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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our orders of the day are for the study of the subject matter of the supplementary estimates (B) 2010-11 under Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

I want to welcome the minister here today.

Minister Oda, it's great to have you. I believe you have an opening statement for us. Everyone knows how this works. I'll let you make your statement, and then we'll go back and forth and do the questions as we normally do.

Minister Oda, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation): Thank you very much.

I am very pleased to be here today.

[English]

Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss supplementary estimates (B) related to the Canadian International Development Agency.

I'm joined by Margaret Biggs, CIDA's president and accounting officer, and Sue Stimpson, chief financial officer, as well as David Moloney, our executive vice-president.

Over the past three years, since our government first introduced its aid effectiveness agenda, we have accomplished a great deal to make Canada's international assistance more focused, efficient, and accountable. First, we untied Canada's food aid in 2008 and are on track to untie all of our aid by 2012-13. This means that our aid dollars can go further, buying needed food and supplies closer to the people in need and supporting more local and regional economies, reducing high transportation costs.

Secondly, CIDA has strengthened its focus both geographically and thematically so that its resources and efforts have the critical mass needed to achieve the greatest impact, making a real difference for those living in poverty.

I outlined also how CIDA will focus its work on three thematic areas, starting with food security. We will follow three paths: food aid and nutrition, sustainable agricultural development, and research and development.

Under our second thematic focus, children and youth, the three paths we will follow are: child survival, including maternal health; access to quality education; and safe and secure futures for children and youth.

Mostly recently, I outlined CIDA's sustainable economic growth strategy and its three paths: building economic foundations, growing businesses, and investing in people.

We have completed a full review of CIDA's country strategies, aligning them with the national poverty reduction plans of our partner countries and with CIDA's focused priorities. At every step taken, we have maintained our government's commitment to accountability. This means taking our international commitments very seriously and fulfilling those commitments.

Budget 2010 ensured that Canada would double assistance by March 2011, increasing the international assistance envelope by 8% and bringing the annual aid budget to its highest level ever—to \$5 billion. We doubled Canada's aid to Africa in 2008, one year ahead of the commitment deadline, and have maintained that level of commitment since.

Our government has also made significant new international commitments. To address the food crisis in 2008 at the G-8 L'Aquila summit, we committed to double our support to food security, with 50% going to Africa.

CIDA is responsible for managing \$93.5 million of Canada's fast-start climate change funding in 2010. We are helping vulnerable, small, developing countries meet the challenge of climate change with contributions to the least developed countries fund, the Haiti world food program, for Vietnam, for Ethiopia's climate change projects, the World Bank's forest carbon partnership, and the Global Environment Facility trust fund.

At this year's G-8 summit in Muskoka, Prime Minister Harper announced \$1.1 billion in new incremental funding over the next five years to improve maternal, newborn, and child health. Of this, 80% will be directed to sub-Saharan Africa, specifically to Mozambique, Mali, Malawi, Nigeria, south Sudan, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, because this region faces the greatest challenges in reducing maternal and child mortality.

Canada's efforts will focus on strengthening health systems by increasing access to local health centres that are adequately equipped with trained health workers, improving the nutritional well-being of mothers and children, and reducing the burden of diseases that are the major causes of maternal and child mortality. Canada will also address identified urgent gaps in maternal, newborn, and child health care in Afghanistan, Haiti, and Bangladesh.

Canada fulfilled its G-20 commitments to replenish the African development fund, as announced by Prime Minister Harper in Seoul in November. Our government remains committed to Africa.

As I said, Canada doubled its aid to Africa to \$2.1 billion a year. In fact, last year 45% of CIDA's total aid budget went to Africa. Africa received 62% of our total food aid, 55% of all of our agricultural support, and 51% of our multilateral aid. This year we witnessed the devastating effects of major natural disasters that have overwhelmed their governments and have targeted countries least equipped to reduce their impact, the largest being in Haiti and Pakistan.

Haiti has been the poorest country in the Americas, so in 2009 the international community assisted the Haitian government to develop a national poverty reduction plan. Then this past January it was struck by a devastating earthquake that virtually destroyed its capital; thousands died and thousands more were made homeless, and Haitians faced even greater hardship.

In response to the Haiti earthquake, CIDA promptly allocated \$150 million in humanitarian assistance, and at the international donors conference on Haiti in New York last March, Canada committed \$400 million over two years to support reconstruction efforts, in addition to CIDA's ongoing five-year commitment of \$555 million in development.

Due to the extraordinary needs in Haiti, CIDA is seeking \$40 million in supplementary appropriations. This summer, when devastating floods affected more than 20 million Pakistanis and damaged more than 2 million hectares of agricultural land, one of the largest humanitarian emergencies ever faced by the international community, Canadians responded once again with great generosity, donating \$46.8 million to the Pakistan flood relief fund.

To date, our government has announced \$52 million in support of needed humanitarian assistance and early recovery initiatives. CIDA's support is helping to provide food to 7 million people each month, clean drinking water to over 4.6 million, and basic health care to at least 716,000 victims of the flood.

In August, CIDA sought access to the government's crisis pool for \$16.5 million because of the scale of this crisis, and this is also included in supplementary estimates (B). In Kandahar province, 26 schools have been constructed and another 24 are currently under construction. Another example of our work in Afghanistan is that 23,500 Kandaharis have received literacy training and 5,900 have completed vocational training.

The rehabilitation of the Dahla dam is proceeding well, with 137,500 cubic metres of silt now removed, providing 5,300 hectares of irrigated land for farmers. Over 7.2 million children have received, and continue to receive, polio vaccinations. Over 275,000 tonnes of food have been provided to 9 million Afghans in need;

3,800 Kandaharis have received microfinancing loans; and 66% of all Afghans have access to primary health services within a two-hour walk from their homes, rising from a foundation of only 9%.

Under supplementary estimates (B), we are seeking needed funds to support Canada's ongoing work in Afghanistan.

Finally, there are a number of small transfers to cover a range of operational issues.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, money from these votes will be used to maximize the impact and effectiveness of Canada's development assistance, and I would be happy to discuss any of the items listed with you in further detail.

Merci.

• (1535)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Oda.

I want to start with Mr. Rae. You have four minutes.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

Minister, I want to focus on an article in *Embassy* magazine that deals with the KAIROS question, because there seems to be such a discrepancy between the documents that are filed on KAIROS with the *Embassy* magazine, coming from your department, and the decision you made not to fund KAIROS, as well as the comments you made to the House of Commons, which were followed up by a comment made by Mr. Abbott, both of you saying that KAIROS was not funded because it did not meet the priorities of the agency. All of the documentation that's contained in the recommendation document that goes to you went the other way. In fact, all the recommendations were clearly that it should be funded, that it was an organization that conformed with CIDA's responsibilities and that it could in fact be focused on the countries of priority for the new government. So I'm trying to understand how the "not" got put into the final document, which was added by someone's signature, to the recommendation that the organization be funded.

