

Statement

Minister for
External Relations
and International
Development



Déclaration

Ministre des
Relations extérieures
et du développement
international

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH BY

THE MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS

AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

THE HONOURABLE MONIQUE LANDRY

HOUSE OF COMMONS

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MR. SPEAKER, HAVING JUST RETURNED FROM AFRICA, I WISH TO REPORT TO THE HOUSE ON MY ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA AND RECENT HUMANITARIAN AND DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES WHICH CANADA HAS TAKEN IN REGARD TO THE CRISIS IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY.

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WILL BE AWARE THAT SOME FOUR TO FIVE MILLION PEOPLE IN THE NORTHERN ETHIOPIAN REGIONS OF ERITREA, TIGRAY AND WOLLO ARE NOW SERIOUSLY THREATENED BY STARVATION.

I WISH I COULD PROVIDE THE HOUSE ASSURANCE THAT SERIOUS LOSS OF LIFE COULD BE AVOIDED - BUT I FEAR THAT IS NOT THE CASE. THE SITUATION CREATED BY THE DROUGHT WAS SERIOUS - BUT IT WAS MANAGEABLE.

WHEN AUGMENTED BY THE ONGOING MILITARY STRUGGLE IN THE REGION, THE SITUATION HAS RAPIDLY DETERIORATED AND IS NO LONGER MANAGEABLE.

THE TRAGEDY, MR. SPEAKER, IS THAT NOT ONE SINGLE ETHIOPIAN NEEDED TO DIE AS THE RESULT OF THE CURRENT CROP FAILURE.

DONOR GOVERNMENTS HAD RESPONDED GENEROUSLY, AND INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL AGENCIES WERE POISED TO ENSURE DELIVERY TO THOSE HARDEST HIT.

A VARIETY OF CHANNELS WERE FORESEEN - DISTRIBUTION BY THE GOVERNMENT WITHIN THE AREAS CONTROLLED BY IT, CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS SUPPORTED BY THE NGOS FROM SUDAN INTO THE REBEL-HELD AREAS OF ERITREA AND TIGRAY, AND RELIEF CORRIDORS CROSSING BATTLE LINES INTO VULNERABLE REBEL-HELD AREAS OF ERITREA, TIGRAY AND WOLLO THAT COULD NOT BE REACHED THROUGH THE CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS.

THIS WAS A COMPLICATED PACKAGE, BUT ONE THAT COULD HAVE WORKED IF TWO ELEMENTS HAD BEEN ACHIEVED.

THE FIRST WAS THE CONTINUED AVAILABILITY OF THE PORT OF MASSAWA FOR THE TRANSHIPMENT OF EMERGENCY FOOD AID SUPPLIES.

THE SECOND WAS AGREEMENT BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND REBEL GROUPS TO ALLOW THE SAFE TRANSPORT OF FOOD ACROSS BATTLE LINES.

THE EPLF OFFENSIVE OF FEBRUARY WHICH SAW THE PORT OF MASSAWA FALL INTO REBEL HANDS AND THE CONTINUED UNWILLINGNESS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA TO ALLOW THE PORT TO BE USED FOR FOOD

SHIPMENTS WHILE STILL UNDER EPLF CONTROL, HAVE EFFECTIVELY ENDED ANY CHANCE OF SEEING THROUGH THE PRESENT CRISIS WITHOUT LOSS OF LIFE.

IT IS A SAD FACT THAT WE CANNOT GUARANTEE THE DELIVERY OF ESSENTIAL LIFE SUSTAINING FOOD TO THE INFLECTED OF THE REGION IF THE POLITICAL ENTITIES THAT GUIDE THEIR DESTINIES CONTINUE TO USE FOOD AS A WEAPON TO ATTAIN THEIR STRATEGIC MILITARY AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES.

THAT IS NOT TO SAY, MR SPEAKER, THAT WE WILL NOT DO ALL WE CAN.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR PEACE AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO USE ALL CHANNELS AVAILABLE TO US IN AN ATTEMPT TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF THIS FAMINE.

I MUST, HOWEVER RELUCTANTLY, CONCLUDE THAT WE HAVE PASSED THE POINT OF NO RETURN FOR MANY OF THOSE MOST AFFECTED, AND IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF DAYS UNTIL THOSE AGONIZING REPORTS OF STARVING ETHIOPIANS BEGIN AGAIN TO FILL OUR NEWSPAPERS AND TELEVISION SCREENS.

SINCE THE 1984 FAMINE, WHICH AFFECTED SOME ELEVEN MILLION PEOPLE, OUR COUNTRY HAS BEEN ONE OF THE PRINCIPLE SOURCES OF HUMANITARIAN AID IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA.

CANADA AND CANADIANS HAVE PROVIDED MORE THAN THREE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS IN RELIEF SUPPLIES FOR AFFECTED CIVILIAN POPULATIONS.

