

Special Debate

there will be serious examination at the United Nations about the rebuilding of Somalia, not just in terms of immediate humanitarian aid but in terms of the reconstruction of political authority, a rule of law, a system of justice and a system of economic development, something that will give some hope.

That just begins to touch on the kinds of questions I think Canadians legitimately have. There are many more questions that I think Parliament deserves to have answered. I would ask during this debate—and I hope we will receive an answer from someone in government—that in addition to this commitment to Somalia we will have an equal opportunity in the very near future to have a similar debate about the situation in Bosnia, what we should do about it, what Canada's role will be in it and what we can do at the UN to try to end the suffering and tragedy taking place in that country at this time. I think we will approach it with the same kind of willingness to co-operate and deal with the matter.

There is an old saying in the Talmud that to save one life is to save the world. Canada is called uniquely at this time to save not one life but many lives. It is an opportunity that may be unique in this generation's history, something that we can look upon as one of the turning points in defining who we are as a country and the kind of role we can play in the world. If Canadians are looking for a sense of mission, a sense of purpose and a sense of what holds us together, perhaps there can be no greater tribute than the call we receive from the world to be a major player and partner in these kinds of initiatives overseas to save lives and to solve tragedy.

If I might, just to add and to strengthen the motion, I would like to move the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the word "establish" and by substituting the following therefor:

—as soon as possible an enduring secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia.

Clearly the purpose is to say that this is not a short-term quick fix. Canada is prepared for the kind of commitment that will not only give immediate relief but long-term hope to the people of Somalia and show that in these kinds of adventures, international initiatives, one must be prepared to play out the long haul.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The Chair will take under advisement the motion moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg-South-Centre and seconded by the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

[*English*]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on the motion before the House regarding the role that Canada should play in responding to the desperate situation facing the people of Somalia. It is fair to say that none of us over the past year has been untouched by the tragedy that we see unfolding in Somalia, the virtual breakdown of a society, the images of death, of starvation, the pain on the faces of the children, the children being victims of a system that quite clearly has gone mad.

There is also the tragedy that almost certainly we will not see and that almost certainly will be occurring on a daily basis, and that is the victimization of women who are always the most vulnerable along with the children in a situation such as the one in Somalia. I am sure that instances of rape and the brutalization of women continue and that we will not see them on television. It is clear that women and children tend too often to be the victims of decisions in which they have not participated. It is against this horror that my party supports this motion.

I want also to say a word of praise for the very brave relief workers who have worked and risked their lives to this date for their fellow human beings in Somalia. It would be very easy for us tonight as parliamentarians to feel very smug that we are somehow suddenly finding our conscience, but in fact it is the relief workers who have worked so hard in Somalia, and indeed in other countries, simply on a humanitarian basis and have been the force behind touching the consciences of this country and many other countries.

Much time has passed since we first learned of the famine in Somalia. It is not the time to feel that we have somehow just found a sense of altruism, but that we must give respect to those who have in fact brought to the attention of the world the situation in Somalia, those who have been workers with non-governmental organizations.