• (1540)

Hon. Bev Oda: As you know, Mr. Rae, there is a thorough process at CIDA, and CIDA has been operating under certain procedures and processes using certain guidelines. As a new government, we are also putting in new priorities, new principles, for how we use our international assistance. I would say that CIDA staff in the department certainly did its job. However, you can also appreciate that the ultimate decision is made by the minister, and the minister does have that responsibility not only to endorse recommendations coming out of any department, but also to use his or her own judgment in every case.

Consequently, one of the values that our government wants to ensure is that our development dollars are going to have an impact and make a difference in the lives of those who are living in poverty or who are in need. They're also going to be utilized and maximized in the value of our aid dollars in country, where they are.

When I looked at the overview of how we can support Canadian organizations to do work in developing countries, the decision on my part was not to fund KAIROS but to continue funding organizations such as the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, which is working in Bangladesh, Mozambique, Burundi, and Tanzania; the Mennonite Central Committee, working in 16 countries; the United Church of Canada, working in nine developing countries; the Canadian Lutheran World Relief, working in India, Mozambique, Zambia, Bolivia, and Peru; the Presbyterian World Service and Development Organization, helping with HIV/AIDS patients in Malawi; the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, helping the rural poor in Bangladesh—

Hon. Bob Rae: I think that's enough, Minister. I appreciate your answer, but we have such limited time.

I want to be very clear on what happened. You stated to the House in the past very specifically that the decision made with respect to KAIROS was a corporate decision of the organization, that you were following professional advice that you received from the staff. What this memo clearly shows is that in fact was not the case. You've just admitted that today. You've just told us today that in fact you personally decided that you would not go along with the recommendation that was there that KAIROS be funded.

I wonder why you wouldn't have told the House that you received the recommendation, that it was a positive recommendation and you personally disagreed with that, and you, the minister, personally decided that an organization representing all the churches of Canada that had been funded since 1976 would no longer be funded—by you personally.

Minister, this isn't your money. This is money that belongs to the people of Canada. There are processes to be followed. I think you've badly politicized this process, and you've just admitted that today by saying it's your decision. You're the minister; you decide. You decide the fate of these organizations. It's unbelievable that you'd behave in that way.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Rae, regardless of who is the government, the Government of Canada has ministers who are given responsibility. Ultimately, through a mandate from the Prime Minister, you have to exercise the responsibility and the mandate you are given. There are recommendations that do come up.

I would also say that there was much discussion with the department—with the department—to ensure that we had a clear understanding of my thinking and also our government's policy and intent on how international assistance should be used. Ultimately, it's the minister's responsibility and it's the minister's decision.

I know very clearly it is not one minister's money. We have the responsibility as a total government to recognize that these are taxpayers' dollars. That's the responsibility to make sure it's being used in a way that we're getting good value for dollar and those dollars are being used to support organizations that are actually helping people living in poverty in developing countries.

• (1545)

The Chair: Mr. McKay.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Minister, you've just said that you signed off. You were the one—

Hon. Bev Oda: I sign off on all of the documents.

Hon. John McKay: Yes, and you were the one who wrote the “not”.

Hon. Bev Oda: I did not say I was the one who wrote the “not”.

Hon. John McKay: Who did, then?

Hon. Bev Oda: I do not know.

Hon. John McKay: You don't know?

Hon. Bev Oda: I do not know.

Hon. John McKay: That's a remarkable statement.

Hon. Bev Oda: I know that the decision ultimately reflects the decision I would support.

Hon. John McKay: Well then, there are only three people who could have written the “not”.

Hon. Bev Oda: That's not true.

Hon. John McKay: Two of them are sitting at this table. So who wrote it?

Hon. Bev Oda: I cannot say who wrote the “not”.

However, I will tell you the ultimate decision reflects the decision of the minister and the government.

Hon. John McKay: Was this “not” put in by some interloper? Is there some override of a minister's decision?

Hon. Bev Oda: As I clearly said, the decision reflects the decision of the government and minister.

Hon. John McKay: So there's a reasonable possibility that you signed off on this and that someone put in a “not” later.

Hon. Bev Oda: I would tell you that the document reflects the decision that—

Hon. John McKay: It may well, but you just said that you didn't put the “not” in. I'm assuming your president of CIDA didn't put the “not” in. There's only one other signatory who didn't put the “not” in.

So somehow or another, a “not” was put in after, possibly, all three of you recommended the KAIROS funding.

Hon. Bev Oda: That's not true. As I said—

Hon. John McKay: How could it not be true?

Hon. Bev Oda: —the document reflects the decision of the government. I was entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that the government's policies are being followed.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Minister, clearly somebody didn't get the memo on the priorities, because clearly Madam Biggs, or the other person who was the signatory, sent the memo up to you...from September through to November. They sent that memo to you, and you sat on it for two months—which is fine; that's not an issue. The issue is that they didn't seem to understand what your priorities were. So they didn't get the memo as to what the priorities were.

I'm not quite sure, but if this reflects government priorities, why is it that the president of CIDA doesn't know what the priorities of the government are?

Hon. Bev Oda: The responsibility of the department is to give its best advice to the minister. The minister then has the discretion to make the ultimate decision. As I've indicated, we had discussions with the department regarding this file.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Minister, did—

Hon. Bev Oda: I will tell you that I have the utmost confidence in the deputy and executive vice-president and the officers at CIDA. I'm very confident that every time we come to agreement on a final decision, the document will reflect the decision made. However—

Hon. John McKay: We're not discussing, Madam Minister—

Hon. Bev Oda: Well, I'm trying to follow your thing. It's like we're on *CSI* or it's an investigative forensic thing, asking who put the “not” in. I'd like to know what your issue is.

What is your issue?

Hon. John McKay: Well, it's rather important. We're talking about \$7 million for people who have been in a relationship with the government since 1977—

Hon. Bev Oda: Right.

Hon. John McKay:—and what you've just told this committee is that three people signed off on this memo recommending a continuation of that relationship, and you tell me afterwards that you don't know who put the “not” in.

Does it go somewhere else after it goes—

The Chair: That's all the time we have.

Because we have limited time, I'm going to hold everyone to their time today.

We're going to move on to Mr. Dorion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Thank you.

Madam Minister, ladies and gentlemen, welcome. I do hope that you will continue to shed light on some of the issues that concern us today.

In the form that the minister is supposed to use to approve a project, a form that in effect has become a rejection form since it includes the word “not” before “approved”, we see that...

Ms. Biggs, when you signed this form on September 28, 2009, did you notice if the word “not” was handwritten on the form?

• (1550)

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: I would just like to be able to say—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: May I put the question to Ms. Biggs, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: But I would like to say something first, if I may, Mr. Chair, before Madam Biggs...

I respect the responsibilities of the committee as well as those of every committee member. The material thing that I think is important

here is how is CIDA helping people in developing countries. On the process by which the decisions are made, who signs, etc., it's important that the department always ensures that it gives me its best advice and that the ultimate documentation reflects the decision.

Madam Biggs will now answer your question.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dorion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Mr. Chair, I am being denied my right as a committee member to get an answer from one of the witnesses, in this instance Ms. Biggs.

[*English*]

The Chair: Sure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Ms. Biggs, was the word “not” handwritten on the form that you signed on September 28, two months before the minister signed it?

