

*Adjournment Debate**[English]*

ARMED FORCES

Mr. Fred J. Mifflin (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception): Mr. Speaker, I rise to follow up on a question I asked the Minister of National Defence on April 2.

The question and subsequent events cause me to want to follow this up more than I have on any other occasion on the late show.

The question was to the Minister of Defence which in her absence was answered by the House leader of the government. It was: Why did it take from the March 16 to the end of March, a period of two and a half weeks for information about a major incident that happened in Somalia, namely the death of a Somalian at the hands of peacekeepers, to reach the Canadian public? Why was it made known the way it was: essentially accidentally from a member of the media? And more precisely, why did the Minister of National Defence not inform this House or at least the Canadian public what had happened?

The House leader's response to me was that everything happened the way it should have happened. It was done the way it was done because investigations were going on and attributed the motivation for my question to the fact that the Minister of National Defence was running for the Conservative leadership. Normally I might have had a point of privilege on that, but because of the gravity of the events I did not want to get involved in any action of that nature. I avoided mixing up the issues with an issue of personal privilege.

You may recall that after April 2 we had an Easter break and we came back to the House again. On April 19, two weeks later, I then asked the Minister of National Defence who was in the House, the same question as to why she did not tell the public of the event in Somalia the day after or within a reasonable period of time after it happened. The minister got up and said to me that it was all the mistake of national defence. It was an incredible thing. She said it was a regrettable mistake and that national defence had the information but instead of releasing the information in Canada it released it in theatre.

That just does not wash because to begin with there were members of the media in Belet Huen where this

incident occurred. A press release was issued but it was issued in Mogadishu, 260 kilometres away. There were members of the media there when it happened and not only were they not told about it, they were diverted from any knowledge of the incident.

I followed up the question the next day on April 20 and asked the Minister of National Defence, answered by the government House leader, why the minister did not tell the House. The answer I got was very much obfuscatory and very confusing.

• (1740)

Subsequent events have shown that this incident occurred on March 16. The Minister of National Defence was briefed on March 17. A member involved in this was incarcerated on March 18 and the minister subsequently said that she did not know anything had involved murder or homicide until March 31.

To begin with, if the minister was briefed on this she would have been briefed on the total issue. She would have known that the Canadian media did not carry the stories the next day. Therefore I find it absolutely preposterous that the minister would not cause—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I regret the hon. member's time has expired.

Mr. Bill Domm (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for Science and Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of uninformed comment on recent events.

It contrasts with the remarkable praise Canadian forces personnel have received elsewhere. They have received praise from a Canadian surgeon working with an American NGO who wants people to know that Canadian troops really did a good job and praise from Somalis who said that Canadians had shown them respect and did not want them to leave.

Yes, there have also been disturbing events. They are being dealt with so let us review what we know of these events and make up our own minds. Each of the four Somali events has been or is being investigated.

In each case the Canadian forces gave public notice of the incident. The details are on public record and were summarized in the minister's statement in the House on April 26, 1993.