it is one the minister did not address is the issue of whether the government is going to finally change its policy and begin accepting as bona fide refugees women who have been suffering from severe persecution.

The minister properly announced and we support the idea of offering international assistance for those who have suffered abuse, sexual crime or violations in the area. However in a form of contradiction while we are offering to help internationally, we are refusing to take a more genuine, open look at that problem here in Canada. As we have seen in recent weeks, there are hundreds of women who have escaped from the most incredible conditions and have applied for refugee status and now are in threat of being sent back.

It hardly makes sense to me that on the one hand we would be saying we must assist them through international organizations but on the other hand we are not prepared to take a more open look at our domestic policy as it relates to the acceptance and provision of this as a refugee claim. I understand that it would be broadening the definition but surely to goodness in this day and age with all the changes going on in the world, Canada could take a lead in helping to broaden that definition and show other countries it is possible by setting the kind of criteria that is required.

A third issue I would like to ask the minister about, and I am really surprised she did not mention it because frankly she has taken an initiative in the past on this matter, is the issue of war crimes.