[*English*]

Ms. Margaret Biggs (President, Canadian International Development Agency): No, it wasn't, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: So then, when you signed the form, you were in fact giving your approval. You were recommending approval, since the form states:

[*English*]

“Recommendation: That you sign below to indicate you approve a contribution of \$7,098,756 over four years for the above program.”

[*Translation*]

So then, on September 28, you were recommending that the minister approve the project.

[*English*]

Ms. Margaret Biggs: Yes, I think as the minister said, the agency did recommend the project to the minister. She has indicated that. But it was her decision, after due consideration, to not accept the department's advice.

This is quite normal, and I certainly was aware of her decision. The inclusion of the word “not” is just a simple reflection of what her decision was, and she has been clear. So that's quite normal.

I think we have changed the format for these memos so the minister has a much clearer place to put where she doesn't want to accept the advice, which is her prerogative.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Minister Oda, you had this to say to the House on October 28, 2010, about a CIDA project: “After due diligence, it was determined that KAIROS' proposal did not meet government standards.”

Since the president of CIDA recommended approval, who was it that ultimately decided the proposal did not meet government standards? My question is for the minister.

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: It's my responsibility to ensure that CIDA respects the policies and the directions of the government, so consequently—

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion: So then, you implied that someone other than yourself made the decision, but ultimately, you're acknowledging to us that you personally were responsible.

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: I have advice within my own office, as I say, I have discussions with the department to understand their positions, and ultimately the responsibility, the final decision, lies with me.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Then it wasn't someone else, as you implied to the House. When you said “it was determined that” and so forth, you were trying to justify the decision, but in point of fact, you were ultimately the person responsible for making that decision. Two months after the president of CIDA recommended approval, you decided not to approve the proposal and you let the House believe that someone other than yourself—we don't know who exactly—made this decision.

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: Yes. That's my responsibility as the minister.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion: One of our colleagues on the committee, Mr. Jim Abbott, said substantially the same thing in a statement to the House on April 23, 2010. He had this to say: “The criteria for the funding for KAIROS is the same as the criteria for funding for anyone else applying for such funding. KAIROS did not meet the criteria. It did not get the funding. There was no surprise there.”

In fact, this has nothing to do with the criteria. Basically, it comes down to a decision by the minister. By phrasing your answer this way, isn't this the same as misleading the House indirectly?

• (1555)

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: No, I disagree. The questions that would have been discussed are: Is the best value for taxpayers' dollars to achieve results in developing countries? How many people in developing countries who are living in poverty would benefit from these public funds? What kind of impact would it have on sustainable improvements for the lives of those living in poverty? Those are also considerations that we give to every CIDA decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Mr. Chair, may I point out that the text preceding the signature and the word “not” speaks very highly of the project. There are many pages. For instance, it says:

[English]

“Successes: stopped the crimes against women and children in the Magdalena River in Colombia; helped free black child slaves in the Sudan; instrumental in the DRC Congo government's adoption of its first poverty reduction strategy paper”, etc.

[Translation]

There are other comments about the Philippines and about the program's successes. In spite of everything, in spite of CIDA having made a recommendation and the president of CIDA having recommended approval, ultimately, the process was blocked by someone, at the minister's level.

That's what I wanted to find out today, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madam.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Did you have a quick question? I have one minute left.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Minister, right away we see that there are many amendment criteria, that the winds of change are blowing at CIDA. You talked about making aid more targeted and more effective.

Following up on my Liberal Party colleague's comments on the KAIROS decision, what made you decide at the last minute that the coalition no longer met the criteria? What criteria would that be?

I think we have demonstrated here that KAIROS met the criteria for the proposal that the coalition was submitting for the umpteenth time to CIDA. Suddenly, there are criteria, I'm not sure which ones, that are not being met. Perhaps you can tell me what they are... Many changes have taken place at CIDA, many priorities have been set, perhaps to reflect your government's unknown priorities that we are trying to understand.

What criteria did KAIROS fail to meet when it submitted its proposal to your department, considering that for years, the coalition received CIDA's aid and support?

[English]

The Chair: Ten seconds.

Hon. Bev Oda: CIDA receives hundreds, if not a couple of thousand, applications every year. Many of them are very good projects. Many of them work in different areas and actually have to be weighed. We have to then make a judgment with the resources we have to support projects that will maximize the impact and also to ensure that we are distributing our funds where the money is needed; we have projects in many countries. In many of the countries listed we have other projects. So there are many factors that are considered at the same time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move on to Mr. Lunney, sir, for 10 minutes.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We know, Minister, and we appreciate the good work that CIDA does in delivering aid on behalf of Canadians around the world to many, many nations in need, and many good programs, including governance, capacity-building, and so on around the world. I'd say to my colleagues around the table here, you know, we all realize that many good programs are oversubscribed. Many demands come in. I think of our summer student program, the student employment program, that we all have to make decisions on. I know in my riding we have to make decisions on who's going to get the funding and who isn't. There are always people disappointed because there's never quite enough money to cover all the worthy projects.

Minister, I wanted to draw attention to our work in Africa, because I think sometimes there has been an underappreciation, shall we say, of the amount of investment that Canada is actually doing in Africa. I think you touched on that briefly in your opening remarks. But I do find it unfortunate that some members want to seem to disregard the fact that we've doubled our aid to Africa.

I wanted to ask you about the program related to youth. I think around the table here we'd probably agree that youth are very key to a successful future. I'm aware that CIDA has a skills for employment program engaging youth in Africa. I want to ask you about that. It is engaging some of our Canadian community colleges. I understand you met with them recently and announced some 36 projects that will provide vocational training for African youth, to help them establish strong technical and vocational education and training systems. If I'm correct here, I understand Senegal, Mozambique, and Tanzania may be involved in those programs. I'm just wondering if you could provide for us some context of what CIDA is doing to help create employable skills for youth in Africa.

● (1600)

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you very much for your observations about the work CIDA is doing, and also the challenges we face.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, Africa is receiving a substantial amount of international support in many, many sectors.

This is one issue that is really important and that we have to address. If you look at the demographics in many African countries, you'll see that increasingly the majority of the population is under the age of 25 or 30, and this trend will grow as we go forward. So it is important that we address the challenges that youth in those countries will face.

Consequently, we are working with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, which we all know is a quality institution, having done a very fine job for our Canadian youth. We can share and export their expertise to other countries. The ACCC, the association, came forward and proposed doing some work on vocational and skills training in Africa.

If poverty is to be reduced, individuals must have access to opportunities for increasing their income. Without the skills and the literacy training, they will never achieve the opportunities to move out of poverty. Consequently, we are supporting this project by ACCC, called education for employment. There are 25 Canadian colleges and institutions who will be working with their African counterparts. The other exciting part of this project is that they're actually going to be working with institutions in this country. And we're building the capacity in those countries, so they can go on

training their youth and improve the quality of the vocational training they're giving.

The range of fields is quite broad. It includes the fields of construction, marine and port activities, agriculture, tourism, mining, fisheries, and the agrifood industry. This program, as I said, is called education for employment. So there is an assessment made of what industries will need in those countries, what businesses are needing, what skills they need, and what they should be trained in, and then the program is designed accordingly.