THIS YEAR, IN ADDITION TO THE TWENTY-SIX MILLION DOLLARS WE HAVE ALREADY CONTRIBUTED TO SEVERAL UNITED NATIONS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, WE HAVE MADE INITIAL COMMITMENTS OF FOURTEEN MILLION DOLLARS FOR THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR.

CANADA HAS ENCOURAGED THE BELLIGERENT PARTIES TO SEEK PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS AND TO ENSURE THE FREE MOVEMENT OF RELIEF SUPPLIES.

THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES: IN ADDIS ABABA WE HAVE REGULAR DISCUSSIONS WITH WESTERN DONORS, INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS, AND ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND COMPARABLE CONTACTS IN OTTAWA WITH THE ETHIOPIAN CHARGE D'AFFAIRES; WE HAVE HAD DISCUSSIONS WITH THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL AND SENIOR OFFICIALS OF PERTINENT UN SPECIALIZED AGENCIES IN NEW YORK, GENEVA AND ROME.

WE HAVE ALSO MAINTAINED A DIALOGUE WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EPLF AND TPLF REBEL GROUPS.

IN CONSULTATIONS WITH MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, THE SOVIET UNION, THE UNITED STATES, THE NORDIC COMMUNITY AND COUNTRIES

NEIGHBOURING ETHIOPIA, WE HAVE URGED DIPLOMATIC AND HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION.

ON DECEMBER 20, I NAMED MR. DOUGLAS LINDORES, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF CIDA, TO SERVE AS MY SPECIAL ADVISOR ON ETHIOPIA AND BORDERING COUNTRIES.

MR. LINDORES RECENTLY HEADED A DELEGATION OF OFFICIALS FROM EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CIDA ON A MISSION TO ETHIOPIA AND THE SUDAN.

THE DELEGATION MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENT, REBEL GROUPS, OTHER BILATERAL DONORS AND THE UNITED NATIONS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WHO ARE STRIVING TO BRING RELIEF TO THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE.

MR. LINDORES MET THIS WEEK, IN WASHINGTON, WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EPLF AND TPLF REBEL GROUPS, AS WELL AS VARIOUS INVOLVED AMERICAN RELIEF OFFICIALS.

ON MARCH 18, ACCOMPANIED BY THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR HALDIMAND-NORFOLK, THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR WINDSOR-ST. CLAIR, AND THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR KITCHENER-WATERLOO, I PERSONALLY MET WITH PRESIDENT MENGISTU AND SENIOR MEMBERS OF HIS CABINET IN THE ETHIOPIAN CAPITAL FOR MORE THAN TWO HOURS. I CONVEYED TO HIM THE VIEWS OF CANADA ON THE CRUCIAL ISSUES OF FAMINE, PEACE

NEGOTIATIONS, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY REFORMS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN ETHIOPIA.

OBVIOUSLY, PRESIDENT MENGISTU AND HIS CABINET ARE UNDER GREAT PRESSURE AND WORKING IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF NATIONAL CRISIS; BUT IT IS QUITE CLEAR THAT THEY ATTACH IMPORTANCE TO THE VIEWS OF A COUNTRY WHICH HAS REPEATEDLY COME TO THE AID OF ETHIOPIANS.

DURING THE COURSE OF OUR DISCUSSIONS, I EMPHASIZED THE NEED TO OPEN A SOUTHERN SUPPLY LINE INTO TIGRAY AND TO USE ALL OTHER AVAILABLE RELIEF ROUTES INTO THE NORTH, INCLUDING THE PORT OF MASSAWA.

I ALSO STRONGLY ENCOURAGED PRESIDENT MENGISTU TO RELAUNCH THE PEACE PROCESSES INVOLVING THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA AND REBEL GROUPS.

I REFER TO THE PROCESS UNDER THE COCHAIRMANSHIP OF FORMER PRESIDENTS JIMMY CARTER AND JULIUS NYERERE INVOLVING THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA AND THE EPLF, AND THE PROCESS UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT INVOLVING THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA AND THE TPLF.

ON MARCH 20, THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA ANNOUNCED ITS SUPPORT FOR A MAJOR RELIEF OPERATION WHICH HAS STARTED FROM THE SOUTH, WILL

CROSS THE LINES OF CONFLICT AND CARRY SUPPLIES TO CERTAIN FAMINE AREAS IN THE NORTH.

THE JOINT RELIEF PARTNERSHIP (JRP), COMPRISING THE ETHIOPIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY AND THREE CHURCH RELIEF AGENCIES: THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE MEKANE IYESUS CHURCH, WILL DELIVER THE RELIEF ASSISTANCE.

YOU MAY HAVE SHARED WITH ME LAST THURSDAY THE PLEASURE OF SEEING ON TELEVISION THE FIRST CONVOYS ACTUALLY ARRIVING IN THE FAMINE AREA.

HOWEVER, MR. SPEAKER, MORE, MUCH MORE, NEEDS TO BE DONE.

