



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 021 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): *Bonjour, chers collègues.* Welcome.

This is meeting 21 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on Wednesday, May 27, 2009.

This afternoon we will be reviewing our main estimates for 2009-10, and we're very pleased to have appearing before us today the Honourable Bev Oda, Minister of International Cooperation. Accompanying the minister we have, from the Canadian International Development Agency, Ms. Margaret Biggs, president, and Christine Walker, chief financial officer.

We thank the minister for working with our committee and the clerk to make this appearance possible.

I should also indicate at this time that we have a number of ambassadors from different African countries here with us this afternoon. We certainly do look forward to having them appear in the second hour as part of our study on the key elements of Canadian foreign policy dealing with Africa.

Before we move to the minister, I've asked the committee's indulgence and cooperation in moving into committee business just for a moment in order to pass the steering committee report. We should have perhaps done this last Monday, but this allows the clerk to make the necessary arrangements to fill the schedule for the upcoming week and it also just lets you know that your subcommittee has been meeting.

So you've had a chance to look at this.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): I'd like to move the report.

The Chair: Is everyone in favour of accepting the report as circulated?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Also, if you take a look at the report, you'll see that we have the legal opinion back from the law clerk. Would you want that circulated today? It's still in translation. We could possibly give you a copy of it after. It will be out tomorrow morning.

Do you want that then, Mr. Dewar?

All right, I'll give the clerk the go ahead to circulate that as well, and it will be sent out. Thank you for that.

Madam Minister, welcome again. We want to thank you for appearing on these main estimates. You're no stranger to the way this goes about. We look forward to your comments, and then we'll move into the first round of questioning. I will remind the committee that with the minister here, the first round of questioning is a ten-minute round.

Madam Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am very pleased to have an opportunity to meet with you and the members of your Committee today.

[English]

CIDA's main estimates reflect our ongoing efforts to ensure that Canada's international assistance is supporting the world's most vulnerable people responsibly and effectively.

Over the past decades, the international community has made significant progress in helping to reduce world poverty. The percentage of people living on less than \$1.25 per day has been cut in half. That means that between 1981 and 2005, a staggering 500 million people managed to climb out of poverty.

Until most recently, the economic crisis had barely touched the developing world. However, the World Bank now estimates some 40 low-income countries are highly vulnerable. The latest forecasts report that the economic crisis could drag down 50 million to 90 million more people into extreme poverty.

Clearly, foreign aid must be part of the solution to mitigate the impact of the economic crisis in the developing world. The reality is that in developing countries there are no quick fixes. The impacts on the lives of their populations will be deeper, more widespread, and longer to remedy.

In the face of this, it is critically important that donor countries keep official development assistance on track, and we are on track to meet our commitment to double Canada's international assistance to \$5 billion annually by next year. Furthermore, we met our G-8 commitment to double our aid to Africa, with a total of \$2.1 billion in the fiscal year just completed, a full year before the G-8 commitment deadline. And we have made multi-year pledges to the Americas, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, including Afghanistan.

More importantly, our government will live up to its commitments. Since taking office, our government has committed to make our international assistance more effective and make a real difference in the lives of the people living in poverty by making it more efficient, more focused, and more accountable, and we have taken steps to do so.

First, for decades it was common practice for donors to pledge their aid with strings attached. It was known as tied aid, requiring that the needed goods and services be acquired in the donor country. The OECD estimates that tied aid makes international contributions 30% less efficient and 35% less efficient in the case of food aid.

I know this is not the kind of efficiency Canadians expect from us, so last April I announced that Canada's food aid would immediately be fully untied. Agencies such as the World Food Programme can now use Canada's money and buy the appropriate food at the best prices in areas closest to the hungry. Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, we will untie all of our aid by 2012-13 to gain even more value for Canada's contributions.

As an agency, CIDA itself will also be undertaking efficiency action. When people are on the ground seeing the conditions in the country, they are better able to react quickly, form more rigorous assessments of needs, develop appropriate responses, and reduce the decision-making process. So we are increasing the number of staff in the field, with more delegated authority and the flexibility they will need. This step will reduce the lengthy approval process and Ottawa-centric approach currently in place.

But decentralization alone is not enough to make CIDA more effective and meet the expectations of Canadians. We are determined to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of CIDA's assistance programs. CIDA will engage independent auditors to measure results, and external, non-CIDA representatives will sit on CIDA's internal evaluation committee.

Accountability is also about being transparent and providing information to Canadians. Consequently, in addition to its required annual reports to Parliament, CIDA is now creating a "development for results report" that will show Canadians how their tax dollars are making a difference. We will do our best to communicate meaningful results and be open about setbacks that sometimes thwart our best efforts.

• (1540)

I also believe that more effectiveness and impact can be achieved with greater focus. We are increasing the focus of our bilateral program, the program that supports mainly development programs and projects in countries rather than aid, and that represents 53% of CIDA's total budgetary appropriations.

It has been said that Canada's bilateral spending was spread too thinly over too many countries and was too diffused, working in multiple sectors, making it hard to see how and where results were being achieved. To address this, I announced that CIDA will invest 80% of its bilateral program resources in 20 countries of focus. Those 20 countries were selected based on an analysis of their needs and their capacity to realize positive outcomes from our development efforts and in alignment with Canada's foreign policy priorities. To

ensure consistency in the future, any changes to the list of 20 countries will require cabinet approval.

As I have noted, and I stress once again, other countries not selected as countries of focus will continue to receive Canadian aid through CIDA's other programs and will remain eligible to access the remaining 47% of our total aid budget. And of course Canada will always respond to the needs of victims of natural disasters or conflict through CIDA's humanitarian assistance program.

Having taken steps to focus geographically, Canada's international efforts must also be focused on fewer areas of activity or sectors. Historically, CIDA's aid has been too diffused and scattered, as I said, across literally dozens of different activities in multiple sectors, so that our money had limited impact, without the critical mass needed to make real gains.

We have now established three priority themes that will guide CIDA's work going forward: increasing food security, stimulating sustainable economic growth, and securing the future of children and youth.

Let me say a few words about each.

First, food security. Last year about this time, the food crisis, caused largely by higher food prices, captured the world's attention. The FAO estimates that the number of undernourished people in the world increased by 75 million in 2007 and 40 million in 2008. The impact of the economic crisis will be immense on the ability of millions to avoid starvation. The world's poorest live on less than \$2 a day and spend 50% to 80% of that on food. In fact, the number of chronically hungry people is expected to climb to more than one billion this year.

CIDA will continue to respond to the need for emergency food aid. In fact, Canada is the third-largest single country donor to the World Food Programme. We will also be placing a high priority on initiatives that will meet the micronutrient needs of those living in poverty.

But without an adequate supply of food, development is impossible. The World Bank estimates that GDP growth from agriculture benefits the income of the poor two to four times more than growth in other sectors. Given that so much of the developing world is agriculturally based, I believe we must pay more attention to agriculture in developing countries. Whether it be with improved inputs, technical resources, the rehabilitation of degraded farmland, or irrigation, this will result in greater food self-sufficiency and food security, our first thematic focus.

We have seen how the power of a vibrant economy can reduce poverty. Countries in Asia, in Latin America, and in Africa have shown over and over again that growing the economy is the best way to help people lift themselves out of poverty permanently, and economic growth will be an essential part of helping developing countries weather the economic downturn.

● (1545)

It was noted at the recent World Bank-IMF meetings that economies of developing countries will grow by only 1.6% this year, compared to 6.1% last year. Canada has contributed significantly to the IMF and the World Bank and regional development banks so they can make financing more accessible to developing countries. However, it has been reported that in developing countries the private sector generates 9 out of 10 jobs, so we must create more business opportunities and support entrepreneurship and industrial development in these countries. These efforts will result in productive employment and incomes for the poor.

Elements that support economic growth could be skills training, access to financing, such as micro-credit, protection of property, and the needed supporting infrastructure. Of course, all of our development work in both agriculture and economic growth must consider the environmental impact of the project. Furthermore, all of the gains we achieve must be sustainable in the future for the next generation. Today, the fate of that generation, the children and youth living in extreme poverty, is the most distressing tragedy of our time. There are the needless deaths of 10 million children a year from preventable diseases. There are millions who do not yet have access to a quality education. More than half of the child population in developing countries, some one billion children, live in poverty.