Building the economy and giving people financial security means, as it does in Canada, more jobs, stable jobs, secure jobs. So if we can give them the tools and skills they need going forward, we believe that our Canadian colleges are probably among the best in the world as a group to do that work in Africa.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you. I appreciate that sentiment.

We have a very capable institution out our way. Not everybody is cut out for a university education, but boy, those trades are surely needed in Canada, and I'm sure they are in Africa.

Can I take it another way, to Haiti, here? I want to ask you about the reconstruction efforts in Haiti, as we know that country has been through a terrible time and is going through more instability right now. But I understand from your remarks that CIDA is requesting some \$40 million in addition, through the supplementary estimates, in support of the reconstruction effort. We've committed a fair bit of money to rebuilding there and Canadians have given generously.

I wonder if you could give us an idea of some of the specific programs this funding is going towards in Haiti.

● (1605)

Hon. Bev Oda: I certainly can. As you know, Canadians have been very generous in their response to the needs in Haiti. The government itself has been very generous as well. So we've made a significant commitment to that country.

Just in humanitarian relief, we've disbursed over \$150 million. This is an ongoing need, as you know. We've provided, in terms of food assistance, food for 4.3 million people; emergency shelters for 370,000 families; drinking water for 1.2 million people; protective services for 63,000 children; vaccinations for one million children and youth; as well as 11,000 latrines, sanitation facilities, mosquito nets, hygiene kits, and kitchen sets.

There are stages, as you know. There's an immediate need for humanitarian aid, medicine, shelter, and so on. Then there's the stage called "early recovery". We were in the stage, I would suggest, of starting down early recovery and we wanted to ensure that the commitments made to Haiti were going to actually flow and be done in an orderly, coherent, and logical manner. That's why Canada supported the international approach to reconstruction, which was to set up the interim Haitian reconstruction commission and to work with the international community through a World Bank trust fund.

We are doing that now with committed money, \$30 million for the trust fund, to be able to have resources it needs to meet some of the requirements put out by the Haitian government. We committed to rebuilding the hospital in Gonaïves. We've committed to building a new police academy and officer training facilities. We've committed through the Red Cross for some more permanent kinds of shelters.

But Haiti, let me assure you, has had its challenges, and now, of course, it has increasing challenges with the cholera epidemic. As you can imagine, we are monitoring on close to an hourly basis, not a daily basis, the outcome of the election process.

These are all challenges that country is facing right now. They also present a responsibility for the international donor community to follow and to make sure that we can be where we are needed to do what is needed. However, reconstruction itself has challenges. We have millions of tonnes of rubble to remove. We have land titling disputes that have to be settled. We have access challenges in terms of getting materials into that country. Infrastructure is missing as far as roads for heavy equipment are concerned, and so on.

So there are many challenges, but it has to be done in a logical order and in a coordinated way with our partners and also in support of the governing body.

Mr. James Lunney: Does CIDA still have personnel on the ground in Haiti, or are we relying on the coalition that you referred to, the Haitian reconstruction commission, to monitor the progress of these projects and to make sure they're on target?

Hon. Bev Oda: We do have people on the ground. We have a full mission. We have CIDA staff as well who are working very closely with our partners and with the government. Unfortunately, during the earthquake, CIDA lost two of its employees.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lunney, that was a very impressive 30 seconds.

Mr. Dewar, the floor is yours for 10 minutes.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our guests and the minister.

Ms. Biggs, I want to start with you on this KAIROS application. Just looking at the memo that was referred to, it says there was a request for \$7 million, but the total package is \$9 million. I'm reading here that just over \$2 million would have come from KAIROS itself. Is that correct?

• (1610)

Ms. Margaret Biggs: Yes. Normally there is an in-kind contribution. The organization puts it in and we usually cost-match it up to a one to three ratio.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Okay, so what we in fact had here was not just an ask for over \$7 million, but also some matching money through the organization itself. I think that's important, Chair, because what we're talking about here is leverage, and we often talk about capacity in particular.

But, Minister, I want to ask you about something, because there is a lot of confusion here and I just want to be able to understand this. From what you and Ms. Biggs have stated today, we understand that this went through the department and that there was an approval by

departmental officials, who signed off on it for you to approve. Then someone wrote the word "not" on it. We'll leave that aside for a second. As you said, it's apparently not important, but we'll put that aside. Then you decided not to approve the application.

The problem I'm having here, Minister, is that during this time that you had officials approve this, it looks like it was a very good proposal. It would help over 5 million people—and 2.5 million women and girls and 2.9 million men and boys were expecting to benefit from it. All of this was fitting in with the range and ambit of what departmental officials seemed to think was important.

The problem, Minister, is why did you then tell the House that officials told you not to fund KAIROS? I ask you because that's not what I'm hearing and that's not what I'm seeing.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Dewar, what I will do, obviously, is to ask my staff to go back through *Hansard*. It's not my recollection that I would say that, but if you could provide me with a copy, I will take it.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Well, I'll help you. I'll read it into the record:

Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear. We have an international aid effectiveness strategy and we are acting on it. We are getting results for people in the developing countries and all projects by CIDA are assessed against our effectiveness standards.

After due diligence, it was determined that KAIROS' proposal did not meet government standards.

Most of us who heard that question in the House also heard the subsequent answer by our friend, Mr. Abbott:

CIDA thoroughly analyzed KAIROS' program proposal...

What's important here, Minister, is that our impression was that this proposal had been rejected by the department, and what you've established here today is that this was rejected by you. However, what you told the House and what you've stated here today don't match up, and I'm wondering if you have something you want to say about that, because I think people were misled.

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you for the question because it gives me an opportunity to clarify this.

The department puts forward to the minister a recommendation. They don't make the decision; they put forward a recommendation. So at every step of the way it's the recommendation that comes forward. The ultimate decision, however, is made by the department

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. Bev Oda: —by the minister, sorry. It's by the minister. Once the decision is made, then the department must ensure that the documentation and the process to follow the minister's decision reflect the minister's decision.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Well, that's all well and good, but we still have you on the record saying, "it was determined that KAIROS' proposal did not meet government standards".

The fact of the matter is that from what you're saying to us, I guess you have to understand, you have misled us. I don't need you to reiterate the fact that the minister gets to sign off on decisions. We all know that; we've taken our civics lessons.

What we need to understand is why you told the House that this proposal did not meet government standards. There's a difference between government standards and the minister, in terms of how this was signed off on, because, Minister, what I think happened is this. I think what happened is that Ms. Biggs signed off on it. Someone wrote the word "not". You then decided that you saw "not" in there and you decided to reject it.

Minister, did you thoroughly go over this whole proposal?

•(1615)

Hon. Bev Oda: I did, many times.

Mr. Paul Dewar: And what did you see wrong with it that was different from what the officials saw whose responsibility it is to recommend to you whether or not you should sign off?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Dewar, it's not the minister's responsibility necessarily to find what's "wrong"; it's to find the best projects for the utilization of the public funds.

