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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Support for International Aid

Question by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

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[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL AID

Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourables senators, the 2012 budget presented three weeks ago would reduce government spending on foreign aid by 7.5 per cent over the next three years. Canada's assistance to international organizations is also being reviewed and will be cut.

These cuts are among the largest cuts made in the budget. Spending on international aid, which had already been frozen at the 2010 level, is estimated to represent only 0.29 per cent of this year's gross national product, which is a far cry from Canada's commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of our national income to development assistance.

Canada already ranks among the least generous of developed countries in terms of spending related to foreign aid based on national income. By 2015, this percentage could be even lower.

The government's position recently prompted OXFAM Canada to ask the following question, which I will now ask of the leader: Why is this government balancing its budget at the expense of the most vulnerable people in the world?

• (1450)

[*English*]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, we are not balancing the budget at the expense of the poorest people in the world. As honourable senators know, since we formed government, we have been making our international aid commitments more effective, targeted, focused and accountable. In fulfilling our international commitments, Canada's international aid levels will continue to be higher than those of the previous Liberal government.

Of course, we all know the advantages when Canada untied 100 per cent of food aid, reducing the cost of transportation, supporting local producers and allowing food to be bought at the best price in the areas where we are focusing.

Canada was the second largest donor to the World Food Programme in 2011, helping the program reach over 90 million people in 73 countries.

[*Translation*]

Senator Tardif: Unlike Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom have increased their international aid budgets even though their economic situation is similar to or even worse than ours. In Great Britain, David Cameron asked parliament to increase aid by 40 per cent to ensure that his country reaches its millennium development goal of 0.7 per cent by 2015, the target year. Canada spends just over \$3 a week per Canadian on international aid. By 2015, our expenditures will fall below \$2.50 a week per person.

How can the government justify making cuts to modest expenditures that seek to help the most disadvantaged while the Minister of International Cooperation insists on staying in luxury hotels when attending conferences on poverty, and while scourges such as AIDS and tuberculosis continue to afflict millions of people in the world?

[*English*]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, I pointed out a moment ago that Canada was the second largest donor to the World Food Programme in 2011. As honourable senators know, Canada partnered with the people of Canada by matching donations with regard to the drought in Eastern Africa. We worked with experienced and reputable organizations to deliver critical relief to over 13 million people. Through the World Food Programme, 11.5 million people have received food in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia. In 2009-10, 48 per cent of CIDA aid went to Africa and 53 per cent of CIDA food aid went to Africa.

I know the honourable senator is not specifically referring just to Africa. However, as I pointed out in my opening answer, we have focused our international aid to be more accountable and we are bringing better results on the ground.

With regard to the honourable senator's comments about Minister Oda's stay at the Savoy hotel, the minister has repaid the cost of changing hotels, and she has apologized to Parliament and to the Canadian public.