

Statement

Department of
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Affairs



Discours

Ministère des
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extérieures

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

"THE SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA"

Notes for remarks by
the Honourable Monique Landry,
Minister for External Relations,
reporting to the House of Commons
on her trip to Ethiopia

OTTAWA

February 23, 1988.

Minister for
External
Relations

Ministre des
Relations
extérieures

Canada

MR. SPEAKER

I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM ETHIOPIA. I APPRECIATE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REPORT TO MEMBERS, AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT, ON WHAT IS HAPPENING THERE, AND WHAT ROLE CANADA IS PLAYING... MORE SPECIFICALLY, TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF MY FINDINGS... AND SOME OF MY FEELINGS. WHENEVER I TRAVEL TO AFRICA, IT IS ALWAYS A PRIVILEGE TO REPRESENT THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF CANADA. I AM VERY PROUD OF WHAT WE ARE DOING IN AFRICA. AND I WAS RELIEVED AND PLEASED TO SEE MANY POSITIVE THINGS IN ETHIOPIA - OUR CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE PEOPLE OF THAT COUNTRY... THE DEEP INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR DEVELOPMENT... AND ENCOURAGING SIGNS OF PROGRESS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FAMINE.

MY TRIP ALLOWED ME TO MEET WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF OUR PARTNERS - PEOPLE FROM CANADIAN NGOS (SUCH AS THE WORLD UNIVERSITY SERVICE OF CANADA, CANADIAN PHYSICIANS FOR AID AND RELIEF, THE SUDAN INTERIOR MISSION, AND MCGILL UNIVERSITY)... AS WELL AS ETHIOPIAN OFFICIALS, AND SENIOR REPRESENTATIVES OF UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES - INCLUDING MICHAEL PRIESTLEY, WHO IS THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, AND THE RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.

I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THE NORTH. AT MEKELE, I SAW THE FOOD AIRLIFT IN OPERATION, AND AT THE NEARBY SETTLEMENT OF WUKRO, I WATCHED THE FOOD BEING DISTRIBUTED.

WHAT I SAW IN THE NORTH WAS, ABOVE ALL, THE COLOR BROWN - ROUGH TERRAIN, TERRIBLE ROADS, BARREN LAND, PARCHED SOIL... EVERYTHING BROWN, AND INCREDIBLY DRY. THE EARTH, BOILED AND BAKED BY THE SUN, WAS MERE DUST, DRY AND DEAD.

BUT I ALSO SAW A VERY EFFECTIVE AIRLIFT HARD AT WORK, WITH BELGIAN HERCULES, RUSSIAN ANTONOVs, SMALL PLANES AND HELICOPTERS ALL WORKING TOGETHER EFFECTIVELY. I SAW UNLOADING OPERATIONS AT MEKELE, AND IT WAS INSPIRING. UP TO TWENTY BIG PLANES COME IN EACH DAY, BEARING UP TO TWENTY TONNES OF FOOD PER PLANE - MUCH OF IT CANADIAN GRAIN. I SAW THE HARDWORKING TEAMS OF ABOUT EIGHTEEN ETHIOPIANS WHO MEET EACH PLANE AND UNLOAD THAT TWENTY-TONNE CARGO INTO TRUCKS, BY HAND, IN AS LITTLE AS TWELVE MINUTES. ANYONE WHO WITNESSED THEIR ENERGY AND EFFICIENCY, UNDER TRYING CONDITIONS, WOULD NEVER SPEAK LIGHTLY ABOUT PEOPLE NOT TRYING TO HELP THEMSELVES.

AT WUKRO, I SAW A WELL-ORGANIZED FOOD DISTRIBUTION EFFORT, WHICH WAS OPERATING VERY SMOOTHLY. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS - PARTICULARLY MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES BELGES - AND THE RELIEF AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION WERE WORKING CLOSELY TOGETHER.

THE NAMES OF RECIPIENTS WERE RECORDED, VILLAGE BY VILLAGE, ON A REGISTER... AND CHECKED OFF AS THE PEOPLE COLLECTED THEIR RATIONS - THIRTY KILOS PER FAMILY MEMBER, ENOUGH FOR TWO MONTHS. THIS TIME, UNLIKE 1984-85, PEOPLE ARE TAKING THE FOOD BACK TO THEIR VILLAGE - WALKING AS FAR AS FIFTY OR SIXTY KILOMETRES - RATHER THAN GATHERING IN HUGE FEEDING CAMPS AT THE DISTRIBUTION SITE.

