The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD met on 24th November 1994 to review the development co-operation policies and programme of Belgium. The Belgian Delegation was led by Mr. Roger Lenaerts, Administrator General, Belgian Administration for Development Co-operation (AGCD). The examining countries were Austria and the Netherlands.

The Chair of the DAC, Mr. James H. Michel, summarised the main points emerging from the review as follows:

-- A special focus of the DAC review was to seek clarification of the directions, goals and achievements of the Belgian aid programme. The discussions aimed to take stock of how Belgian activities relate to the broad international consensus on objectives for development co-operation and the principles for effective aid. The Committee encouraged the Belgian authorities to pursue their efforts in support of human rights in the developing countries. It also vigorously encouraged Belgium to target increased resources and carry forward its activities on the role of women in development, family planning and the environment.

-- The Committee was interested in the assessment by the Belgian Delegation concerning the situation caused by political instability in some of its main partner countries, notably Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire. The international community attaches considerable importance to the outlook and priorities for Belgium’s future relations with these countries and its response to the central requirements of reconciliation, reconstruction, "peace building" development and governance.

-- The Committee encouraged the Belgian authorities to step up their efforts to pursue an integrated strategy of development co-operation. The articulation of such a strategy would guide all the component parts of the aid programme and would place the various Belgian interests in the proper perspective in relation to the central objective of sustainable development in partner countries.

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Particularly in the view of Belgium’s engagement in countries that have suffered major setbacks, most DAC Members believe that explicit strategic guidelines would ensure a more effective response to the needs of Belgium’s partner countries, and could also help to reassure and mobilise public opinion at home in favour of development co-operation.

-- The volume of Belgian development assistance shrank by 3 per cent in real terms in 1993 to $808 million. As a percentage of GNP, it remained at its 1992 level of 0.39 per cent. The Belgian Government has just announced its intention to maintain allocations for AGCD at constant levels for the next four years. The Committee urged the Belgian authorities to do their utmost to mobilise additional resources for the aid programme, including by means of firm medium-term planning. It also expressed the hope that the changes to the Development Co-operation Fund would not result in a reduction or slowdown in Belgian assistance.

-- The Committee recognised the highly concessional financial terms of Belgian ODA, but observed that the degree of tying to Belgian goods and services was particularly high. It invited Belgium to continue its efforts to untie more of its aid.

-- The Belgian Delegation explained the restructuring of the AGCD and the efforts made to increase its efficiency. The Committee encouraged the Belgian authorities to act to overcome the shortage of staff, which is bound to hamper the implementation of the new policy emphases and the effectiveness of aid. It noted the role of the project evaluation unit and encouraged the Belgian authorities to cover the whole Belgian aid programme in evaluations, and to share their results.

-- The Committee was interested in the description provided by Belgian Authorities about discussions with NGOs concerning the programming of activities, coherence at the recipient country level, new initiatives such as work with local NGOs, and the geographic concentration of aid. These discussions, which are on-going, aim at improving the co-operation between AGCD and the NGO community.

The summary and conclusions of the DAC review will be published together with the report prepared by the OECD Secretariat on Belgium’s aid programme.