Ms. Biggs would have signed off on the recommendation. Ms. Biggs does not make the decision, though she does ensure that the recommendation coming forward to the minister has been properly scrutinized, etc. It's my responsibility to ensure that it meets the government—the government being the current government that is sitting there, which is saying make maximum use of our aid dollars, help the most people you can in developing countries, make a difference in their lives, and ensure that we're getting good value for the taxpayers.

Mr. Paul Dewar: So when we have a proposal that is asking for \$7 million, that is going to provide an additional \$2 million, not from government, that is going to help over five million people, that is going to deal with issues that go everywhere, from education to dealing with crime, insurgency, and health protection, and within which, as far as I can tell, there is nothing that would be outside the government's priorities...I am absolutely stunned that you would have this go through the process, so that people see that there is actually leverage here—again, over \$2 million—and at the end of the day, when someone writes the word "not", you would reject it and tell the House that it didn't meet the priorities of the department. And you think that's okay?

Well, Minister, I have to say to you, as someone whose responsibility it is to hold government to account, to make sure how money is spent, I think you're out of line with the values of Canadians. I don't think you understand how important an institution in the capacity of KAIROS is. You have basically blown decades of work by a group of people who have been working diligently overseas—and will continue to do so but will not have the full capacity to do so.

And Minister, I think it's sad that instead of telling us that you actually made what many think is just an ideological decision, you're saying that it's something you made because you thought it was in line with what Canadians want. Canadians want to see us doing the

most we can overseas. This proposal would have done it; KAIROS would have done it.

I just want to ask you finally, do you understand why I believe you misled the House? And would you like to correct the record? Would you like to state for the record that you misled the House, that in fact it wasn't the department that turned down this proposal, in fact you personally intervened and undermined the decision that was coming to you from the department?

I'll give you an opportunity to do that if you wish to.

Hon. Bev Oda: Well, I'll take the opportunity to ensure that we have the actual facts and the truth put forward here.

First of all—I don't want to mislead this committee or the House—all of our projects have a contribution from the organizations themselves. Their contribution.... They all have the leverage; they all have the requirement that they contribute. As Ms. Biggs has indicated, the Canadian contribution is usually on a three to one basis. So this was not a unique element of this particular project.

As I've said before, we receive many good proposals, and we have to pick the best and the strongest among all. It doesn't mean that there aren't other good proposals that have come forward that we have not had the capacity to fund. Many of the proposals that come from members of KAIROS meet the criteria—they have indicated how many people and what countries, etc.—and we cannot fund all of them.

And I would not agree that anything based on speculation is the fact.

•(1620)

Mr. Paul Dewar: So you don't want to withdraw your comments made in the House?

The Chair: Actually, that's all the time we have. We're just over time a little bit.

Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

Thank you, Minister Oda.

We're going to move into the second round, which is going to be of five minutes each.

I have Mr. Goldring, and we're going to finish up with Dr. Patry.

Mr. Goldring, you have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for appearing here today, Madam Minister.

I first want to commend you for the extraordinary job you did during that crisis in Haiti during the earthquake, and for the reaction of your staff and your people to get there as fast as you could. Given the circumstances of the country, it must have been an extremely trying and testing time, particularly with the unfortunate bereavement of some of your own people and the people there on the ground too, whom they must have met and known as well.

Congratulations for that. It's a tremendous effort.

Of course, you are aware that I was in Haiti in 2006 for the election and saw for myself first-hand the tremendous need of that country, even at that time. We travelled through Jacmel, and unfortunately it was badly hit by the earthquake too.

At that time, we had some ongoing funding of \$555 million that had been committed. To walk into the earthquake with, in my understanding, an additional commitment of \$150 million and an additional commitment of \$400 million to support reconstruction... I can just imagine some of the decisions that you have to make on where your priorities should be lying. Of course, I certainly would agree that an extremely high priority of decision-making was required to allocate that money there, and it has to come from someplace too.

Perhaps you could tell us a little of some of the difficulties of rolling out the funding there, because I think it would be interesting for everybody to hear that there are some conditions and circumstances that are beyond everybody's control. You touched a little bit on the huge amount of rubble, but there are other circumstances too.

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

Many also know that I was very concerned with Haiti and ensuring that Canada fulfilled its task and did the best it could. As you said, immediately as the earthquake hit, not only I but the Prime Minister himself, with the ministers, responded very quickly. We have been very active, I would say, in the international efforts to respond to Haiti.

Some of the challenges, I would tell you, are very similar; you can imagine. The World Bank estimates that there are more than 10,000 non-governmental organizations right now working in Haiti. To coordinate these efforts and to ensure that things are being done in a coherent manner, we have the international reconstruction commission. That commission is chaired by the Prime Minister of Haiti as well as former President Clinton, who was the UN's representative for Haiti just prior to the earthquake.

The commission itself did an assessment with the international community of the needs in Haiti. David Moloney is our representative on that commission. They have presented a list of projects that they have approved and would like to see go forward. Just two weeks ago, CIDA put out a call so that Canadian organizations who want to respond, to actually contribute to this process, have... We have set aside the resources for that, and the call went out. We have a deadline. We will review the proposals that come in; then those proposals that come in will have to go back to ensure that they meet the interim commission's criteria, so that then we would proceed with funding them.

I share everyone's frustrations when we see a very slow process on reconstruction. Of course, the cholera situation has made it even more difficult. We're hoping for and have asked for stability and a peaceful situation now after the election, so that our fight against cholera and our efforts to ensure that humanitarian needs continue to be met and that we can continue along the road of reconstruction will continue.

I don't know whether Mr. Moloney has something more to add.

•(1625)

The Chair: He may have something, but he'll have to wait. I'm sorry.

Thank you, Mr. Goldring and Minister Oda.

We're going to move over to Dr. Patry for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I will share my time with Mr. Rae. I just have one question for the minister.

Madam Minister, my question is about the funds dedicated to Haiti. The government pledged to match the amount of charitable donations made by Canadians, up to \$220 million. However, none of the matching funds have been distributed yet. The order paper answer even says that these matching funds are financed partly through the \$150 million allocated after the earthquake and the \$400 million from the donors conference. In other words, the matching funds are coming out of the existing pledges and the majority of pledges have yet to be delivered.

That means, in my opinion, the government specifically, in a sense, misled the Canadian population, because Canadians felt their donations would be matched by new, not recycled, money.

Do you not think these pledges of money that have not yet been delivered would be much more helpful to stop the spread of cholera? You talk about giving this and giving that, but we don't have any amounts. We'd like to get from your department—not today but later on—the amount of money that was given to Haiti in the current year, *poste par poste*. I would like to have the facts. I like facts and figures, not just to say that we give this and we give that and we love everyone in the world.

Hon. Bev Oda: I'll just very quickly say that, for cholera, the government has given \$7 million, not out of the earthquake fund. The earthquake fund is not being used for cholera.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Where is the money coming from? Is it new money?

Hon. Bev Oda: Yes. It's from the crisis pool. This is a crisis.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Okay. I just want to know.

Hon. Bev Oda: This is access to humanitarian aid money. So there was \$7 million for cholera.