THE SOUTHERN ROUTE MUST BE SUPPLEMENTED BY FURTHER INTENSIVE RELIEF OPERATIONS TO ENSURE THAT FOOD REACHES ALL AREAS OF THE NORTH.

TRADITIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ASSISTANCE TO AREAS WHICH CAN ONLY BE REACHED FROM SUDAN MUST CONTINUE.

I SO INFORMED THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT.

AS I HAVE SAID, THE PORT OF MASSAWA IS CRUCIAL IF FAMINE IS TO BE AVOIDED.

TO THIS END IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT, NOTWITHSTANDING THE DELICATE POLITICAL AND SOVEREIGNTY ISSUES INVOLVED, THE PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT TAKE THE HIGH GROUND AND MAKE WHATEVER ARRANGEMENTS ARE NECESSARY TO ENSURE THE SAFE PASSAGE OF FOOD. HOWEVER, THE DETERMINATION OF THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT TO RECAPTURE MASSAWA AT ALL COSTS PUTS SOME SHADOW ON THAT OPTION.

I DISCUSSED THESE MATTERS IN ROME WITH MINISTER LENOCI OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT AND WITH THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME.

IN WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA, LAST WEEK, I ASSURED THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL OF CANADA'S SUPPORT FOR AN INCREASED UN INVOLVEMENT IN THE RELIEF EFFORTS AND THE SEARCH FOR PEACE.

MR. SPEAKER, WE SHOULD NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE DIFFICULTIES WE FACE.

ON THE ONE HAND, REBEL GROUPS SENSE A FINAL VICTORY, WHILE ON THE OTHER, AN EMBATTLED GOVERNMENT STRUGGLES TO PRESERVE THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF ETHIOPIA.

AND YET, IT IS ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THAT ONLY A JUST AND ENDURING SETTLEMENT OF THE ETHIOPIAN CONFLICT WILL BRING TO AN END THE SUFFERING OF THE PEOPLE OF THAT COUNTRY.

THE PEACE PROCESS INVOLVING THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE TPLF IS RESUMING IN ROME.

THE TALKS UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF PRESIDENTS CARTER AND NYERERE ARE SCHEDULED TO RESUME IN NAIROBI, KENYA, APRIL 8-21, 1990.

THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT HAS URGED THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA, THE EPLF AND TPLF TO ACCEPT THAT NONE WILL PREVAIL BY FORCE OF ARMS WITHOUT UNCONSCIONABLE HUMAN SUFFERING.

WE HAVE URGED THEM TO PURSUE THE NEGOTIATIONS TO A SUCCESSFUL AND EARLY CONCLUSION AND, IN THE INTERIM, TO PERMIT THE SAFE OPERATION OF RELIEF EFFORTS.

IN THIS LATTER RESPECT, BELLIGERENTS ARE ASSUMING A VERY GRAVE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY.

PEOPLES EVERYWHERE HAVE COLLECTED FOOD TO PREVENT FAMINE AND TRANSPORTED IT TO THE REGION ONLY TO FIND THAT CONTINUED FIGHTING IS, IN SOME KEY AREAS, INTERRUPTING DELIVERY.

HOW, IN ALL CONSCIENCE, CAN THIS BE ALLOWED?

HOW CAN FOOD DELIVERIES BE CONFINED THIS WAY?

FOR MY PART, I AM PRESENTLY CONSULTING WITH MY COLLEAGUES FROM DONOR COUNTRIES TO UNDERLINE THE URGENCY OF THE SITUATION AND TO ENSURE THE GREATEST POSSIBLE COORDINATION IN ASSURING FOOD DELIVERY TO THE NEEDY.

AT THE SAME TIME THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT STRONGLY SUPPORTS AN INITIATIVE BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO MOBILIZE INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT TO SEEK AN IMMEDIATE AGREEMENT FOR THE SAFE AND ASSURED DELIVERY OF ALL NECESSARY FAMINE RELIEF ASSISTANCE TO ALL PERSONS INNOCENT TO THE CONFLICT.

LET ME END, MR. SPEAKER, BY REITERATING THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION AS WE FOUND IT.

DESPITE FOOD AID WHICH HAS BEEN PROVIDED AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE PROVIDED BY THE INTERNATIONAL DONOR COMMUNITY, FIGHTING ON THE SPOT CONTINUES TO HINDER ADEQUATE, TIMELY AND SUFFICIENTLY WIDESPREAD DELIVERY.

A CONTINUING STALEMATE IN PEACE TALKS IS UNACCEPTABLE.

IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE FOR SOME.

WE APPEAL TO THE PARTIES TO ACCEPT THAT INTRANSIGENCY RISKS THE LIVES OF FURTHER INNOCENT POPULATIONS.

IN CONCLUSION, I ASSURE MEMBERS OF THIS HOUSE, AS WE HAVE ASSURED THE PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT AND THE CHAIRMEN OF THE PEACE PROCESSES THAT CANADA IS READY TO SUPPORT THE SEARCH FOR PEACE IN ANY WAY THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL.