

## **Harper 'recycling' money in Haiti**

Aid coming from existing budgets, says Ignatieff

By STEPHEN MAHER Ottawa Bureau

OTTAWA — Politicians and NGOs have begun to wrangle over the nature of Canada's aid commitment to Haiti, with the Liberals complaining that the government is recycling money, and one aid group worrying that shifting money to Haiti could shortchange other areas of the world.

Since Haiti was devastated by the earthquake on Jan. 12, the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has won praise for its humanitarian efforts.

On Monday, though, for the first time since the quake, the Liberals levelled their guns at the government, complaining that the Tories are recycling money and failing to appoint a high-profile champion for Haiti.

In a news conference Monday in Ottawa, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon said that the \$85 million in humanitarian assistance the government has announced since the quake "comes from budgets that are already in place."

In Moncton for a meeting of the Atlantic Liberal caucus, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff attacked the government for playing "shell games."

"If Parliament were in session, that would be the kind of question I would be asking the prime minister of Canada right now. This is a country, Haiti, which has suffered a catastrophe. Canadians have responded with unprecedented generosity. The last thing they want is a government playing with the numbers. This should be new money, not clever recycling and repackaging."

Jean-Luc Benoit, a spokesman for International Development Minister Bev Oda, sent out a news release soon after, saying that \$85 million in humanitarian assistance and about \$130 million raised to match individual donations comes mainly from a special disaster reserve fund.

"There is no repackaging and no recycling," Benoit said. "This is all new funding being allocated to Haiti."

Only the \$12 million for a new home for the Haitian government, which Harper announced on his trip to Haiti last week, comes from funds previously earmarked for the country, he said. And that money will be reallocated from projects that will not go ahead because of the earthquake.

The Inter-American Development Bank has estimated that it will take 10 years and about US\$14 billion to rebuild Haiti. Donor nations will meet in New York in late March to make funding commitments and divide responsibility among themselves.

Haiti is the second-largest recipient of Canadian aid, after Afghanistan, and Canada is the second-largest donor nation in the country. In charity fundraising after the earthquake, Canadians raised the most money per person in the world.

Canada's commitments so far have been appropriate, said Robert Fox, executive director of Oxfam Canada, but some aid organizations are nervous that if Ottawa expands its aid to Haiti on a huge scale, that could mean cuts to other parts of the world in desperate straits.

"If Haiti has depleted a pool, and there are other humanitarian needs around the world, will Canada be able to fairly meet its responsibilities with respect to those needs?" he said.

There is no sign of that yet and the government can find ways of moving numbers around to avoid cutting other programs, said Carlo Dade, executive director of Canadian Foundation for the Americas.

"If there were evidence of that actually happening, I would worry about it," he said. "Until then, no."

Also on Monday, the Liberals issued a news release attacking the government for declining to appoint a former prime minister as champion for Haiti.

"Of the three leading countries leading the rebuilding efforts in Haiti, Canada is the only one to refuse to appoint a special envoy to spearhead Canadian support for Haiti for the long term," said Liberal foreign affairs critic Bob Rae.

"Stephen Harper doesn't want to lose control of the Haiti file, preferring to keep everything under the tight watch of the PMO. But, unfortunately, this isn't in the best interests of the people of Haiti."

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