We respond to the Pan American Health Organization, which does the assessments of the needs, as well as the organizations working on the ground. We can't just throw money there; we need somebody there to receive the money, somebody who understands what medications are needed, what equipment is needed, and so on. Consequently, on cholera, we've been responding to that.

I'm going to ask, if I could, David Moloney to respond to where the money is coming from and where it has been spent.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I would like to have it by riding also, Mr. Moloney, if you don't mind, because we have another question.

Go ahead.

Hon. Bob Rae: Minister, just to come back to this KAIROS thing, Ms. Biggs has already said she signed the document that showed it approved. So did Mr. Singh.

Did the final document that you signed two months later have a “not” on it, or did you sign the document that just had the approval on it? Did you sign the document that had the “not” on it or the approval on it?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Rae, I did not put the “not” in. I did not sign the document. The document reflects the decision of the minister.

Hon. Bob Rae: No, sorry. Your signature is on the document.

Hon. Bev Oda: Well, as you know—

Hon. Bob Rae: When you signed it, was there a “not” on the document? Was there the added “not” on the document? It is in the document. Was it there?

Hon. Bev Oda: No—

Hon. Bob Rae: So when you signed, you actually signed an approval.

Hon. Bev Oda: No, I made the decision. The document then reflects the decision of the minister.

Hon. Bob Rae: Was the “not” added after you signed the document? Either it was there when you signed it or it was there after you signed it. Which is it?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Rae, I will ask the deputy to find out whether this was a pen-signed document or actually—

• (1630)

Hon. Bob Rae: How is she going to know?

Hon. Bev Oda: I personally did not sign that document. I made the decision. I gave my decision, and the document then would reflect—

Hon. Bob Rae: Whose signature is on the document?

Hon. Bev Oda: It's my signature, which is either pen-signed or personally signed. I do not sign, as any minister does not sign, every document required to be signed—

Hon. Bob Rae: There's a two-month delay—

Hon. Bev Oda: —but there are very strict restrictions on the utilization of pen-signed—

Hon. Bob Rae: Well, look, you have a document where Ms. Biggs has told us that the document she signed didn't have a “not” in it. The document you've distributed has a “not” in it. That leaves an utterly misleading impression that Ms. Biggs, or Mr. Singh, actually agreed with putting the “not” in. You've compromised your own officials by the way in which your department has handled this thing.

What happened in the two months between the time Ms. Biggs recommended it and the date of your signature?

The Chair: Just a quick response, Ms. Oda.

Hon. Bev Oda: You can answer about your signature, and then I'll...

Ms. Margaret Biggs: I think, as I said before, the project was recommended to the minister, but it goes to the minister for her consideration and it's her decision. She doesn't have to agree with the

advice, and you wouldn't want every minister to agree with the advice all the time.

Hon. Bob Rae: No, I've been involved in a government—

The Chair: Okay, that is all the time we have right now.

Hon. Bob Rae: I just wanted to say that what's changed is the word “recommendation”.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend the meeting. I'm sure everyone will want to thank the minister for being here. Then we'll come back with the officials for the last hour.

So I'm going to suspend the meeting for one minute.

• _____ (Pause) _____
•

The Chair: Mr. Van Kesteren will be up next.

You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for appearing before us. We want you to know that on this side of the House we're very pleased with your work and the fine results.

I want to talk to you a little bit about Afghanistan, but before I do, I think there has to be some clarification. There must literally be hundreds of applications that unfortunately you have to strike off. Even the ones you may suggest be approved are going to be done away with.

Mr. Goldring and I are going to Africa in January and will be visiting some projects by Engineers Without Borders. I don't know whether or not they've made applications, but there are just so many of them. There's another organization that I've made myself available to and that I want to visit in Africa. It's an excellent organization, too, and I'm sure I will be suggesting to them that they make an application, but they may be turned down, like others are turned down.

I'm pleased, though—and maybe I'll give you a quick opportunity to just comment on this—with the direction the government is going. I believe, and I think I can speak for this side of the House as well, that Canadians want to see results. When they talk about \$7 billion being given out in aid, they want to see where it's helping people. Maybe you can quickly comment on that.

The next part of my question, and then I'll let you just go right ahead, is about Afghanistan. Nobody has talked about Afghanistan. We know about the deplorable conditions there when we arrived. In this part of my questions I want to talk about the schools—and I'm sure some of my colleagues may want to carry on with this, because you have another 40 minutes.

How did you find the conditions in the schools when you first came to Afghanistan? What was the attendance by gender? What's happening today, and how have you been able to make a difference in the lives of the Afghan people, especially the children?

Ms. Biggs, I'll let you answer at your leisure.

•(1635)

Ms. Margaret Biggs: Thank you very much.

I heard three separate questions. The first one was on the number of applications we receive.

Particularly in reference to our partnership programming with Canadian organizations, we fund more than 500 or 600 organizations a year, but we get applications from many more. Also, we often get applications we aren't able to fund in their entirety. I can't give you the exact ratio, but it is a fairly competitive process. We have to pick the ones that we feel are the strongest, that will deliver the strongest results.

All of them in our partnership programming are expected to show a commitment that they're also going to be able to bring resources to the initiative, and then we would match it, as I said, up to one to three. So that ends up leveraging their money, and they leverage us, and you can end up with a stronger impact. There is much more supply than we're able to fund, actually.

On the second issue, with respect to results, you're absolutely right that Canadians want and expect our international assistance dollars to deliver the strongest results possible. As with any government expenditure, they expect value for money. But also, in particular, when you're talking about trying to address poverty in developing countries, it's extra important that we do the very, very best with every dollar we have.

As to what we've been doing in that area, we really feel strongly that the more we can focus on fewer areas of concentration geographically and concentrate our efforts in some thematic areas, we're going to be able to have a stronger impact in terms of the delivery of results. I think CIDA has a very strong reputation for results management. We've done more in terms of reporting on that as well. So I think we have had a very strong effectiveness and results-oriented agenda over the last couple of years.

On the third issue, with respect to Afghanistan, you're right. There were many issues, going back to 2001-02, after many decades of conflict. There was a lot of destruction. There was underdevelopment to begin with, but also a great deal of need there.

In 2001, Afghanistan was the second-poorest country in the world. There are probably about seven million children right now, but only 700,000 of the children were actually in school. Of course, very few of them, if any—

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I'm just going to interrupt for one second.

What was the poorest country in the world?

•(1640)

Ms. Margaret Biggs: I don't know.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Was it Haiti?

Ms. Margaret Biggs: No, but I can find out.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Okay, sorry.

Ms. Margaret Biggs: So if there were 700,000 children in school at that time, very, very few of them were girls, of course. Now we have up to seven million children in school in Afghanistan, and a third of them are girls. Of course, we'd like it to be half of them, but

even that is actually really pretty amazing given where things were at in Afghanistan.

