

Oral Questions

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Canadian government, I would like to say how happy we are at the turn of events, at the lack of bloodshed that could have resulted in the death of many Haitians.

There is no doubt that we must pay tribute to the efforts of the American special envoys who have managed, at the very last second, to convince the military to abdicate. It seems obvious to me that this last-minute agreement that averted the military action called for under United Nations resolution 940 provides that the military will not only have to hand over power, but also allow members of the multinational force that should land in Haiti within hours to gain control of the situation and bring about the speedy return of president Aristide.

One major factor to take into account is that under Governors Island arrangements, one legislative measure must be passed to provide for the general pardon of the military and another one to provide for the division of powers between the military and the police. In our view, it would be important that the proposed legislation called for in the original Governors Island agreement be implemented as soon as possible by the Haitian Parliament.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères): Mr. Speaker, does the Canadian government intend to contribute actively to the forces that will be put together to guarantee the safety of civilian populations upon the return of President Aristide and, if so, what will this contribution consist of?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of meeting President Aristide last week, at which time I reiterated that the Government of Canada was firmly committed to providing him with support whenever he requests it, to help rebuild his country at the democratic, social and economic level. We are confident that, as soon as he is back in Haiti, president Aristide will ask for support, large-scale participation, from Canada. I can assure you that we will be ready to respond to his request and will do so most positively.

[English]

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Last week the minister committed personnel and money, lots of money, toward the rebuilding of Haiti. I believe the Canadian people need to know more about that plan. They need to know what the costs are going to be, what our commitment is going to be, and how long we are going to be there.

Also as parliamentarians we need to know if we are going to be discussing this in detail in the House.

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the hon. member that Canada supports the UN resolutions with regard to Haiti. Indeed, we support the Governors Island agreement which calls for the sending of Canadian police forces to Haiti to train the Haitian police forces. This is a well known commitment by Canada. We are anxious and eager to fulfil this commitment. We will be following through as soon as the circumstances allow our police to go there.

• (1505)

Second, we have approved the UN resolutions, which will allow—in the second phase of the implementation of resolution 940 of the United Nations—the involvement of military personnel under the auspices of the United Nations. This has not yet been realized. When this second phase takes place, we will then respond.

The Speaker: In the interest of brevity, we would ask all members to have very brief questions and very brief answers.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, in the red book it says that we can be assured we will not be U.S. camp followers. Yet the minister makes a trip to Washington on Thursday and comes back with our plan.

Can the minister assure us that we will now take the lead and work with the OAS and the UN in a leadership role regarding the solution to the Haiti problem?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am very intrigued by the question of the hon. member because I thought I heard his leader on television a few days ago expressing a different point of view. I want to assure the House that Canada has an independent position which we have clearly expressed inside and outside the House with regard to Haiti.

We believe we can play a more independent, separate role than others because of the privileged position we have with the Haitian population. Certainly under the auspices of the UN, we could give leadership in playing a very constructive role.

I hope that in the near future the House will allow us to have a debate on the matter in order to permit members of both sides of the House to express their views in this regard.

* * *

[Translation]

RED CROSS BLOOD CENTRE IN TORONTO

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond): My question is for the Minister of Health. In a press conference held last Monday, the Minister of Health tried to reassure the Canadian people following investigations conducted by the United States Drug and Food Administration, which revealed several deficiencies in the operation of the Red Cross blood centre in Toronto.