THREE YEARS AGO, WHEN FAMINE STRUCK, WE SAW IMAGES OF DESPAIR AND SCENES OF HUMAN SUFFERING THAT HAUNTED OUR MINDS: MEN AND WOMEN REDUCED TO SKELETONS, AND - THE ULTIMATE HORROR - CHILDREN DYING ON CAMERA. THIS TIME, THOUGH LIVES ARE CERTAINLY AT RISK, THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE SEEMS MUCH BETTER. IN GENERAL, THEY APPEAR TO BE IN FAIR PHYSICAL SHAPE, AND IN GOOD SPIRITS. IT WAS ENCOURAGING TO NOTE THAT, THIS TIME, THERE IS AN ORGANIZED BABY-WEIGHING PROGRAM TO DETECT SIGNS OF MALNUTRITION.

FAMINE RELIEF WAS NOT THE ONLY WAY I SAW FOOD AID BEING USED. IT IS ALSO SERVING THE CAUSE OF LONGER-TERM DEVELOPMENT. SPECIFICALLY, WE VISITED A FOOD-FOR-WORK PROJECT, ALSO AT WUKRO. THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE ARE WORKING WITH HAND TOOLS, BUILDING EARTH DAMS ABOUT SIX METRES HIGH AND TWO TO THREE HUNDRED METRES LONG. THESE DAMS WILL TURN DEPRESSIONS IN THE TERRAIN INTO RESERVOIRS TO HOLD THE RUN-OFF WHEN THE RAINS DO COME. THE WORK OF THESE THREE THOUSAND IS PAID IN FOOD, WHICH KEEPS THREE THOUSAND FAMILIES GOING - AND THESE PEOPLE ARE CREATING A BASIC SYSTEM TO IRRIGATE MORE THAN SEVENTY HECTARES OF LAND.

I ALSO WENT SOUTH, TO WANDA GENET, AND THEN TO AWASSA TO VISIT A CANADIAN-SPONSORED WATER PROJECT. I CAN REPORT SEEING MUCH THAT GAVE ME A FEELING OF RELIEF... AND OF HOPE. I SAW EXCELLENT COOPERATION BETWEEN CANADIANS AND ETHIOPIANS... REAL INVOLVEMENT OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE PROJECTS... AND FINE WORK BY NGOS (NOTABLY THE VANCOUVER-BASED HOPE INTERNATIONAL). TRUE ENOUGH, I HAD SEEN EVIDENCE OF THESE THINGS IN THE NORTH, TOO... BUT IN A SETTING WHERE HOSTILE NATURE AND CIVIL STRIFE MADE PROGRESS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. IN THE SOUTH, THE SAME FACTORS, WORKING IN A MORE BENIGN ENVIRONMENT, WERE PRODUCING VISIBLE PROGRESS. I WAS VERY IMPRESSED BY THE DEGREE OF ORGANIZATION AND DETERMINATION SHOWN BY THE ETHIOPIANS. THEIR CONCERN FOR THE LONGER TERM WAS QUITE OBVIOUS - IN, FOR INSTANCE, THEIR CREATION OF A WATER TRAINING INSTITUTE.

THE MOST STRIKING THING ABOUT THE TRIP TO THE SOUTH WAS THE PHYSICAL CONTRAST WITH CONDITIONS IN THE NORTH. BROWN GAVE WAY TO GREEN. WE SAW FERTILE LAND AGAIN. AND WE REALIZED THAT, COMPARED TO THE DRY, BROWN NORTH, OTHER PARTS OF ETHIOPIA HAVE MUCH BETTER AGRICULTURAL AND WATER POTENTIAL.

I AM GRATEFUL TO HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE FOR MYSELF, FIRST-HAND, SOME OF THE REALITIES OF A MOST DIFFICULT AND OFTEN TRAGIC SITUATION. I LEARNED SOME VALUABLE THINGS - SOME OF THEM CAUSE FOR CONCERN, OTHERS CAUSE FOR HOPE AND EVEN A DEGREE OF SATISFACTION.

FIRST, OVERALL CONDITIONS ARE MUCH BETTER THAN IN 1984-85. A GOOD BASIC ORGANIZATION IS IN PLACE TO COPE WITH THE PRESENT EMERGENCY. IN GENERAL, IT IS WORKING EFFECTIVELY - ALTHOUGH THERE ARE PLACES, SUCH AS KOREM, WHERE IT WORKS LESS WELL.