Our government has strongly supported children and youth who face these realities, and we are continuing to support the health of women to reduce maternal and infant mortality, but we need to do more. Keeping children alive is only part of the equation. We want them to grow and prosper by providing children and youth with quality basic education and training so that they have the opportunity to live full, productive lives and engage meaningfully in their communities. This is particularly important now, as some are forecasting a youth tsunami. In 67 countries, up to 60% of the population is now under the age of 30. Through to 2020, some of the world's poorest and often most politically unstable countries will have the largest youth population, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Colombia, and parts of Africa. Consequently, it is imperative that we make a real difference in the lives of children today for a stable and more secure tomorrow.

These three things—food security, economic growth, and children and youth—will be core for CIDA going forward. But as we have seen in Afghanistan, there can be no development without security and stability.

One billion of the world's poorest people currently live in states where crime, violence, insecurity, and insurgency are part of their daily lives. Ensuring security and stability is of the utmost importance, and Canada's response will build upon its engagement and lessons learned in countries like Afghanistan, Haiti, and Sudan. Our aim is to ensure that the basic needs are met while helping willing countries develop the capacity to self-govern, while shifting

from aid dependency to responsibility and local ownership of projects and programs. This requires that good governance be integrated into all of our work in developing countries, as will sound environmental management and sustainability.

● (1550)

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, our government pledged to make Canada's international assistance program more efficient, more focused, and more accountable—in short, more effective.

By untying aid, decentralization, more accountability, and through greater bilateral and thematic priorities, we are taking action. Setting priorities is fundamentally about making choices, but I believe that our agenda for aid effectiveness reflects the values of all Canadians. We are committed to making our aid make a difference in the lives of those living in poverty.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to speak with the committee today.

[*Translation*]

I am now available to take your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Pearson, you have 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I'll be sharing my time with my colleagues.

Minister, welcome. Ms. Biggs, Ms. Walker, it's nice to have you here. I do want to start by thanking you for the initiative and taking the leadership for untying aid. I think a lot of us have been looking for that for a long time, and we appreciate very much what you have done there.

This is a meeting about estimates, and in going through the estimates, there were a number of trends I was trying to look for. It seemed to me that private sector development was number two in those trends; health was number one. It seemed that as the trends were growing, health actually decreased in this last while, but private sector development continued to increase. If it kept going on that trend, eventually private sector development would surpass health. I'm simply trying to get your observation on that trend. Is there a reason for that? Also, can we see more of this in the future?

Hon. Bev Oda: I think your observation reflects that over the past year we've been working with many of the developing countries, and they've put together plans. They have health plans that we are contributing to and supporting. The other very important movement I see, particularly in those countries that are willing to take responsibility, is that they see economic growth as very critical to their long-term stability. These are countries that are willing to invest to their capacity into economic growth.

As you know, in Haiti we've recently completed a dialogue with the Haitian government, which came up with a plan to reduce poverty. It is founded and based on the economic growth of Haiti. It's in concert with the United Nations, which undertook with Professor Collier from the U.K. to look at what would be long-term opportunities for Haiti.

It has been observed in many countries that aid and development have been undertaken, but again, people are frustrated because there doesn't seem to be the progress that people would like to have seen. When a country indicates that economic growth is important to them, we have to now move. We've seen the success of micro-credit, and what they're asking from us is this: how do those people who benefited from micro-credit move to the SME level? So we're working and putting our support behind that, because we believe, coupled with our efforts in vocational training, making sure we work with our other country partners on infrastructure needs, that that will create the jobs.

I think we would all agree that nobody wants to continually be receiving handouts. What they want are the opportunities to better themselves, to improve their incomes, so they can provide for themselves and their families. So you're seeing a little bit of that trend.

Will we be reducing in the health area? Absolutely not. We will not. If you look at our health commitments and our support for the global fund for AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria—the catalytic initiatives are extra-supportive for tuberculosis—our commitment to stay in Afghanistan and support the polio eradication campaign, you will see we're committed to health.

You have to couple that with our intent in our food security theme, to increase the attention of the world and our own efforts in the micro-nutrient nutrition provisions there. When you put this all together, we are not abandoning health, absolutely not. We're going to find the most effective ways, as we're doing everywhere else, but we also want to support countries that are now indicating that they want to start taking responsibility themselves, and we'll share in that responsibility.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Patry, go ahead. I think Mr. Rae will come in on this one as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Minister.

In the part of your Budget Plan for 2008 that deals with savings from CIDA's Strategic Review, the government says that the Agency

is currently re-organizing its multilateral programs in order to target fewer organizations. Which organizations are being targeted by CIDA? And, what were the selection criteria?

Also, can you confirm or deny that your government is considering reducing its financial contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, known as UNRWA?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you very much for your question. *Merci.*

In terms of multilateral international organizations, what we're doing across the board at CIDA is undertaking to ensure that when we contribute to an organization, it will achieve the results and the objectives that we have laid out for CIDA; it will be the most effective; it will be actually well managed.

As it will be attested to, when there are evaluations or audits done of organizations, I actually ask to read them myself. When there are observations about how an organization can improve itself, I ask, before we commit money, what they've done to correct those observations themselves.

Basically, we have to be focused even in our contribution to multilateral organizations. We want to find the most effective organizations, the organizations that are, again, looking at outcomes, that are well managed, that are fiscally responsible, etc.

Consequently, we're doing that review, but we have not selected and so on; the review is being undertaken. I will tell you that there are organizations that we have already identified as being very responsible and very effective on a multilateral basis. The World Food Programme is a good example. The Red Cross is a good example. We've identified those agencies within the United Nations that we believe are very effective.

In terms of the UN, you've asked about UNRWA, particularly related to the Middle East and Gaza. I've met with the head of UNRWA. We've had very frank discussions with UNRWA. I know they play an important role for the international community in the West Bank and Gaza. I put some questions and I got some very frank, objective answers from the head of UNRWA.

We support UNRWA, because it does play an important role. There are some questions about UNRWA. I think we all can remember that the UN reported, during the conflict, that schools were actually being bombed. I asked the head of UNRWA why it took three weeks to correct that report: the schools themselves weren't bombed, and the bombing was happening outside of the schools. I indicated that it was very important. We, as an international community, rely on UN reports, so we have a high degree of expectation of the accuracy of those reports. It was recognized that they do have this responsibility, and that they will be looking at it.

We had other discussions. I know you're familiar with some of the other issues about UNRWA and the education system they're providing. We had very frank discussions with them about that.

So we do support UNRWA, but it doesn't mean that we don't question or that we don't ensure that any organization that we support is totally reliable, can meet the expectations, and can serve us as well as the people they're there to serve.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Mr. Rae.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): On that subject, Minister, you will be aware that there are many concerns being expressed about Canada's position with respect to UNRWA.

I'd like to simply ask you, what discussions do you have with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and with the department, about the implications of any decision that would lead to a reduction in funding for UNRWA?

Hon. Bev Oda: I have conversations with not only the Minister of Foreign Affairs. As you know, we have a minister for the Americas, when it's related to the Americas, and a Minister of International Trade. Certainly we are making great strides in the whole-of-government approach to the work we do, not only in development but in our foreign relations.

On the UNRWA situation, they're familiar with the meetings and the concerns I have with UNRWA. I've indicated the conversations I've had with the head of UNRWA. They support that I do my due diligence, express concerns where I have concerns, and make sure we get adequate responses from any organization.

Hon. Bob Rae: The concern is also what other countries are doing with respect to UNRWA. This isn't a unilateral decision that Canada would make on its own. I presume there are management discussions with the UN organization on questions of accountability that aren't simply bilateral relations between Canada and UNRWA.

This is an issue of enormous sensitivity on Canada's responsibilities for holding the refugee gavel, which we received from the Madrid conference in 1993. So I hope that whatever concerns you have are not simply personal ones. There are issues that are shared throughout the government because of the impact that any unilateral cut by Canada would have on Canada's position on the Middle East and other issues we have.

You have to put an end to the speculation, because it's affecting very seriously a lot of the other bilateral political relations we have in the Middle East.

Hon. Bev Oda: First of all, no decisions made on behalf of the government or CIDA are personal decisions. We undertake a whole-of-government approach, and significant decisions made on behalf of CIDA and the government are certainly not personal. They're done in the interest of Canadian taxpayers and citizens and their relationships with the world.

I fully reflect that situation. I have spoken to other donor countries. I've even had a conversation with Ban Ki-moon at the United Nations. He indicated that Canada was not the only country expressing some concerns about UNRWA.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Minister. I have three questions for you.

