

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Madam Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of the House to the presence in our gallery of the Hon. Wahid Ali, the President of the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF MR. MOUMIN BAHDON FARAH,
REPUBLIC OF DJIBOUTI MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Madam Speaker: I also have the honour of drawing the attention of the House to the presence of His Excellency Mr. Moumin Bahdon Farah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Djibouti.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

INCIDENCE OF CF-104 AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS

Hon. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence. During the last week we lost two more CF-104 Starfighters, for a total of four in the last six months, with the loss of three pilots and now, unfortunately, five civilians killed in Germany. Has the Department of National Defence formed any early conclusion as to the causes of these latest two crashes? Were they caused by pilot error, or mechanical failure in these aging aircraft?

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, it goes without saying that it was indeed a very regrettable accident in Germany, and in the name of the Government of Canada. I expressed our sincere condolences to the families of those persons in Germany who lost their lives. This Government very much regrets this accident.

As for the airplane itself, the 104, as far as fighter aircraft is concerned, has a very good safety record. It is—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lamontagne: Well, what do you know—Madam Speaker, these people who are laughing, what do they know about the safety of a warplane? I think I am more aware and more knowledgeable about what airplane safety is than most of those people who are laughing on the other side.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Oral Questions

Mr. Lamontagne: Madam Speaker, we have the record of all accidents which happened to 104s since 1961. In some years, like 1972, we lost none. In 1965 we lost—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lamontagne: Well, in 1965 we lost 12. It is part of the ups and downs of any war plane.

Mr. Broadbent: Up and down is right.

Mr. Lamontagne: They have to be involved in exercises, Madam Speaker, in very difficult missions with low and high flying. It is a warplane which has to be exercised in very difficult situations. Germany flies the 104, some other European countries fly it, and we can match their record and our record in so far as our good safety record is concerned with this warplane. I am not talking about commercial airplane safety; I am talking about warplane safety. These are two different worlds, Madam Speaker.

Mr. McKinnon: Madam Speaker, I must say that to claim the CF-104 has a good safety record brings the answers of the Minister to a new level of unlikelihood.

REQUEST THAT REMAINING CF-104 AIRCRAFT BE GROUNDED

Hon. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Madam Speaker, in 1979, when an F-16 crashed, every F-16 then flying was grounded until the cause of the crash was made known. Has the Minister in any way considered grounding the Starfighters because of their attrition rate, which to many of us is already unacceptably high? While he is on his feet, could he tell us whether the CF-18A, the new fighter aircraft, will replace the Starfighter first, or will priority be given to replacing the CF-101 Voodoo, which is even older than the Starfighter?

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, if there were any unreasonable risk in letting our pilots fly any of our planes I would stop them from flying right away. We are checking everything we can to make sure the planes we are flying have a good safety record and can be flown in safety, and can help our allies in every eventuality.

You have many reasons why a plane can crash, Madam Speaker, we have here the reasons for every crash of the 104. It could be personnel, it could be the material, it could be the environment, it can be operational, foreign object damage, or the reasons could be undetermined. All accidents have been investigated and we know why 95 per cent of the accidents occurred. Unfortunately in the case of some others we were not able to discover the exact cause of the accidents. But we are following matters very carefully. I think the last accident was among the most unfortunate, and one we regret greatly, but I do not think that this is any reason to stop the 104 from flying, because Germany and several other countries fly it, too.