One of the areas that Canada and CIDA have focused on in Afghanistan is with respect to education. Canada has led in terms of the development of the education sector. We have helped build their ministry. We've been one of the stronger supporters of the education programming. We've also, in Kandahar, focused in particular on teacher training and on the reconstruction, rehabilitation, and construction of schools. As the government and the minister have indicated, going forward, post-2011, we would also continue to build on our strength. We are probably the strongest donor, and the Afghan government looks to us in the education sector. As Minister Oda said, if you can actually build an education system, boys and girls going to school, that's one of the best investments Canadians can make for the future.

The Chair: Thank you. We will come back.

Next we'll go to Mr. Dorion, and then back to Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Dorion, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Biggs, I would have liked to have the time to put my question to the minister, but I think you can enlighten me.

There was an article in *Embassy* magazine about the cuts in funding that you recommended to the minister, cuts that the minister decided not to proceed with, as it happens. I'll quote the article verbatim, to ensure that my comments are translated correctly in our proceedings. The article says this:

[*English*]

it appears KAIROS's work on corporate social responsibility as it related to Canadian mining efforts rubbed diplomats in Mexico and Guatemala the wrong way.

[*Translation*]

This is a reference to Canadian diplomats.

[*English*]

Embassy magazine continued:

In Guatemala, KAIROS had proposed working with a local NGO named CEIBA to "promote human rights to life, health and prosperity by supporting the ecological sustainability [Guatemalans] seek, including reducing the impact of climate change and unsustainable resource extraction".

The magazine noted that:

When asked for their opinions on the project, however, the response from Canadian diplomats in the field was an unambiguous "no".

Moreover, the magazine observed that:

Following another redacted section, the memo concludes: "KAIROS and CEIBA are openly unwilling to consider the concept of sustainable mining even on a case-by-case basis, they are not in a position to foster a balanced or an impartial monitoring effort"

[*Translation*]

That would be a memo written by embassy diplomats.

[*English*]

Embassy magazine then continued:

Similarly, diplomats in the economic, political and trade section at the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City criticized KAIROS's plan to work with another local NGO named CIEPAC to help communities in Oaxaca and Chiapas "acquire the capacity to defend their rights, participate in policy development in relation to resource extraction/mining, and to determine development processes in their communities".

The diplomats noted that Canadian mining companies are "overwhelmingly present in Mexico", with \$4 billion invested over five years in 53 mines, 500 exploration projects, 200 companies and 290,000 local workers.

[Translation]

The diplomats were against the KAIROS proposal. Do Canadian diplomats tend to intervene like this in the case of projects eligible for CIDA funding?

[English]

Ms. Margaret Biggs: Your question, sir, is?

Could you just put the question exactly to me?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Do you receive comments from the embassies on the nature of projects? Where do they stand on such matters? Do they have many concerns about Canadian investing in countries like Mexico or Guatemala? What do you do after you receive recommendations like this?

[English]

Ms. Margaret Biggs: In the review of a proposal from any organization, our officers would seek out the advice and analysis from a variety of sources. If it were a project on health, we would look to our health expertise to give us a judgment on the merits from a health perspective. If it has to do with a project in a particular country—Tanzania, or Guatemala, in this case—we would go to the field and ask our Canadian mission staff on the ground to give us their observations on what they feel to be the merits, or the strengths and weaknesses, of a particular proposal. That would be part of the due diligence that we would undertake in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a particular proposal.

It would not be uncommon for us to do that, particularly with our CIDA staff in countries, and they would consult with their embassy colleagues as well. Those considerations, as you can see, get put into the mix, and, ultimately, a decision or advice comes together in the form of a recommendation. Some people might think it's particularly strong. Other people, for different reasons, may think it has some weaknesses. But on balance, we have to come to a judgment on its merits. So that would have happened in this case.

On the particular issue you're referring to, if I could speak to that, what I understand from what you have read to me, sir, is that the Canadian diplomats were commenting that it was important in terms of investment, whether Canadian or anybody else, to do it in a very responsible and sustainable way, which is not to say it shouldn't happen at all.

That's what I would take from the words that were in that document. But as I say, they're just one set of considerations that would have been brought to bear.

•(1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move back across the floor to Mr. Goldring.

You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Ms. Biggs, I was just reviewing some notes here, and I find it absolutely amazing how you handle all of the complications of the large amounts of grants that have been put through. Specifically just for Haiti—and these are all additional to what had been previously committed—you have Haiti with the earthquake; Haiti with the cholera; Haiti with the reconstruction; with the G-8, \$1.1 billion for Africa; and with the G-20, \$325 million. Then there was Pakistan, too. It is my understanding that all of these would be in addition to what had been on long-term commitments and what you could foresee to be planning for on a long-term basis.

These are emergency commitments that would come up. This would have an impact on, I would think, literally hundreds of millions of people. It would be a huge number of people. So when we're trying to make decisions based on how many people it will have an impact on and what we need to do now, it must take a tremendous amount of resolve to go through even a lot of good applications that have to be turned down, because you just have to fit in what is the highest priority and should be done first.

Perhaps you could comment on that, because I think that's a point that has been missed here. This is a very, very significant number of additional commitments that have to be made. Obviously, some have to stay and some have to go, and you have to make a decision along the way on that, particularly on the African commitments, because those were very substantial.

Ms. Margaret Biggs: I would agree with you. I think this last year in particular has been hopefully unprecedented, given the two very catastrophic natural disasters, the first being the Haiti earthquake on January 12, and then the extended period of floods in Pakistan. Of course, there were other crises as well, and now we're dealing with the cholera outbreak in Haiti. Those have, of course, led to us requesting supplementary resources.

On top of that, the Prime Minister made maternal, newborn, and child health the centrepiece of the G-8 and also \$1.1 billion in new dollars over five years. A portion of that \$173 million would be for this year again in supplementary estimates.

Overall, I think your point is that these are on top of ongoing programming. They require, in each and every case, for us to identify the highest priorities. In the case of Africa, as I think the minister indicated, Canada has doubled its assistance and met the G-8 commitment to do so. In the case of maternal, newborn, and child health, the Prime Minister and the minister have indicated that 80% of our new commitment on that will go to Africa. Seven of the 10 countries on which we will be focusing in particular for maternal, newborn, and child health will be African countries. That again is a prioritization on Africa because of the extent to which many African countries are falling behind in terms of the two millennium development goals around maternal mortality and child mortality.

I'm not sure if that answers your question.

•(1650)

Mr. Peter Goldring: Partially. As my colleague was saying, we're going to be visiting Africa. Are there particular countries that will be receiving funding on food aid? Will most of that food be procured locally? Is that how it's intended? And how do you track the food aid for effectiveness afterwards?

Ms. Margaret Biggs: In the area of food and food security, we do quite a bit of food assistance each year. A large proportion of it does go to Africa, probably 50%. We also focus on sustainable agricultural development, particularly in a number of African countries. That's the focus of our work in Ethiopia and in countries such as Ghana. At the 2009 G-8 summit at L'Aquila, the Prime Minister announced \$600 million over three years of new resources for agriculture and food security, and again, over 50% of that will go to Africa.

On the maternal, newborn, and child health, we will be focusing in particular on countries such as Tanzania, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Malawi. We're building on work we're doing in the health sector and really zeroing in on maternal, newborn, and child health, again with over 80% of the resources going to Africa.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We're going to finish off with two rounds of four minutes each, because we have a little bit of committee business that we need to take care of and votes at 5:15.