In your opening statement, you said that your government is “on track to meet our commitment to double Canada's international assistance to \$5 billion annually by next year”. Are you able to tell me what percentage of Canada's GNP that represents?

You also said that all changes to the list of the 20 core countries will now have to be approved by Cabinet, for strategic reasons. Do those reasons jibe with the trade agreements that your government is currently negotiating with a number of countries, including Colombia and Peru?

You have withdrawn from your new list of core countries eight African countries, adding instead four Latin American countries. How were the new countries selected? Did you hold consultations? If so, whom did you consult? According to data provided to me by the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, the 2005 list contained more poor countries than the 2009 list. Based on the UN's human development index, 11 of the countries on the 2005 list were ranked as having poor human development. By comparison, only seven of the countries on the 2009 list were deemed to be weak in terms of human development. Knowing that, can you tell me why you decided to remove those African countries and add countries such as Colombia?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Deschamps.

Minister.

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: *Merci.* First of all, let me say that yes, we will be targeting the \$5 billion by next year. As far as the relationship goes, in the most recent OECD report that came out in March of this year, it has been noted that for Canada, the ODA level is up over 12% due to our scaling up of our overall aid contributions and our contributions to the World Bank. Canada is one of the top 10 countries in ODA contributions in 2008. In fact we surpassed the DAC country average, the European Union average, and the G-7 average. In fact, as you will know, we've increased to a level of 0.32%.

As you know, the ratio between ODA and GNI depends on the economy of the country, so looking at the situation that all the developed countries are in presently, I'm watching the contributions closely.

Canada has maintained its commitment to increase its international assistance. We are doing that every year. Other countries have been decreasing their international assistance. In fact, Italy, for example, threatened to decrease its international assistance by 57% or 58%. Through international discussions, they've reduced that reduction, but unfortunately, they're still reducing by over 40%. When we see this happening, we always have to make sure that we are going to be effective, and there's more coordination amongst the countries that we're looking at.

This leads me to how we selected the countries. Canada is not the only one that's been focusing geographically. Other countries have been doing so, and in fact some of them took some of these steps before Canada did. When I look at the various countries, the African countries, to see who has increased their contribution to those countries, and what kinds of commitments, what efforts they are making, we're also looking at the effectiveness of those things. We want to work with the African countries. We're working with the African Union. We're supporting the African Development Bank. Some countries prefer the multilateral approach because it's closer to home, and they have more impact on saying what can be done in that country, so we're looking at that.

When I look at the actual countries and the impacts on what is being done there, I would tell you that generally, across the board, the United Kingdom and the European Union have increased their support in Africa, but they're decreasing, at the same time, in the Americas. We have the Netherlands, which now potentially is going to leave Haiti completely—and I've spoken to the head of the Netherlands agency.

If you look at Australia, they're moving their focus to the South Pacific, to countries within their region. I would say to you that there is a regional realignment happening.

As to how we looked at the African countries, as I pointed out, need and level of poverty were one of the criteria, and an important criterion, but only one of the criteria. The second criterion, I think, deserves as much attention as the level of poverty. In fact, if you look at how much has been invested by the western world into Africa, it's over \$23 trillion. I'm as discouraged about this as others are. This is why it's important for us to make sure our contribution—and other countries are doing the same—produces real results. We have to look

at the way that aid is being done, etc. It's the capacity of the countries.

This is a real tragedy. We've seen many countries that we thought were progressing really well, and yet, when you look at those same countries.... If you look at a country like South Africa, it was triumphant, and we thought it was moving along very well, and now it has some challenges. If you look at Kenya, it was moving along very well, and now if you look.... We are also seeing an increase in conflict and refugee situations, etc. So events and situations evolve.

● (1610)

We look at countries and ask, where is the country and the government willing to take responsibility? Even if it's in one sector, we would prefer to work with a government that's willing to work in that sector.

I met recently with an African ambassador from a country that is very, very rich in natural resources. The country has significant GDP growth, but there is a particular humanitarian situation there. I asked the ambassador—and I'm hoping I'll get information from them—what is your government willing to do to help address this humanitarian situation? We will partner with them; we will work with them.

But I think the thing here is that we know the way to ensure long-term, sustainable movement out of poverty is to help the governments themselves take over that responsibility, or else we're continually going to have countries that are aid dependent. And that does not help, I believe, the social stability and the political stability of a country. They want to see their own leadership providing them with the needs they have. So that's a very important criterion.

The third criterion as a government is that we have policies and priorities, but we do not, and we will not, tie our aid only to the countries where we have any trade or economic interests. For the countries we look at, yes, we are undertaking trade negotiations with Peru and Colombia, but there were other countries on that list with whom we have no trade relationships and where we don't have an economic interest. There is an immense need, but there is an ability to make a difference in that country.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Ms. Lalonde.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Minister. I listened carefully to your comments, but I have to say you did not convince me. There are a number of points I would like to raise.

First of all, to our knowledge, before making a spectacular shift and removing eight African countries from your list of core countries — which happen to be Francophone — you did not in fact consult anyone who has worked or is currently working in these countries. We find that surprising. Indeed, it is a worrisome surprise, particularly since you are telling us that the next list will only be amended following a decision by Cabinet. That is a clear indication of the importance of this shift.

Second, you are probably aware that the Quebec National Assembly unanimously passed a resolution asking you to reinstate the former list. Indeed, some countries have been abandoned and the Quebec National Assembly believes it is also responsible for helping NGOs and community groups that have acquired a great deal of experience and play a major developmental role in Francophone Africa.

Third, I would like to ask you a question. Given what you have said, how can you continue to say that you will meet the Millennium Development Goals? We cannot see how you will be in a position to do that. Indeed, no one we have spoken to sees how that could be possible.

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: *Merci, madame.* Let me just put some information on the table—and I want to correct this.

This is something that we get too obsessed with, whether we're on the list or we're not on the list, etc. We are not abandoning any country and we have not abandoned any country. What we said was that in 20 countries we are going to focus our work to make sure it is coherent, that it is going to be better coordinated, and we're going to focus on certain sectors where we can make a difference.

I also indicated in my presentation this morning that even if you were not on the list first, any project that is being undertaken in that country now will be honoured until the end of that. We will then look at the needs in that country, and we're not going to abandon it. If we have an effective program that's making a difference, that's making a significant difference in the reduction of poverty in that country, we will support that program.

I want to also point out that 47% of the remainder of CIDA's entire budget is available to countries not on the list. We're not abandoning any country. In fact, in eight of the Francophonie countries, our programming for Francophonie countries under our government in 2007 and 2008 was \$141 million. Last year it increased to \$208 million. We hosted the Francophonie. I have talked to DESI and Oxfam-Québec. Oxfam-Québec is a very effective organization, a wonderful organization. There are so many. I went to a school in Gonaïves, in Haiti, that is supporting a primary school and a secondary school that was just devastated by the hurricanes last year. I visited them. They're doing wonderful work as well in Haiti.

I've travelled to francophone countries. What we're saying is, as I said, not to be on the list does not mean Canada will not be there to work with the best organizations. What we aren't going to do—and I will be very frank about this, Mr. Chair, if I could—is put a little bit of money into one or two projects in every country. When I look at country by country, for example—

• (1620)

The Chair: Madam Minister, very quickly.

Hon. Bev Oda: If I look at a country like Malawi—\$12 million. We will be focusing on HIV/AIDS in that country.

I can go country by country and tell you where good work is being done in that country. If it's good work, if it's showing results, we will be there.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

We'll go to Mr. Abbott and Ms. Brown.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you, Madam Minister.

I'd like to thank you for coming before the committee. As the chair noted, you're not a stranger to this committee. You're regularly available to us.

I think it's been interesting to hear this dialogue from the Bloc, and certainly it's driven, I think, by some lack of understanding of what the focused approach is. We all know that Canada had become quite overextended and spread too thin in many areas.

If I understand correctly, I think we were involved in 69 countries and we're now down to 20 countries with our bilateral aid. Of course, as you pointed out, the bilateral aid is only a small portion of the \$4.3 billion total aid package. Focusing, I think, is important. You have made some changes, and you're continuing to make changes to make our aid more effective.

I wonder if you could share some more examples of problems that existed at CIDA. How are you working to overcome those problems?

