

Haiti could use Afghan development dollars in quake wake: Canadian expert (Haiti-Earthquake-Cda-) By Mike Blanchfield

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OTTAWA _ Long before he disappeared Tuesday beneath the rubble of Haiti's United Nations headquarters, Hedi Annabi delivered a simple message to the Conservative government: spend more development dollars to prevent the poor Caribbean country from backsliding into anarchy.

Annabi, the head of the UN mission in Haiti, personally delivered that message to federal cabinet ministers 13 months ago on a visit to Ottawa.

In her emotional address to the nation Wednesday, Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean referred to Annabi as ``our dear friend.''

With Annabi feared to be dead beneath the crumbled UN compound in Port au Prince, others are now giving voice to his call for more long-term assistance to Haiti.

And some suggest the government could find the extra money by diverting aid spending from Canada's other major foreign aid recipient: Afghanistan.

Not counting the emergency funding announced by Canada and the world since Tuesday's massive quake, Haiti is Canada's second largest recipient of development spending. Some \$555 million has been earmarked for Haiti for the five years ending in 2011, a distant second to Afghanistan, where \$1.9 billion has been promised for the 2001-2011 time frame.

``There's pressure all around on the budget,''' said Carlo Dade, the executive director of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), a non-partisan think tank focused on relations with the Caribbean.

``Ergo, you look at where you can possibly move money and obviously larger pots of money would be most prone to discussion. Afghanistan is a large amount of money. Ergo, Afghanistan should be subject to discussion.''

Dade said he believes Canada deserves much credit for a well-crafted, co-ordinated approach to development in Haiti that has focused on improving law and order, prisons, and governance.

Indeed, he said, Canada has met or exceeded its spending promises for Haiti.

But in light of this week's disaster, Dade said it is legitimate for Canada to reconsider its broader foreign aid priorities. Haiti, after all, is in Canada's time zone, while Afghanistan is on the other side of the world.

Even though Canada is ending its military mission in Afghanistan next year, Dade said that won't necessarily make it any easier to switch its development focus from Central Asia to Haiti.

``We're pulling out but we want to have our investment in terms of time and blood not amount to nothing,'' he said.

Dade said Canada should be working with other countries in the Western Hemisphere as well as institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank.

When Annabi came to Ottawa in December 2008, the 65-year-old Tunisian-born diplomat said in an interview that Haiti needed an additional \$3 billion over the next three years to help it recover from the devastating impacts of a series of hurricanes.

``I feel all the work we are doing on the security side, the rule of law side, will remain fragile and could be reversed very quickly if we do not undertake a major effort to improve living conditions in the country and start a major reconstruction,'' Annabi said at the time.

Asked back then what he thought of Canada's spending in Afghanistan relative to Haiti, Annabi's replied: ``It's OK for Canada to decide its own priorities I think Haiti surely offers the prospect of an easier win, so to speak, than some of these other situations. Therefore I think Haiti is worth investing in.''