



CANADA

Debates of the Senate

3rd SESSION

• 40th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 147

• NUMBER 3

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Maternal and Infant Health in Developing Countries

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): On January 27, 2010, the honourable leader's government announced that it would call the attention of the G8 and G20 countries to maternal and child health in some of the poorest countries in the world. It reiterated this commitment in the Speech from the Throne.

However, the government has also announced that it is freezing international assistance budgets. How does the government plan to improve maternal and child health in developing countries by freezing budgets and without cutting the aid programs in place?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I believe the government can manage its foreign aid in a more responsible way, and that was exactly what Minister Oda put in place well over a year ago, if not two years ago.

As president of the G8 in 2010, Canada is championing a major initiative, as the honourable senator has just stated, to improve the health of women and children in the world's poorest regions. I believe that when these meetings are held in June, Senator Tardif will find — and this is Canada taking the lead on this matter — the other G8 ministers will be fully supportive.

The honourable senator may have caught the announcement that Minister Oda is chairing a special meeting in April in Halifax

to lay out the working documents for how the government envisages this support will take place.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, there appear to be some contradictions in the government's statements and policies. The International Planned Parenthood Federation provides programs designed to improve maternal health. The Government of Canada has been supporting it since the 1980s. Yet the foundation is still waiting for its funding of \$18 million for the next three years to be renewed. Why is the government no longer renewing those funds?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, I believe I answered that question in my last answer. A meeting will be held in Halifax in April, where the documents will be presented as to how the government envisages taking leadership on this issue. What is important is that the government, as the host of the G8, has a simple objective and that is to save the lives of vulnerable children and mothers in Third World countries.

I invite senators to await the meeting next month, which is coming up quickly, and I do not see a contradiction at all. Minister Oda has taken many steps as the minister responsible for the Canadian International Development Agency to properly target funds to areas where we can make a real difference. There has been considerable success.

As honourable senators know, Minister Oda untied food and food is now delivered more directly. Minister Oda has taken many good initiatives. I think the honourable senator will agree that she has received some credit, although not a lot; she does not expect a lot, but she has received some credit for the good work she has done as the minister responsible for CIDA.