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

To be fair, yes, we were in multiple countries. Some people said we moved from 127 to 69, or 78, etc. But in fairness, the former government had published a list of 25 countries. When we took office I asked, "What does this mean? What's been done to focus in these countries, the concentration of the former government? How has the movement been? Have the resources followed? Have activities followed?" There was a list, I will grant you that. However, there was no directional indication of what "countries of concentration" meant under the former government, and certainly no articulated public statements focusing work within the country, etc.

Consequently, I want to be fair. We didn't go from a hundred and some odd countries or 78 countries down to 20. There was a list of 25 countries. Yes, there were changes in those countries. Some of the countries that were on the former list in fact were only receiving maybe \$4 million in a bilateral program. The majority of the money going into that country was through our humanitarian assistance because it was a humanitarian situation that was happening, either through natural disasters or in many cases through conflict situations. So the best vehicle and the best means to address the largest or most significant challenges in that country would be through refugee settlement, to support food aid, to support responding to droughts, etc. When you look country by country, depending on the country, the impact of adjusting bilateral programming does not reduce our humanitarian support for those countries as well.

To address the question about what else at CIDA, I will say that there is one other thing that does concern me. Now that we've chosen thematic focused areas, I don't believe we have the expertise at CIDA. There was a day when CIDA historically, in the past, had expertise in-house. It moved away from that, I think, over the past decade, decade and a half. So now, as expertise is required, consultants are hired. I think if we choose a focus, it means we have to have at least a satisfactory level of expertise at CIDA.

The other thing too, and I think we can all witness it, is when we're working in a large department that has sectoral and also geographic interests and activities—and we've heard this about governments and the public service before—many times silos are created and there is not cross-talk and sharing of information across the silos. Consequently, you have things happening in isolation. It may be a multilateral branch, or a partnership branch, or a country branch. They don't talk to each other, so they don't know sort of what's happening in the health sector and what Canada is supporting. I'm not saying it's a blatant, humongous problem, but there wasn't that open vehicle by which that would happen naturally, so we're addressing that.

I think probably those are two observations. I think we would benefit from more in-house expertise and to ensure that we encourage cross-talk and that we work together as an agency. For example, in Africa, I've asked the African branch to come forward so that when we have our discussions with the African community, we've already done some investigation and due diligence on what is best addressed on a pan-Africa basis, on a regional basis, and then on a country-by-country basis.

• (1625)

If you look at the Great Lakes region, that is a region, but it includes many countries, so there are issues that they share. Maybe to address those issues we should look more regionally than at three, four, or five countries and different programs all addressing the same issue. That's the kind of thinking I would like to have happen at CIDA.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Ms. Brown, quickly.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll keep my questions very brief.

Minister, you've talked about the thematic priorities that we've put in place. You've talked about sustainable economic growth, and you've talked about food security. One of the areas you've also spoken about is securing a future for children. As you know, I was in Bangladesh in March. I met with the foreign minister, and I actually had the opportunity to observe some of the projects that CIDA money is going into for the children of Bangladesh. I wonder if you could tell us, first of all, how you chose those, and do you have any specific comments about the priorities for children?

Hon. Bev Oda: The programs, I would say, that you primarily see in Bangladesh, because right now we do have some evolving humanitarian requests that are coming in from Bangladesh.... Before, CIDA primarily was a responsive organization, and it would respond to organizations, whether they're international, national, or more local, community-based organizations. Its partnership branch is set up to respond to Canadian organizations' requests, but even in the bilateral we would work with them, but a lot of the programs would be driven by individual organizations. I would say they were all very based with the best of intentions, good work, but they wouldn't be coordinated in a way that there was cohesiveness being undertaken.

In fact, even within organizations.... When I was in Colombia I saw two water projects undertaken by CARE International. For the one project, that team was doing everything for the local community. In the second water project, they took a little longer, but they set up a water project where it's now being locally managed and run. So even within the same organization you'd have two different kinds of water projects. You can see how, if you're being more responsive in indicating to the organizations what it is you want to accomplish in a country, they can come forward with their proposals.

As far as how the projects were selected before is concerned, they were selected according to the millennium development goals. If they were directly or even indirectly related to the reduction of poverty and one of the millennium development goals, they of course would be considered. CIDA itself formerly had some principle statements that they would support and areas where they would support, and of course those would again be supported. Consequently, what happened is you'd try to respond to any activity that would fit under those principles, without any focus in programming, and in actually articulating the outcomes you would like to see, the outcomes you were trying to achieve.

What I found at CIDA was that things were more measured by input than by output. So there was the reporting. Yes, they got the money, they administered it responsibly, etc., and then when you asked for output, what was the real result, some of the activities we were looking for, it was more how many people would be part of a program. The real measures—did it increase the productivity of a farm, did it prevent youth who were in the sex trade from returning to the sex trade—were measures that were never required of a project that we supported.

Those are some of the changes we're putting in place.

•(1630)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Oda.

Seeing the clock at 4:30 p.m., I know it's time for Mr. Dewar.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister.

I have one quick question to maybe clarify questions from previous questioners. When we're talking about Gaza and the West Bank, UNRWA, there are no cuts to that funding? There will be no cuts to that funding?

Hon. Bev Oda: In fact, on our commitment to UNRWA and the West Bank, we responded very, very quickly. I know that the former Minister of Foreign Affairs went to the Paris conference and committed \$300 million. That \$300 million is being undertaken with a plan. It's supporting the Palestinian government's initiatives, and they're very happy with what we're doing with the justice system, etc.

On the other hand—

Mr. Paul Dewar: So there'll be no—

Hon. Bev Oda: —we are also significantly contributing, where we can deliver, humanitarian aid to the refugees and to the Palestinians who have been affected by the conflict. But you know that there are difficulties about getting supplies through to those living in Gaza.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'm aware of those, but thank you. So there are no cuts coming.

I just wanted to touch on your comments about Africa. Minister, with respect, I have to say that I think there's a bit of a chasm here that seems to be widening, a chasm between where Canadians want the government to be—and that is in Africa—and where the direction of the government is going.

I was listening carefully. One of the things you mentioned is that you want to decentralize. You want more accountability, you want to be more effective, and you want to help where there are willing countries. You also mentioned the \$23 trillion that has been collectively put into the region.

Most people that I talk to want to see us do more there, not less. I guess I'm a little concerned about this notion that you're going to be handcuffed as the minister. I want to support you as the minister. I don't want you to be going to cabinet when, as the minister charged with the responsibility of overseas development, you believe the priority should change. You should be able to have the power to do that.

I say that, Minister, because of what we have seen. It's actually not fair to say that all this money is being put into Africa. As you know, there's a lot of money coming out of Africa. On the resource-based industry that I think you talked about to one of the ambassadors you were mentioning, you will know that there are billions and billions of dollars going out of there and into our pockets. I have to say that because it's something that needs to be part of the equation. I know you know that.

I want to say to you, Minister, that if there's anything we can do to help you have more power at the cabinet table so that your hands aren't tied and you can actually focus on more countries, I think this committee would be willing to help you with that.

So here's what I want to ask you. Were you the one to come up with this idea of having countries of focus and that you would have to receive cabinet approval to change the countries of focus? Or was that an idea that was put on you? In other words, was it your idea to do this?

•(1635)

Hon. Bev Oda: No, and as I responded to one of our colleagues before, any decisions made are not individual decisions. This is important. It's important not only for what we would be able to do to help developing countries and those living in poverty, but I also understand and recognize that it is important for Canada's foreign relations and relations with many countries and hemispheres around the world.

But as you yourself said, sir, if success is to be measured in terms of numbers of lives saved, we must focus on outcomes, on proven cost-effective solutions that work to prevent needless suffering and death. That is exactly what I'm trying to accomplish and what our government is trying to accomplish. What I would like to say to you is that if because you are on a list, etc., it is indicating to you or in your reading that there's going to be less effort in Africa—\$2.1 billion was spent last year, leading up to there, for Africa. If you look at our total budget at CIDA, that's a significant portion of our international assistance envelope.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Is that including World Bank investments?

Hon. Bev Oda: Yes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: You're quoting me back to myself, so one of the things on the World Bank that was mentioned in my op-ed today—

Hon. Bev Oda: Yes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: —was that one of the problems is the World Bank. I was saying that we need to do more to make sure the investments through the World Bank are going to be more effective.