I'm going to go to Mr. McKay, and then back to finish with Mr. Lunney, with four minutes each.

What's that?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Do I get another round?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Paul Dewar: We have done that in the past, so I'm asking, because I'm curious as to why not.

The Chair: We have some committee business to take care of at 5 o'clock, and then bells are at 5:15. If you have a question, I'd be happy to let you pose it, but probably not for the full five minutes.

Mr. McKay.

Hon. John McKay: Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Biggs, when you signed the KAIROS document, you were clearly recommending in favour of the grant. Is that correct?

Ms. Margaret Biggs: Yes.

Hon. John McKay: When you signed the document, was Mr. Singh with you as well?

Ms. Margaret Biggs: No, he wasn't with me when I signed it.

Hon. John McKay: Can I assume that Mr. Singh was clearly recommending in favour of the grant?

Ms. Margaret Biggs: Yes. At the time, he was the acting vice-president of the branch responsible, and he went through in his branch the assessment process and then it came to me for my decision as to whether to recommend it or not.

Hon. John McKay: When were you informed that the grant was not to be recommended?

Ms. Margaret Biggs: I can't give you the exact date, but I was told. The minister told me verbally that she wasn't going to approve it. And I think she was quite clear, so there is no dispute on that.

Hon. John McKay: With greatest respect, she wasn't all that clear. She didn't seem to know when or who had inserted the "not". So I'd like to know whether there was anybody in the agency who inserted the "not".

Ms. Margaret Biggs: No, not to my knowledge, because it left my office and my signature is on the document. I think what matters here is that the department recommended it. As you can tell, the other member indicated that there were comments on the proposal that were not necessarily always in favour of it, but on balance, I did recommend it.

Hon. John McKay: On balance, as a recommendation—

Ms. Margaret Biggs: I did recommend it, and on balance, the minister didn't accept that.

Hon. John McKay: The clear impression left to a reasonable person looking at the document is that you and Mr. Singh and the minister must have recommended against this, because the "not" is inserted.

I used to practise law in another life. When you're dealing with \$7 million documents, there are initials all over the place when there are any interlineations. There are no initials, there are no signatures, and it appears that somebody tried to make it look as if you were not recommending this grant.

•(1655)

Ms. Margaret Biggs: I won't comment on that, exactly. I'll just indicate that I did recommend it to the minister in writing. I think if I had changed the recommendation on the memo I would have initialed it.

Hon. John McKay: That would have been normal. You're an experienced civil servant. You've been around Ottawa for years. You have a very excellent reputation, and it appears to me—and I'm sure to others—that your signature was being used to suggest something opposite of what you'd actually signed for.

Ms. Margaret Biggs: I wouldn't necessarily assume that. My discussions with the minister were quite clear. She did, as she indicated, deliberate on it. She knew what my advice was. I don't know where that "not" came from, but she wasn't misled in any way. She knew what the recommendation was.

Hon. John McKay: It's very curious, though, Madam Biggs, that in the House, Mr. Abbott and the minister said that CIDA thoroughly analyzed KAIROS' program—that's true—and determined with regret that it did not meet the agency's current priorities. That is a complete variance from what you've just told the committee.

The Chair: Okay, that's—

Ms. Margaret Biggs: Can I disagree with...? Can I just comment on that?

The Chair: Sure, but go very quickly.

Ms. Margaret Biggs: I just wouldn't want to let it stand that way. I think, as the minister indicated, the agency did its due diligence, but the minister and her office also do due diligence. They are the minister, that is the government, and that is the decision that was taken. I just—

Hon. John McKay: But it says that CIDA did it.

The Chair: Thank you. We're going to move on now.

Mr. Lunney, you have four minutes, sir.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank our officials for being here.

I want to pick up on another question I don't think we have discussed at all, and that is the food aid program.

We have nearly a billion people around the world who are suffering from hunger. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, 925 million in the world are hungry and malnourished, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Malnutrition is the main cause of those 3.5 million maternal child deaths a year.

I think the fact that Canada is the second-largest single country donor to the World Food Programme is underappreciated. It currently serves as chair of the Food Aid Convention, and I know that back in 2008 the Government of Canada fully untied its food aid budget, providing our partners with greater flexibility to purchase appropriate food locally at reasonable prices and reduce high transportation costs.

Would you fill us in on some of what Canada is doing in the area of support for the World Food Programme, on what we're doing in terms of food security, and on what really the significance is of untying aid? I know that many nations use it as a food subsidy program for their own agricultural production. What is the significance of untying?

I've wrapped three questions into that, all related.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Margaret Biggs: Thank you.

With respect to untying, the government did untie all its food aid, and we're also on track to untie all of our assistance by 2012-13. We're at 93% now.

As to the significance of untying food aid, it means that the World Food Programme or the organization with whom we're working can buy food that is the cheapest or the closest or the quickest to get to or the highest quality without having to respect a particular supplier, and that can increase the value for money by 25% to 30%. That has been verified on a number of occasions. That means that for every dollar, you're getting \$1.30's worth of food assistance, and that saves lives. That's the significance.

It also means, for the World Food Programme, for example, that they can source locally, which means they can.... Sometimes you can have famine and drought and food insecurity in one part of a country,

but there can be—this can happen in a country like Tanzania or Ethiopia—food somewhere else. They can then procure locally, and that can help encourage production and have lots of good effects in terms of development.

Just on the World Food Programme, you're quite right, Canada is the second-largest bilateral country donor to the World Food Programme and is looked to not just for the volume but also for the fact that we are long-term suppliers. They like that; it gives some stability to their financing. Also, we then help them with some of their innovations, such as school feeding and food for purchase, which means that people can work and also get food for purchase. These help to stimulate local development, so we've also been innovative with them.

As I mentioned, food security was a priority for the G-8 in 2009. Maybe I can draw attention to some of the things we have done there in terms of food security. It signifies the kinds of things we're doing in our food security strategy.

One is on food aid. The second is on agricultural development, which we are doing, as I have indicated, in many of our own countries, but also with the international food and agriculture development organization, which really zeroes in on small landholders, who are largely women, mainly in countries in Africa, which are some of the poorest. If you can get them producing, you can not only create economic growth, but livelihoods for their families and their communities—one of the key engines for both poverty reduction and economic growth in those countries. So IFAD is particularly important, and that's one of the things we are funding. We increased our funding as a result of our L'Aquila commitment.

CIDA, with IDRC, has an international food security research fund, which we created to identify, with Canadian institutions and developing country institutions, really practical, pragmatic ways to increase productivity and innovation in food production. It's getting very good results.

I don't know whether you want me to stop there, but I could go on. As I say—

• (1700)

The Chair: He may not, but I want you to stop.

Ms. Margaret Biggs: Oh, you want me to—

The Chair: No, I'm just teasing.

We're going to wrap it up. I want to thank the officials from CIDA for coming today.

We're going to suspend the meeting again for another one minute to go in camera and talk about some committee business.

Once again, thank you very much for taking the time to be here today, and for the extended time as well.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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