ENOUGH FOOD IS FLOWING INTO ETHIOPIA TO PREVENT FAMINE. TRANSPORT WITHIN ETHIOPIA, HOWEVER, IS ANOTHER MATTER - IN FACT, A CRITICAL PROBLEM. THE ROADS, WHERE THEY EXIST, ARE POOR TO START WITH, AND SOME ARE NOW IMPASSABLE BECAUSE THEY ARE INCREASINGLY UNSAFE. THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH TRUCKS - MANY HAVE BEEN DESTROYED. THERE IS NOT ENOUGH FUEL - THERE IS, FOR INSTANCE, NONE IN PLACE AT THE MOMENT FOR THE AIRLIFT. PLANES HAVE TO DETOUR TO ADDIS ABABA TO REFUEL, MAKING THE AIRLIFT EVEN LESS EFFICIENT AND MORE EXPENSIVE AS A WAY OF CARRYING FOOD... AND YET IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO STAVE OFF DISASTER.

I LEARNED YET AGAIN ABOUT THE VITAL WORK BEING DONE BY NGOS, AND ABOUT THE EXCELLENT LEVEL OF COOPERATION WITH AND AMONG INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. I LEARNED, ONCE AGAIN, HOW MUCH THE WORLD RELIES ON THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS, WHICH IS PLAYING A KEY ROLE IN THIS COMPLEX SITUATION.

I SAW WITH MY OWN EYES THAT SOME PARTS OF THE COUNTRY HAVE EXTREMELY LIMITED CAPACITY TO SUPPORT LIFE... WHILE OTHER PARTS ARE FERTILE AND PRODUCTIVE. THE RATIONALE FOR ETHIOPIA'S RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM, WHATEVER THE POLITICAL MOTIVES, WAS UNDENIABLY VISIBLE, AND PLAIN AS DAY - BROWN DUST IN THE NORTH, GREEN LAND IN THE SOUTH.

I WAS, AND I REMAIN, VERY CONCERNED OVER PERSISTENT RUMOURS OF THE USE OF FORCE IN THE RECENTLY RENEWED RESETTLEMENT CAMPAIGN - EVEN OF SHOOTINGS OF PEOPLE RELUCTANT TO MOVE. INDEPENDENT OBSERVERS HAVE ATTEMPTED TO VERIFY THESE RUMOURS ON SITE - BUT SO FAR THERE IS NO CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE TO CONFIRM OR TO REFUTE THE DISTURBING STORIES.

I TOOK EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE THE POSITION OF CANADA - AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, FOR THAT MATTER - CRYSTAL CLEAR. I HAVE BEEN ASSURED BY THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT THAT ETHIOPIA'S OFFICIAL POLICY, IN THE RESUMED PROGRAM, IS FOR VOLUNTARY RESETTLEMENT ONLY.

I CAN TESTIFY, MR. SPEAKER, AS A FIRST-HAND WITNESS, THAT CANADA IS PLAYING A VALUABLE AND SIGNIFICANT PART IN HELPING TO AVOID A HUGE TRAGEDY IN ETHIOPIA. WE DID MUCH IN 1984-85... WE ARE DOING STILL MORE, THIS TIME... AND THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA WILL ALWAYS BE READY TO AID THE VICTIMS OF DISASTER, WHETHER IT IS NATURAL OR MAN-MADE. I CAN REPORT THAT CANADIANS, ALONG WITH PEOPLE FROM MANY OTHER COUNTRIES, ARE DOING MARVELLOUS WORK UNDER THE MOST DIFFICULT CONDITIONS. AND I FEEL OBLIGED TO SAY THAT OUR CONTINUED HELP AND SUPPORT IS A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH TO MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WHOSE FUTURE HANGS ON A PRECARIOUS, KNIFE-EDGE BALANCE.

THESE FEW WORDS CAN EXPRESS ONLY A FRACTION OF MY THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS AS I SAW, BRIEFLY, THE ORDEAL OF THE PEOPLE OF ETHIOPIA, AND THE SPIRIT OF THEIR STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE AND MOVE AHEAD.

IN CLOSING, MR. SPEAKER, I WILL JUST MENTION THAT, ON LEAVING ETHIOPIA, I PROCEEDED TO BAMAKO, TO TAKE PART IN THE FIFTH BILATERAL CONSULTATION BETWEEN CANADA AND MALI. I WAS ABLE TO VISIT ONE OF THE MANY EXCELLENT GRASSROOTS PROJECTS UNDER WAY THERE, AND TO HAVE GOOD DISCUSSIONS ON THE DIFFICULT PROBLEMS FACING MALI AND THE OTHER COUNTRIES OF THE SAHEL. AND THE MEETING ALLOWED ME, ON AFRICAN SOIL, TO ASSURE THE PEOPLE OF THAT COUNTRY AND THAT CONTINENT, ONCE AGAIN, OF THE CONTINUING CONCERN AND SUPPORT THEY CAN COUNT ON, FROM THE GOVERNMENT, THE PARLIAMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF CANADA.