With respect, Minister, the whole piece of that puzzle was that I was trying to plead with I guess you that we not turn our backs on Africa, that we actually get more involved, roll up our sleeves, and have more people on the ground. In your opening comments, which I listened to carefully, you said that you wanted to put more people in the field and give them more power in the field. What I would hope is that we want to see you as a minister have independence in that field called “cabinet” and to be able to exercise what you think is best. I'm saddened to see that you're going to be constrained in that.

I know you don't feel that way, but I feel that way, and I think many people who share concerns about development feel that way. I just hope that when we look to Africa, it's not just looking to how much money is put in, which I would agree is part of the equation, but to how much comes out. Not only do we need to put more money in, I think, but we need to challenge the money that's coming out and who's benefiting. I think that's important.

Hon. Bev Oda: As you know, we are certainly trying to make sure... CIDA's responsibility—and we work with the Minister of International Trade as well on our activities where Canadians are doing this—is to ensure that Canadian companies are acting responsibly.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Yes, we're worried about that one.

Hon. Bev Oda: Let me first say thank you for your confidence, and I hope you can agree that this effort to be more effective is not going to be completed in the next two months. If you want to see me back as the minister—

Mr. Paul Dewar: We want to see you have your hands freed.

Hon. Bev Oda: I will take you at your word.

I'd like to refer you to a speech—and I think we can make it available if it's not on the website—that I made at the World Bank meetings, the IMF meetings. I didn't point out that the World Bank itself had to make sure that it was accountable, transparent, and had the rigour...and not only financially. When it undertakes development work, it has to ensure—and when we contribute to it, we're going to test them to make sure—that they're as effective as any other organization. Just because they're the World Bank may not necessarily say....

We do support programs that we have confidence in.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I have just one last quick question, Minister, and that is on the list of priorities for you. I'm surprised not to see women there. Canada has a commitment to resolutions 1325, 1820. We just heard from the Commissioner of the Independent Human Rights Commission in Afghanistan. She referenced resolution 1325.

I hope we see you get behind that as an initiative. I think you're there—I hope.

• (1640)

Hon. Bev Oda: I'm going to be continuing it. Certainly Canada has been out in the forefront on the gender issues. One thing that was recognized internationally is the way Canada integrates or mainstreams gender considerations in all of its programs. In fact, we're

one of the few countries where when you come forward with a proposal, you have to respond to how gender considerations have been taken.

Mr. Paul Dewar: But why isn't it one of your priorities?

Hon. Bev Oda: Again, we want to make sure that it's integrated and that it's not in a silo unto itself. There are certain countries, like Afghanistan...and in fact, in Afghanistan we're doing a lot for women particularly. I wanted to be able to report to you that we are monitoring very stringently the rights of women, the laws, the legislation being undertaken there. But I want to make sure that it doesn't get isolated.

In fact, back in the early 1990s I was on the gender issues advisory board to the Treasury Board of the Canadian government to try to ensure that even within our own public service or in our crown corporations, consideration of gender and gender issues was not sidelined and put into a silo. So I'm very conscious of that.

There are activities to support women's human rights, etc., and a lot of the agriculture, as you know, is undertaken by women, the small farm holders, and so is the micro-financing.

I will say this. I think the women are maybe sometimes just as, if not more, entrepreneurial than the males. Our women's literacy programs are critical for us. When you support women, women will take care of their families. Their children will be better educated, better nourished, and they will receive better health care. It's the women who ensure that they have the food they need, the housing, the shelter, etc.

So I'm a big supporter—

Mr. Paul Dewar: So it could be our number 4—

Hon. Bev Oda: I want to make sure that it's not isolated and that it's built in into every one of our themes.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

We allowed Mr. Dewar to go 17 seconds over time. Let me just say that the Liberals had lots of time on this one.

Anyway, Madam Minister, we thank you very much for coming today. We're going to suspend, and then we're going to welcome the delegation from the African countries here.

Madam Minister, just before we do, I also did want to put on the record that I know you were in Sri Lanka and that you did make a pledge there. This committee has just completed a report on Sri Lanka, with some recommendations that we certainly recommend for your reading. We thank you for the work you did there on behalf of our country.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•
• (1645)

The Chair: Colleagues, welcome back.

In our second hour we are going to continue our review of key elements of Canadian foreign policy. We are conducting hearings on the Great Lakes region of Africa. And we have a special delegation of ambassadors, high commissioners, ministers, and councillors to Canada from a number of African nations.

Our committee, really, is overwhelmed by the interest that you demonstrate in our work by attending our meeting today. We thank you all very much for taking the time and making the effort to assist us in our studies in this committee.

It's my understanding that the Ambassador of Burkina Faso to Canada, Juliette Bonkougou Yameogo, will deliver an opening statement for our committee. Madam Ambassador, on behalf of our committee, welcome, and we look forward to your comments.

Oh, they changed. Okay.

Go ahead.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

His Excellency Bawoumondome Amelete (Ambassador of the Togolese Republic to Canada, Embassy of the Togolese Republic): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

With your permission, in my capacity as Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps here in Canada, I will be speaking before my colleague from Burkina Faso.

Mr. Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, honourable members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, it is a tremendous pleasure for myself and all my colleagues to be with you this afternoon in the prestigious edifice which is the Parliament of Canada.

In my capacity as Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps here in Canada, I would like to begin by taking this opportunity to express my very sincere thanks to the Chairman and all the members of this Committee for agreeing to meet with us this afternoon before this august assembly. Meetings such as the one this afternoon give us a chance to get to know and understand each other better, in order to foster the development of a more harmonious and advantageous relationship between Canada and Africa.

A foreign head of state made the following comment on February 28, 2008 in South Africa: "Transparency is the best guarantee of solid and lasting relations, and the best antidote to fantasy and incomprehension."

It is with that desire for dialogue that we come before you this afternoon, as friends of Canada, to exchange views. My colleague from Burkina Faso, to whom I will cede the floor in a moment, is our spokesperson. You have critics here in Parliament, but we have our own spokesperson, who will be delivering our message. With your permission, I would like to very quickly introduce the colleagues mandated by the African group to meet with you this afternoon.

I will name the countries and ask my colleagues to please rise when they hear the name of their country: South Africa, Benin, Burundi, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Ghana—the representative of that country is apparently not here—Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Togo—which I am representing—Tunisia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Libya which, as you may recall, is now chairing the African Union.

I would like to turn it over now to my colleague from Burkina Faso.

• (1650)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame, the remarks you have here are a little long. But I want to commend to our committee's attention that the presentation is in the booklet and that you're recommended to take it and read it. They have recommendations at the end.

Thank you, Madame, and go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Her Excellency Juliette Bonkougou Yameogo (Ambassador of Burkina Faso to Canada, Embassy of Burkina Faso): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of Parliament.

Following the opening remarks of our dean, His Excellency, Mr. Bawoumondome Amelete, Ambassador of the Republic of Togo, please allow me, in my capacity as spokesperson, to thank each and every one of you for your availability and your warm welcome, and to express our great pleasure at being here this afternoon to share with you our vision of the Canada-Africa Partnership.

Before that, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to state firmly that we come before you today as friends of Canada, mindful of the role your country plays as a G-8 member in Africa.

Let it be clear that we are not here this afternoon with a cup in hand, but rather, we come to share our convictions and our concerns with you in the hope of creating a renewed partnership with your country.

It is not about blaming someone for our under-development. We are responsible for errors committed in the strategic choices we made in development programs, for entertaining non-democratic systems of governance and for our weaknesses in terms of accountability, transparency and corruption. However, we wish to energetically assert that, despite these images of an Africa that has turned its back on peace and progress, there is another Africa, which is young, dynamic, industrious and innovative, and which is struggling to achieve positive results.

My colleagues and I are firmly convinced that, in the history of a friendship such as ours, there are moments when it becomes necessary and important to find time to sit down and communicate with each other, to create a new dialogue in order to strengthen and reinvigorate that friendship. That is why we are here this afternoon.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished members of Parliament, Africa's diplomatic relations with Canada are not new; for most of our countries, they date as far back as the early days of independence in the 1960s. Today, all of our countries enjoy diplomatic and/or trade relations with Canada. But, what is Canada to Africa?

Seen from Africa, Canada is a country of friendship, a friendly, developed country, multilingual, bilingual and without a colonial past; a country concerned about world peace and security, a loyal friend that stands up for its convictions, even if that means disagreeing with its best allies on matters that touch on its core values. Canada is a friend that understands the challenges of Africa because it experiences challenges of a similar nature at home, even if those challenges are not of the same magnitude.

