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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA

Maurice Vellacott, MP
Saskatoon-Wanuskewin

Speaking out on Sudan

The Regina Leader-Post – July 13, 2006

After reading the article “Complaint against Vellacott dismissed” in the July 5 edition of the Leader-Post, I’d like to draw your attention to my October 26, 2005 “Sudan Report” on my Web site, www.mauricevellacott.ca under the main header “Maurice speaks out”.

In addition to being widely disseminated to media and others at the time, that very same transcript was also tabled in the Senate and I stand by that report. As you can read in that report, I had meetings with a wide variety of groups and individuals.

In advance of the trip, a Sudanese-Canadian and University of Ottawa student who would accompany us, outlined three places to visit on the Sudan trip – namely Khartoum, Juba and Darfur. Liberal MP Boris Wrzesnewskyj very well knows that I made great effort to get into Darfur and when down in Juba had finally received confirmation that I and my Sudanese-Canadian friend had permission to be on a Sunday UN flight from Khartoum to Darfur.

Our scheduled Saturday afternoon flight from Juba would have got us up to Khartoum Saturday late afternoon in time for the next morning departure to Darfur. Anybody who has travelled in that part of Africa knows the vagaries of airline travel there. When my Sudanese-Canadian friend and I dropped by the dilapidated Juba airline office Saturday morning to confirm our flight for later that day, we were told that there were not enough people to justify a Saturday flight so it had been merged with the earlier Friday flight and announced by megaphone from the back of a small truck driving through the streets of Juba, a city of 500,000 plus. We were told that there would now not be a flight up to Khartoum until Monday. I was already scheduled to leave for Canada on the Tuesday morning.

This was a great disappointment not to get into Darfur to attest first-hand the continuing tragedy there. As a result I had to rely on a number of conversations with personnel from the UN, NGOs, aid agencies and individuals who had gone in and out of Darfur in the

recent weeks. I only claimed to have been in Khartoum in the north and Juba in the south and their respective surrounding environs. A few fallible media may have mistakenly reported that I had been into Darfur.

As the ethics commissioner reported, I covered the cost of all of my own travel, accommodation and food. The ethics commissioner properly acknowledged that upon arrival in Sudan, I conveyed a sum of \$2,000 to my Sudanese-Canadian friend, who was already there, from Wrzesnewskyj, according to a previous arrangement these two had made, for the Darfur mission. I had no access to those dollars thereafter and it was not used to cover any of my accommodation, meals, ground transportation or flights. As those dollars were for the Darfur mission, and I regrettably never got to go there, it would seem that that benefit should be particularly assigned to Wrzesnewskyj and Max Kelly who, subsequent to my departure, got down to Darfur with my Sudanese-Canadian friend. Kelly is a very capable leader in the organization STAND (Students Taking Action Now on Darfur).

I continue to speak of my trip to Sudan as I have opportunity. Upon invitation I am willing to address community organizations and churches about the practical medical, housing, educational, and microeconomic needs in Sudan. I am scheduled to meet with a leader from the Saskatoon Sudanese community to plan a liaison with Saskatoon doctors to hopefully get medical supplies and equipment into the troubled country of Sudan. I wish that Wrzesnewskyj would collaborate with Sudanese Canadians and others in such modest attempts for that war-torn country, because such initiatives can make a difference.

Maurice Vellacott

Vellacott is Conservative MP for Saskatoon-Wanuskewin Constituency.

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