

Government Orders

referred to the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for Northumberland on a very thoughtful intervention. I share many of the concerns that she raised in the course of her remarks.

I want to ask her a question with respect to one of the longer term issues that obviously has to be addressed in the course of resolving the tensions in the Middle East. It goes without saying that the immediate priority is to seek the enforcement of United Nations resolutions calling for the unconditional withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait and an assurance that security will be maintained in that region.

Obviously though, one of the long-term questions that has to be addressed is the very difficult and tragic plight of the Palestinians. Of course, this has been exacerbated by the events in Kuwait resulting in some 40 per cent of the resources which would normally be sent to support the people of the West Bank and Gaza being cut off. So, it is a desperate situation.

We know as well that unfortunately Israel has stepped up its campaign of harassment and violence in that region. We have seen the bulldozing of homes and shops in the Gaza. We have seen the refusal to reopen universities on the West Bank and Gaza.

I would like to ask the hon. member what her views are with respect to the importance in the longer term of responding to this crisis as well as part of a regional solution to reduce conflict in the area, and very specifically, whether she agrees that there must be an international conference in the region, which would include representatives of the Palestinians or the Palestine Liberation Organization, which has been recognized as their representatives, an international conference which would deal with the claim of the Palestinians for self-determination which may include a state and which would finally resolve this historic and tragic grievance of the Palestinians in that region. Does she support this as part of an over-all comprehensive approach to the situation in the Middle East?

• (1140)

Mrs. Stewart: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying in my comments, I believe that right now there is an unusual alliance of interest in the conflict represented among the Arab nations themselves. Also, on the international scene, we are seeing alliances that we would never have dreamed of even a year ago.

As I was saying, I believe as well that if we were to get into open conflict, we would put those alliances that exist right now in support of peace in the world in jeopardy, because there are so many unresolved issues in the Middle East. One that my colleague raises is the situation of the Palestinians in the Middle East.

Yes, I believe that we must do everything possible as a nation, and we must be more aggressive in trying to promote peaceful negotiations and dialogue to address the issues of the Palestinians and the state of Israel, and all of the many other very difficult historic problems in the Middle East region.

Before the Middle East crisis erupted on August 2, it was the intention of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade to look carefully into the situation as it exists and to analyse the situation in the Middle East before this crisis.

I think it is important that our committee continue to look at and try to investigate so that Canadians can understand just what the problems and positions are of the different parties to all of the conflicts in the Middle East.

I think there has been trepidation on the part of Parliament to discuss these issues in the past. Without discussion, without witnesses coming before us to explain the various positions that exist, we will never be able to take an effective role in trying to resolve the issues of the Middle East.

Mr. Ian Waddell (Port Moody—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I have a question.

I want to follow up on what the member for Burnaby—Kingsway said. He is asking a question to the member who spoke. She is the associate critic in this area for the Liberal Party. I would ask her if she would answer the question and take a position for the Liberal Party.

With respect, I think that is fudging it a little bit. The question was very specific. The question was: Does the hon. member favour an international—