Like many countries, Canada's economy is driven by raw materials. Certain regions of Canada have only one type of production and are keenly aware of how precarious such dependency can be. However, despite this fragility, Canada has been able to build a strong economy based on knowledge and technical know-how, and now stands tall among the eight greatest nations of this world. We, Africans, would like to emulate your shining example.

For us, Canada is a country whose people stand shoulder to shoulder with vulnerable people, both at home and elsewhere in the world, a country which uses public resources wisely, carefully, effectively and with skill, to support effective markets in the public interest.

For we, Africans, Canada, one of the greatest countries in the world, is a reliable partner we can count on. Canada's corporations and institutions are not as huge and anonymous as those of other world economic power houses. It is interesting to recall that, on many occasions, at international gatherings, Canada has stood shoulder to shoulder with Africa in defence of our continent's interests. This has been the case for agricultural subsidies, and especially as regards cotton.

That is the Canada that Africa knows, frequents and with whom it is anxious to move forward.

● (1655)

It is for all of these reasons that, without questioning Canada's right as a sovereign nation to set its own priorities, and the policies that go along with them, we were very disturbed by the government's recent decisions regarding our continent, decisions which seem to

sound the death-knell for the bright days of our privileged relationship with Canada.

In that connection, we have in mind the closure of embassies in certain African countries; the establishment of a priority list of countries to receive Canadian aid; a reduction in the number of countries on that list; figures showing a downward trend in Canadian aid to Africa in favour of other regions of the world. Indeed, according to some sources, such as the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, with the list of 25 core countries, 70% of Canadian bilateral aid was going to Africa. With just 20 countries now, the proportion will drop to 35% after 2010.

These observations are even more baffling to us as they come at a time when new economic powers such as Brazil, China and India are rushing to secure a place on our continent and investing significant amounts of money in order to do so.

Are we to believe that our longtime friend has decided to let others pick up where it has left off, and to ignore the many studies, both from international financial institutions and private organizations, which all conclude that Africa will play a critical geostrategic role in the next decade with its population of 1.5 billion by 2020, 60% of which will be under the age of 25? Did the Honourable Peter MacKay, member of Parliament and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, not say, and I quote: "As to the question of knowing if Africa is a long-term challenge, I would say that even if currently, it is terrorism that is grabbing the headlines, Africa will be the most important challenge of my generation and the next".

For we, Africans, tomorrow's challenge is already today's challenge. In terms of private investments, many Canadian firms are already investing in many different sectors in Africa, primarily mining, and are in an excellent competitive position. Furthermore, despite a few areas of concern, good governance is taking root in most of our countries, along with greater democratization and the organization of regular and pluralist elections which sometimes result in changes of government.

More independent and better equipped judicial systems are also being set up. An active civil society is emerging with more and more civil liberties and a free press. New institutions and programs, such as the Africa Peer Review; the Council for Peace and Security of the African Union, which is tackling conflict prevention and resolution; the Organization for the Harmonization in Africa of Business Law, which is improving the business environment and providing for better legal protection of investments; and the New Partnership for the Development of Africa, which is giving Africa a coherent program of development, all contribute to strengthening economic and political governance, thereby giving Africa hope, peace and development.

For a continent that has gone through the trials and tribulations of the Cold War and the consequences of the East-West confrontation on its soil to be able to take these important steps in just a few years is quite an achievement. Added to these positive steps with respect to good governance and democracy, are Africa's huge mineral deposits, that have prompted some to say that our continent is a geological scandal. Indeed, Africa has enormous natural resources, huge amounts of solar energy, 30% to 40% of global hydro-electric potential, considerable oil and gas reserves, 97% of the world's chrome, 85% of its platinum, 60% to 80% of the world's gold and diamond deposits, 64% of its manganese, as well as 9 billion tons of high-concentration bauxite, significant reserves of phosphate, abundant natural and wildlife, and so on.

Unfortunately, the tsunami brought on by the current global financial crisis is likely to wipe away all these efforts and mortgage the opportunities that these resources represent for our countries.

• (1700)

In fact, from 2004 to 2008, general economic reform programs in Africa resulted in an average rate of growth of 6% annually. Now, however, the current crisis will break that momentum and force the growth rate down to 2.8% in 2009. The reduction by half of that growth rate erases all hope of increasing per capita income on the continent, because of equivalent population growth over the same period.

According to World Bank estimates, the number of poor—in other words, people living with the equivalent of \$1.25 US or less—will increase by 2% to 500 million, 50 million of whom are in Africa, with all the ensuing negative consequences for the people of Africa. Fewer resources mean fewer meals, fewer children in school, and less health care. This crisis may well carry with it businesses, mines, jobs and people's economic livelihood.

In Africa, no less than anywhere else, time is of the essence and decisive action is needed right now. In record time, rich countries were able to put up hundreds of billions of dollars to come to the rescue of their own businesses and citizens. As a victim of collateral damage, Africa is asking that a very small part of those resources—7% of global GDP—be allocated to it in order to meet these challenges.

According to a recent study by the African Development Bank, the continent needs about \$106 billion US over a two-year period—from 2009 to 2010—just to maintain the previous growth rate. However, in order to get the wheels of the economy really turning again and reach the 7% growth rate needed to provide basic infrastructure and reduce poverty by half between now and 2015, it will take \$247 billion US over the same period to reach that objective. That is the amount announced by Barack Obama for the stimulus package in the United States alone. It is the equivalent of 10% of China's foreign exchange reserves. In this context, it is clear that this is within the realm of the possible if the entire international community is involved in assisting the billions of people in need.

That is why we are asking our longtime friend, Canada, to again take its place as the world's social conscience, which has done so much for its reputation and credibility.

We therefore have included recommendations on page 9 which we see as an attractive set of concrete proposals. We are asking that members of Parliament support these proposals, examine them carefully and gain a clear understanding of the authorities and the populations involved, so that vigorous and urgent action may be taken to assist Africa. These recommendations relate to political issues around democracy, good governance, peace and security, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, human development, occupational training, and so on.

Of course, as we mentioned earlier, we understand that every country sets its own policies according to its means, its constraints and its priorities. However, it is worth noting that Canada, like other developed countries, undertook at the Copenhagen Summit—a commitment which was later confirmed by the United Nations General Assembly when the Millennium Goals were adopted—to dedicate 0.7% of its GDP to official development assistance and to work towards reducing poverty by half by 2015.

Unfortunately, the poor are in Africa. Today, at 0.32% and ranked 16th on the list of 22 developed countries—according to the OECD—we are a long way from achieving that goal.

According to the United Nations, the Millennium Goals aimed at reducing poverty by 50% by 2015 will not be met as long as the various bilateral lenders, including Canada, do not meet by their commitment to dedicate 0.7% of their GDP to official development assistance. The same experts believe that, if the current rate is maintained, Africa cannot expect to reduce poverty by half before 2150—in other words, 130 years from now.

Certainly, we are very appreciative of the significant efforts made by Canada with respect to basic education, the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other pandemics in Africa, as well as its contribution to peace and security in the world.

Today, more than yesterday, however, we have to face the facts: prosperity, peace and security go hand in hand. They nurture one another and grow together. Also, it is very important that we work together, starting now, with our long-time friend to put a stop to violence and terrorism which are making an appearance here and there on the continent, particularly cases of abduction, piracy, and so on.

• (1705)

It is an illusion to believe, as some do, that one can separate business from development and security. One cannot flourish without the other.

We believe that Canada's decision to seek other partners should not be to Africa's detriment. In spite of that, and given expressions of friendship and solidarity from the people of Canada, high-ranking politicians, the press and the civil society, including the strong voice of a former Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, who called for continued preferential solidarity with Africa in the *Globe and Mail*, we remain optimistic, and are confident that Canada-Africa relations can continue to improve and develop in a mutually beneficial manner, in order to meet the challenges of development, the fight against poverty and the promotion of peace and security in the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, Canada's commitment to Africa, which remains just as critical, valuable and well-defined, must continue to be unshakable and conform to its values which, more often than not, are the same as those of Africa. That is why, while noting the new measures and the somewhat ambiguous message being sent to Africa, we remain confident and are mindful of the assurances given us by our partners at the Department of Foreign Affairs and CIDA.

