

SENATORS CALL FOR CIDA TO BE DISBANDED

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OTTAWA · The government should consider disbanding the Canadian International Development Agency because it has failed to make a difference in Africa for the past four decades, a Senate report recommended yesterday.

“Given the failure of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in Africa over the past 38 years to make an effective foreign-aid difference, the government of Canada should conduct an immediate review of whether or not this organization should continue to exist in its present non-statutory form,” says the Senate foreign affairs committee in a report that was two years in the making and heard from hundreds of witnesses.

Since 1968, CIDA has spent \$12.4-billion in Sub-Saharan Africa, but has little to show for it. Part of the problem, the report says, is that 81% of CIDA staff are based in the Ottawa area — not in Africa.

The report’s top recommendation is for the government to create an Africa office that would include aid workers, diplomats and security staff with the goal of stimulating economic development. Unlike the current distribution of labour, 80% of its staff should work in Africa. If the government disbands CIDA, its staff should be transferred to the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Department, the report recommends.

But if CIDA is spared, the report recommends it be reconstituted under a “stand-alone statutory mandate,” which would specify clear objectives for the agency that could be monitored by Parliament.

The report states that CIDA is “essentially established by a paragraph in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Act” despite having an annual budget in excess of \$3billion.

“CIDA has no well-defined and clear mandate with objectives that can be monitored by parliamentarians,” the report states.

The agency’s performance in Africa was widely criticized during the committee’s hearings. “CIDA has developed a reputation as one of the slowest bilateral aid agencies in the world,” testified Ian Smillie, research coordinator of Partnership Africa Canada.

“We have more checklists, forms, studies, consultancies and evaluations than any other donor I know. We are pathologically risk-averse.”

Robert Fowler, Canada’s former United Nations ambassador, told the committee CIDA’s contributions were spread too thin across the continent, with programming at one point operating in 46 of 53 countries.

Conservative Senator Hugh Segal, the committee chairman, called the decline of living standards in Sub-Saharan Africa “a central challenge of our time” and one that would threaten global security and economic stability if it continues.

Two-thirds of African countries were exposed to armed conflict in the past decade and a half, which killed six million Africans and drove nearly 20 million from their homes, the report states.

The document also backs the revival of the Doha round of international trade negotiations to knock down trade barriers that bar African agriculture products from the developed world. While the report is highly critical of Canada and the rest of the developed world, it blames corrupt African leaders for causing the most damage.

“Without good governance, it is difficult to envision progress in other areas or the effective use of international assistance.”