

Debate on Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad
February 20, 2007.
House of Commons, Ottawa

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, this subject goes to my heart. When I was a member of Parliament on the opposition side, I was the international development critic and also a member of the standing committee.

I do not mean to say that the essence of the bill and the intention of the member who presented it are wrong, but what really surprises me is that for 13 years the Liberals were in government and could have done all these things they are talking about today. None of them that I can remember sat over here talking about international development assistance. None of them came and told the CIDA ministers about what they are now asking this government to do. We can all make rhetorical statements and we can all make statements about this, but let us look at the record for a minute.

CIDA is a recognized and well respected body around the world. When we went with the member for Halifax to the Scandinavian countries with all the other donor countries, CIDA was recognized as one of the those efficient bodies that does give good aid out there.

The member for Halifax has just stated that we spend \$3.1 billion of CIDA money. With all these things, CIDA has acquired a lot, but yes, there is always room for improvement, and today that is what we should discuss: room for improvement.

The problem here is that nobody is talking about the merits or demerits of the bill. They are talking about international development. They are talking about Africa. Both the member for Scarborough—Guildwood and the member for Halifax talked about their visits to Kenya.

That is the country where I grew up. That is the country where I spent most of my life. I have seen CIDA things there. Today they are talking about all this poverty out there. Yes, there is poverty out there, but there are many reasons why there is poverty out there. And yes, CIDA has been working for a long time, but those members stand here

and now say that they are so stunned about all these things that are happening in Africa.

Yes, we have been working out there, but that is not the message of this bill. We understand that international development assistance can be delivered effectively. That is what we want to do. We are going to need more transparency, but we want to build on what we have achieved over many years and on what CIDA has done out there in working with Canadian NGOs.

We have excellent expertise here in Canada from the NGO community and from all the other communities that are involved in international development assistance. We need to ensure that we help them become more effective in what they need, but in what we are hearing here tonight, that is not the issue. The problem with this bill is that this is a flawed bill. This bill does not achieve the objective of what the members are saying here today about making poverty history.

Yes, we have been involved in making poverty history. I remember that it was the Conservative government that worked very hard to get Mr. Mandela out and free. Canada has been in the forefront in making poverty history. We all want to make poverty history, but that is not what this bill will do. That is why I want every listener to understand why this government is opposing this bill. This bill is not being opposed because its intent is wrong. This bill is being opposed because it is a flawed bill.

The member for Scarborough—Guildwood and the member for Halifax said they worked countless hours out there. I can tell members from being on that committee that they totally refused to listen to us. They totally refused to recognize that the ministers for CIDA and foreign affairs have gone out and made Canada proud of the contribution of international development assistance.

What we had there was one NGO group shepherding this thing, and even when the departmental officials came and outlined what was wrong with this bill and why this bill would create a tremendous number of problems, including a bureaucracy, and would have no transparency and would impact other areas of international development, the problem was that the members refused to listen.

The member for Scarborough—Guildwood just talked about the Senate report on Africa, which outlined that we need to do more in

Africa, as was said. Yes, there are all those things, but the problem is that this bill will not do that.

There are other issues too. Let me tell the House about other areas in which Canada has been involved. Canada has been involved in the global partnership program, to which we have given \$100 million. Canada has been involved in the global peace and security fund, in police training in Afghanistan and in investigating war crimes in Darfur.

Canada's international development assistance takes a bigger picture into account. This bill restricts all those things and creates another level of bureaucracy.

Those members have been members of Parliament for a long time and have been working for accountability as well. I am just flabbergasted that they did not recognize or are refusing to recognize what is wrong with this bill. Whatever they are trying to do will not be accomplished with this bill. That is why the Government of Canada is opposed to the bill.

The Government of Canada is not opposed to making poverty history. The Government of Canada is not opposed to making sure its aid dollars are more effectively spent. As a matter of fact, we have increased our aid budget by 8%. By the year 2010, it will be double the amount in 2001.

My colleague, the parliamentary secretary for international cooperation, outlined the problems with the bill. We wanted to work with the opposition to make the bill effective, but there was an attempt by the opposition to ram it through. When we ram through a bill, it becomes a flawed bill, which is why the Government of Canada cannot support the bill.