While not denying the importance of multilateral contributions, we believe that Canada's deep felt values and the potential for development of the African continent militate in favour of a specific, comprehensive and renewed African political strategy.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, in one word or in a thousand, we wish to see Canada take its place again and demonstrate its leadership in Africa, as part of a comprehensive win-win partnership, because we believe that the country of Pearson, Trudeau, Joe Clark, Kim Campbell, Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin, Brian Mulroney and many other great sons and daughters of Canada has always responded positively, every time there was a need to work together towards a better world, a more cohesive, fairer and richer world for all.

Thank you very much. I want to apologize for going over my time, but I believe the importance of what I had to say compelled me to do so.

Thank you for your kind attention.

•(1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Bonkougou Yameogo.

[*English*]

We'll go now to Madame Folco—welcome to our committee—and Mr. Bélanger. I'm going to ask you to formulate your questions very quickly, both of you together.

Mr. Obhrai, did you have a point?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): I think in the election of 2008 the Liberals lost their way. There are too many Liberals out there. Who is representing whom? We don't know.

The Chair: They have Madame Folco, Monsieur Bélanger, and Mr. Pearson.

Madame Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We're going to have five-minute rounds, so, if you would, give your question, and Mr. Bélanger can give his question.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: And then the answers will come at the end?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Good. Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to wish a warm welcome to all the ambassadors who are here today representing the different African countries.

Thank you, Ambassador Amelete and, particularly, the Ambassador from Burkina Faso.

My question will primarily be addressed to the ambassadors representing countries who are members of the Francophonie, as I am the Liberal critic for International Francophonie. I will go right to them.

The Government of Canada has made a number of cuts. In 2007, the Leadership for the Environment and Development for Francophone Africa program was cut. Then, in 2008, the Canadian Fund for Africa had its funding significantly reduced. The latest cuts made by CIDA to its programs in Africa, and which the Government of Canada recently announced, affect bilateral aid in particular.

My questions, which are addressed in particular to the ambassadors from Niger, Burkina Faso, Rwanda and Benin, are as follows: what has been the impact of these three major cuts which I just mentioned to multilateral and institutional aid in your respective countries? Second, which sectors are most affected by these cuts? Third, how do you expect to be able to carry on the programs that are already underway, in light of the timelines you have signed on to with the Government of Canada? What areas are particularly affected by the cuts that have been announced since 1999 by the Government of Canada?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank all my colleagues for their indulgence. Rather than asking a question, I would like to make a comment.

I am here today as a member of the Official Opposition, but also as Joint Chair of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association. We met with some of Your Excellencies a while ago. I can confirm two things: first, our continuing interest in Africa and our commitment to continue to try and convince any Canadian government, whatever it may be, to maintain a major presence in Africa and major cooperation with Africa.

Also, Excellencies, I would like to thank you for the series of recommendations you have provided today. I have noted them all, and find them very comprehensive. They will certainly be a good basis for our work in the association. Thank you very much.

•(1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

[*English*]

Ambassadors, Madame Folco had some questions. I think she directed them to a number of ambassadors.

Would you like to respond?

[Translation]

H.E. Juliette Bonkougou Yameogo: Madam, thank you for your question. We, Africans, do not necessarily speak in terms of Francophones and Anglophones because, for us, Africa is a whole. However, it is important to say that we believe Canada to be a bilingual country and that we think a continued linguistic balance between Anglophone and Francophone areas can only continue to enrich us as a continent. In that sense, we have indeed recommended in our written brief that a slight adjustment may be in order, but our real desire tonight is to see a more comprehensive vision of aid to Africa.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.* Was there another response?

Yes, Madame.

[Translation]

Her Excellency Nana Aicha Mouctari Foumakoye (Ambassador of the Republic of Niger to Canada, Embassy of the Republic of Niger): Thank you for your questions. I want to express my support for the comments made by the Ambassador of Burkina Faso and refer to the specific situation that prevails in our countries. As you know, Canada is supporting efforts in our countries to meet the challenges they are currently facing, particularly in such critical social areas as education, health and humanitarian assistance. Now, however, those areas are bound to suffer. It is the same for the efforts of NGOs that are active in our countries and benefit from Canada's support. As a result of these cuts, support for NGOs will also be affected, as will all of our efforts and those of our nationals living in those countries. It is all of that. As you can see, the shortfall in funding is enormous.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll move to other questions.

[Translation]

Ms. Deschamps and Ms. Lalonde, you have five minutes.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassadors, I would like to welcome you to this Committee. It is a pleasure to meet with you today. Like Mr. Bélanger, I am a member of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association. I have two or three quick questions I would like to ask, as time is short.

There is one thing I would like to validate with you. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, Mr. Abbott, said in the House of Commons that he had spoken to the ambassadors of those African countries that have been struck from the list of priority countries for Canadian aid. He asserted that these countries support the government's decision to remove them from the list.

I would like to know whether the Canadian government contacted you to make you aware of this decision, whether you were consulted or whether you found out subsequently.

H.E. Bawoumond Amelete: Thank you for your question. My country was not on the list, and therefore was not removed. I can tell you one thing, however. When you have something and someone comes along and takes it away, you cannot just say that you are happy it has been taken away. That would be very surprising, but what I do know is this: as Dean, I have discussed this information with some of the ambassadors. They told me they were never consulted. I believe Burkina Faso was removed from the list; the ambassador to that country can tell you whether she was consulted or not.

H.E. Juliette Bonkougou Yameogo: Thank you, Ambassador Amelete.

I can assure you, Madam, that we were not consulted. We never agreed to that. We were simply informed and, if memory serves me, the decision was already official by then.

Thank you.

• (1720)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Are there others who would care to comment?

We heard the Minister say a little earlier that international aid provided by Canada in 2010-2011 will represent 0.32% of Canada's GDP. According to an OECD source, Canada ranks 16th out of 22 donor countries. Seeing the way things are going, there is reason for concern. Indeed, experts are saying that, if poverty in Africa is not reduced by half and countries do not undertake to meet the Millennium Goals in 2015, your development will be delayed and you will be stuck in the cycle of poverty for another 130 years. Is that correct?

H.E. Bawoumond Amelete: Yes, it is. As my colleague from Burkina Faso said earlier, our countries must act, but we need help from our friends, particularly Canada. If Canada or other countries do not help us, that will certainly have a very detrimental long-term impact on Africa.

H.E. Juliette Bonkougou Yameogo: Madam, I would just like to add to what the Dean of our group has just said.

A short time ago, I attended a meeting in Montreal. On that occasion, the economist, Jeffrey Sachs, whom you are familiar with, and others as well, suggested that, even if it makes no additional effort to increase its contribution, Canada could host the next G8 Summit.

However, as friends of Africa, this is sad news indeed. It is very important for us that Canada again play a leadership role, by acting as the world's social conscience. Canada was known to Africans as a country that stood shoulder to shoulder with them, that protects human rights and promotes women's rights. That is how we have known Canada and why we love it. We are Canada's friends. For all these reasons, we want to say to our friend that it is time it returned to Africa and played an important role in international fora.

Thank you.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: In closing, I would like you to give me some specific examples of projects that have been cut in your countries. Perhaps you could tell me what impact this has had in those countries that have been removed from the list.

[English]

The Chair: We're out of time. If you want to incorporate it in another question....

I should also say that if there are questions and you feel because of our time that you haven't had adequate time to respond, you are welcome to put them in writing and correspond with us.

Mr. Abbott, please.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Excellencies, thank you very much for being here today.

I must say that I'm quite disappointed in this report. I think it has been based on erroneous information that has been given to you.

I'm reading, on page 4, "figures...show a downward trend in official public assistance to Africa for the sake of other countries of the world".

Apparently, whatever your source of information was, they failed to tell you that in fact aid to Africa from Canada in the last three years has been doubled, to an amount of \$2.1 billion. Given that it has not only doubled but that we have shown leadership not only in doubling it on time but in fact a year ahead of time—a year ahead of all of the other countries—I think it's really regrettable that you would write, "Are we to believe that our long-time friend Canada is leaving the place for others...?"

The fact is, our Prime Minister and our government have shown the kind of leadership you would expect in the world, shown that we are prepared to follow through on our commitments, that we are prepared to double our aid. The information you have received is obviously incorrect.

When you speak about Canada retaking our place of leadership in the context of a renewed strategy of partnership in a win-win situation, again, I am somewhat surprised that the fact that the aid has been doubled would not be taken into account. We don't have time to get into the issue of the targeted countries, but if you consider Africa...of the \$4.3 billion that CIDA puts out to the world, \$2.1 billion goes to Africa. I think the characterization you have made of the government and the people of Canada is really quite unfortunate. I know it must have come about as a result of some bad information you have received.

