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Financial Aid to Sub-Saharan Africa

Aid to Afghanistan

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

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THE SENATE

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[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

FINANCIAL AID TO SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, last week, in response to a question asked in this chamber on the possible closure of African embassies, the Leader of the Government in the Senate said that aid to Africa has doubled thanks to the efforts of the Conservative government.

Nonetheless, the second Report to Parliament on the Government of Canada's Official Development Assistance 2009-10 indicates quite the contrary. First, the report shows a \$120 million decrease between 2008 and 2010 with regard to aid for development. Clearly, aid to Africa has not doubled.

Can the Leader of the Government tell us whether she disputes the data in this report published by the Canadian Council for International Cooperation?

[*English*]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, as I have said before, Canadians want their aid dollars to be effective, efficient and focused. Canadians have shown their generosity when it comes to humanitarian disasters, and they trust their government to ensure that the aid money is achieving real results. We are proud of our aid effectiveness agenda and we will continue to concentrate on areas where we can make a difference.

As I have mentioned before, we have untied food aid. In fact, we are in the process of untying all aid. We have doubled aid to Africa, and we championed the issue of maternal and child health at the G8 Summit. We have concentrated bilateral aid in 20 countries and revamped the Canadian Partnership Branch. We have committed \$540 million over three years to the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The Canadian-led Initiative to Save a Million Lives, launched by the Prime Minister in Africa in 2007, has trained 20,000 health workers and distributed 640,000 insecticide-treated bed nets.

We continue to assist in emergencies. For example, we recently provided \$52 million in flood relief to Pakistan. With regard to Pakistan, Canadians raised \$46.8 million and our government committed to doubling those funds.

I stand behind the claim that our government has increased and, in fact, doubled our aid to Africa.

[*Translation*]

Senator Tardif: In addition, the report indicates that bilateral aid granted by CIDA to sub-Saharan Africa decreased by 12 per cent compared to 2008-09, from \$776 million to \$683 million, one year after Ottawa bragged about doubling aid to Africa in 2008. A government target is not the same thing as a

goal that has been met. The official figures are clearly at odds with what was said in this chamber.

Madam leader, how do you justify the reduction in aid to sub-Saharan Africa and how will you provide aid commensurate with demand in these countries if the government goes through with plans to close embassies in Africa?

[*English*]

Senator LeBreton: The honourable senator said in her first question that I had misspoken by saying we have doubled our aid to Africa. I did not misspeak; we have doubled our aid to Africa.

In her second question, the honourable senator spoke about a specific part of Africa. I have already indicated to honourable senators that Canadians want their aid dollars spent in a focused way, where we can make a real difference. We make no apologies for focusing our aid on where the need is greatest, and we have, in fact, doubled our aid to Africa.

With regard to the news reports about potential embassy closures, I can only say what I have said before. These are news reports in all cases. This is a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs to deal with. I am given to understand that this is a question that has not been resolved. In fact, there were reports that we were planning to open more embassies in certain places. I think we should await the decision of the Department of Foreign Affairs on embassy openings or closures.

AID TO AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): The leader might wish to consult the report published by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation to review those figures.

On another matter, we also learned last week that although 950 Canadian troops will remain in Afghanistan until 2014, the budget for aid to Afghanistan will be cut by more than 50 per cent. To many Canadians, this measure goes against the objectives of the Afghan mission — those of education, diplomacy, development and transitional justice.

How does the leader's government justify this cut in aid, especially at a time when it will be most needed?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank the honourable senator for the question. With regard to Afghanistan, after the combat mission, the government will participate in a training mission, as the honourable senator quite rightly stated.

• (1410)

There will be significant aid going to Afghanistan. I will take the honourable senator's question as notice, because I know that aid dollars to Afghanistan will continue to be expended, but I do not have those figures before me. I will be happy to provide them by way of written response.