With respect to the people I have spoken to from the nations of Africa—I'm just trying to recover the list.... There are people at this table whom I have spoken to. I have spoken, I believe, to seven or eight nations; I was communicating the decision that the Government of Canada made. I know that all of you as ambassadors would respect the fact that when a country decides what it's going to do, it decides what it's going to do. The door of my office and the door of my minister are always open to have further discussions, so that there can be greater clarity as to exactly what is involved in the countries of focus.

You have been very direct with us, and I respect that. I hope you will respect the fact that I have been direct with you.

Thank you.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

Whoever would like to respond, please go ahead.

[Translation]

Mrs. Louise Ramazani (Minister-Counsellor & Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. of the Republic of the Congo to Canada, Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Congo has never been on any list.

I wanted to draw your attention to the problem of sexual violence against women and children. The Congo believes that Canada should play a leadership role by mobilizing the most powerful Western countries to put an end to the pillage of our natural resources, which is behind all the violence the Congolese people are experiencing, particularly sexual violence against women and children.

Mr. Chairman, we will have meetings and more meetings. CIDA can send its staff to the Congo, in relation to what is going on in two Kivus, but I believe that if Canada, which wields a lot of influence at the UN, does not help us put an end to this war, all the atrocities and sexual violence will continue. I also wanted to let you know that the funding provided by CIDA to the Congo through NGOs, is not benefiting women.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Madame.

We're going to go to the question from Mr. Dewar, because we're out of time on that question. But if you want to respond again, you may.

Go ahead, Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I just want to pick up on what the ambassador just finished explaining to us. We have other issues on the table here, and I don't think it's helpful for the government to deny that there's a change in their policy that is affecting Africa. You can argue numbers all day long, but the direction is going out of Africa. The minister certainly was laying that out for us, and I believed her.

I want to ask this of Her Excellency from the Congo, because I just returned from there. She touched on something, and I asked the minister this. I was kind of concerned that we have this one-way view that we put money into Africa, so we should see all these results. We're also getting a lot out of Africa. She referenced mining and her concern about—and others might share it—the conduct of Canadian mining companies in the region, and the benefits for the people in the region. In other words, it's not just the aid picture, which is very important, but also the economic developments. It's how Canada can improve our operations in her country to benefit the people and of course to deal with the horrendous situation of sexual violence that is occurring.

Your Excellency, I would like your viewpoint on how Canada can improve its operations when it comes to mining and the resource-based industry in the Congo. If there's time, I open it up to any of the other ambassadors.

• (1730)

[Translation]

Mrs. Louise Ramazani: Mr. Dewar, we are told that time is short, and yet this is very important.

I believe I mentioned earlier that Canada has to show leadership and make contact with the other most powerful countries. It is essential that people carrying out operations in Congo do so legally. I am speaking from the heart. The fact that mineral development is being carried out illegally in Congo is a serious problem. In fact, it is the minerals that are leading to war, atrocities and sexual violence against women.

We can have as many meetings as we like, and organized forum after forum and, as I said earlier, CIDA can always send its staff there, but if Canada, which has a great deal of influence at the UN, does not help us put an end to this war, the problem will continue.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to keep going for just for a couple of minutes once the bells start, but I'm going to need a motion.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Continue, please. Go ahead, Ma'am.

[Translation]

H.E. Juliette Bonkougou Yameogo: Thank you.

A very important question was asked about the numbers. I have to comment, because this is very important to us.

When we take a look at an issue such as this and do research, we rely on sources. While I do not have a very good understanding of English, I know that French sources say that, by reducing the number of countries on the list from 25 to 20 by 2010, bilateral aid will drop from 70% to 35%.

I don't know. I have asked others to have the material translated. The honourable member said the door is open, and I have noted that. He can be sure of one thing: I will keep going to see him until he chases me away, because development in Africa is very important to me and to my colleagues. That is our purpose in being here in Canada. I will go and see him often at his office. I want to thank him for his availability, but that is what the numbers mean.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ma'am. He's looking forward to it.

Yes, Mr. Ambassador.

[Translation]

His Excellency Mouldi Sakri (Ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia to Canada, Embassy of the Republic of Tunisia): Thank you very much.

I would like to come back to the issue that is the primary reason for our being here today, and that is the partnership with Africa. Africa is undergoing tremendous integration, consolidation and development. Development assistance is not the only focus of our effort today. That is not the purpose of our meeting with you.

We are proposing that our Canadian friends engage in development because, without economic and social development in Africa, development assistance will continue to be a problem. As we saw earlier, if that happens, poverty will continue for more than a century. Our appeal is really for there to be a partnership. Other partners, including China, India and the European Union, have heard that call.

In 2007, an important summit was held in Lisbon at which Africa and the European Union developed the framework for a new partnership between Europe and Africa. We laid the foundations for a significant and beneficial partnership between Japan and Africa. Today, we are calling on Canada to position itself as well. We would not like to see it have less of a presence in Africa, to the point where we would one day be wondering where Canada had gone. We do not want to reach that point. We are accredited ambassadors here in Ottawa. We defend Canada and Canadian interests in our countries, on our continent, but we also defend our own interests. We would like to see the establishment of a multisector comprehensive partnership between equals at a summit meeting between Africa and Canada. We could meet on a yearly basis, every two years, or at whatever interval you deem appropriate, but we do want to have a discussion with Canadians at the political, economic, social and cultural levels in order to study the idea of a major partnership, which would allow us to reach the level we are aiming for.

Yesterday in Toronto, I attended a conference organized by Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. That important conference is held every year with a view to assessing Canada's economic and trade relations. What I am seeing jibes with the impression we have here as an African group—namely that, both politically and economically, Africa is simply not on Canada's radar. There is nothing dealing with Africa in Canadian policy.

Yesterday, I made a number of comments to Canadian entrepreneurs and business people who were debating their problems with the United States. The theme of the conference was *Buy American*. Of course, the Canadians were discussing and reviewing the issue of their economic relations with the United States. I told them that we have the same problem with Canada and that we would like to talk about it, just the way they were having that discussion about the United States. We would really like to see our Canadian partner seize the opportunities that Africa has to offer. Africa is truly a continent of hope, a continent of the future. Canada has an excellent reputation, and has plenty of means and possibilities. Why not develop and achieve significant progress together?

So, we are really making an appeal to you. We are not here to criticize the government or any other Canadian entity. We are inviting all Canadians and all the political and economic forces in Canada to establish a partnership with Africa. I am talking about Africa as a whole, because there is the Africa that is developing, the Africa that needs help, and the emerging Africa. Some countries, such as Tunisia, which is an emerging country, deserve Canada's support. I wanted to pass that message along, because it is a much broader question than just development assistance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1735)

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Madame Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chairman, before we all leave, would it be possible to quickly dispose of a motion proposing that we look at this at a future meeting? If everyone agrees, we could do that.

[*English*]

The Chair: If you want to submit a motion, that's fine, but we can't do it at this point unless we have unanimous consent, and I don't think we have unanimous consent.

I want to give just a very short question to our ambassador from Benin.

[*Translation*]

His Excellency Honoré Théodore Ahimakin (Ambassador of the Republic of Benin to Canada, Embassy of the Republic of Benin): Mr. Chairman, I would just like to thank you and make one suggestion. It is clear that the time we had available today did not allow us to express thoroughly and more eloquently the reasons why we came to meet with you today.

I have been an ambassador here in Canada for a year and a half now. This is the first time we have had a chance to meet. You are the national representatives of the people of Canada. As representatives of our countries, we are anxious to talk to you about the concerns of our people. Could we not find a mechanism whereby we could get

together more often to talk and pass on our message, through you, to the federal government here in Canada?

I would also like to answer a question that was raised. We respect Canada's sovereignty. Canada is sovereign in all its decisions. Our purpose in coming here today was not to criticize a decision that had been made but, rather, to tell you that we are your partners. We would like to continue to be on Canada's agenda. Africa stands with Canada, but Canada has to provide strong signals so that we know it also stands with us.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll just say this. I know that a number of committee members do as I do; I meet probably two or three ambassadors a week, and I would encourage you to do that. It sounds as if a number of people are going to be meeting with Mr. Abbott. You're welcome to do that. And we look forward to meeting with you in the future.

Unfortunately, now, the bells show that we have to be at a vote, so we must make our way to the House of Commons.

Thank you so much for coming. *Merci beaucoup.*

We are adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.