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Chair

Mr. Bernard Patry

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● (0905)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are considering issues relating to the United Nations Population Fund.

We have the pleasure to have as a witness this morning Madam Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, *directrice exécutive*. Welcome; you're most welcome here.

I understand you have some remarks to say to us. The floor is yours.

Thank you.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund): Thank you very much, and thank you for inviting us to be with you here this morning. It's a pleasure to be in front of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs.

UNFPA has a long-standing relationship with parliamentarians, one that began in the 1970s. We have been able to develop it through the years, and now we have parliamentarians on population and development in every region. They are really important in advocating for the issues of population and reproductive health in their parliaments.

We held our first parliamentarian meeting here in Ottawa; it was a global one with people from all the regions, and it was in 2002. During that meeting the Canadian parliamentarians played a very important role as hosts of the conference. There was a declaration that came out, and basically the message from Ottawa was that life and death are political questions. Those were the main words that came out of there, and the parliamentarians agreed they would work to provide, slowly, 10% of their national budgets for ODA—because we were looking at developing countries as well—for population and reproductive health.

The second meeting took place. There was an agreement that a parliamentarian meeting would take place every two years, and it was in Strasbourg this past year to accommodate the 10th anniversary of the Cairo agreement. The main message that came out of the Strasbourg meeting of parliamentarians was that, as we are implementing the millennium development goals, it is very important to ensure there is a link between issues of population and reproductive health with the millennium development goals.

As you know, there is a new report that has just come out from the UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change that talks about the millennium development goals as well as peace and security and reform of the United Nations. It's very important to see that they have defined that international peace and security go beyond state security into human security. We talk about the International Conference on Population and Development, and certainly human security is a very important aspect of it because it is linked to poverty inasmuch as the elimination of poverty can contribute to social cohesion and therefore to peace.

As well, in the report they link the protection of human rights to the prevention of conflict, and they emphasize the protection of vulnerable groups. In our work, vulnerable groups are women, young people, and older persons, so it's the whole issue of peace and security linked to the social sector and to social policies in particular.

As you all know, each country is responsible for implementing the millennium development goals, especially in the developing countries. Really, the important part of the framework is the right to development, the right of every individual in any country to be educated, to have good health, to work, to have an income, and so on.

This is especially important because in the developing countries we have the largest youth generation in human history ever; they are between the ages of 15 and 24. Right now we have 1 billion persons between the ages of 15 and 24, and these people require health, education, employment, and so on. If we do not meet the promises we have made to them, then the issue of peace and security will be greatly impacted in one way or another.

UNFPA, I'm sure you know, is the lead United Nations agency for the implementation of the program of action on population and development that was adopted in Cairo in 1994. We work through nationals, and our offices are very small. If you have any parliamentary visits to any country, you are very welcome to visit our people and our programs. We work through national governments and national NGOs. We do not execute programs ourselves because we feel we need to build capacity at the country level.

We have two types of work—and I will end with this. The first one is that we deal with the whole issue of population data—data analysis, data collection, and verifiable data—and the principle here is to build the national capacity of countries to collect data so they can plan better and monitor implementation better, and it is a tool for accountability for the countries themselves.

● (0910)

The other kind of work we do is with what we call reproductive health. Reproductive health basically refers to family planning, care during pregnancy and birth, treatment of complications from unsafe abortion, and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

When we talk about reproductive rights, we mean very clearly that women and men can freely and responsibly plan their families, that they can make decisions free of coercion, and that women will be free from violence in all its forms and can participate in society.

We believe these two issues, reproductive health and reproductive rights, are critical to the well-being of all people, societies, and communities. Therefore, we say we cannot achieve certain millennium development goals, the goal on maternal health, for example. How are you going to improve maternal health if women cannot access reproductive health services in their communities? There is no way. We know that every minute women die because of pregnancy-related complications simply because they have no access to services.

We also deal with issues of migration, refugees, and urbanization.

We have recently, in the past seven or eight years, joined the humanitarian work other organizations do for the simple reason that when you have a humanitarian crisis—the tsunami is an example of that—and everybody is worried about tents, food, water, and so on, the special needs of women are forgotten. Babies come regardless of whether there's war or peace, whether it's raining or sunny, and so on. With respect to the tsunami situation, we have an estimate that more than 150,000 women are pregnant and that 50,000 will deliver within the next three months under very severe conditions, where the health system has totally failed. Our role, the humanitarian part, is to look at issues that are specifically related to the needs of women, who are often forgotten; for example, there are their psychosocial needs and trauma counselling.

The last point I'd like to make is that there is a crisis in the sense that we are assuring young men and women all over the world that it is their right to plan their families, and that's not population control; it is the spacing between the children, between pregnancies. Yet we do not have enough services for women or men to exercise their rights. We need to be able to provide the services just as we are advocating for their right to plan their lives.

We deal with HIV/AIDS, and there's really a crisis in HIV/AIDS. We promote ABC: abstinence, be faithful, and condom use. However, for women the new information coming out is that the face of HIV/AIDS is young. For young married women who are married to older men, ABC is not an option; a married woman cannot abstain. She is faithful, but she cannot get her husband, who hasn't been faithful, to use condoms. Therefore, she's infected. There is a line that shows the growth in the rate of young women with HIV/AIDS infection. Therefore, we try to promote the female condom as a female-controlled method of protection.

This is just a bird's-eye view of where we are. I will stop here because I'm sure there are many questions you would like to ask.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your remarks.

Before we start the question and answer session, please, can you introduce the people who are with you as witnesses this morning?

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: Safiye Çagar is the director of information with the executive board and resource mobilization division. Lene Christiansen is in the resource mobilization branch, and she is the focal point for Canada.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start with Mr. Day, please.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Thanks.

Could you just give us an update for our records? Sometimes we get a little bit behind on what's happening at the UN.

What is the progress following the United Nations board of auditors' findings of mismanagement of funds at UNFPA? It's certainly an area I've asked about in this committee, not just with respect to your organization but for all the money we give, namely that there be a proper audit process in place so we can make sure the money is getting to its intended objective. Could you give us an update on the United Nations board of auditors and their concerns about mismanagement? I'm sure you've been addressing that.

Also, could we get another update? Has there been any change since the report to UNESCO by a U.S. representative or ambassador? I'm just quoting from it here, and that's why I'm asking for the update, because the report is already in place: “It learned that UNFPA, through its 4th Country Program, provides more than 70% of the funds it spends in China directly to the Chinese State Family Planning Commission”. That commission is of course involved significantly in coercive abortions, violating the UN declarations on coercive abortions.

I know you've heard about these issues before. Could we get a fresh update on those two areas?

The Chair: Mrs. Obaid.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: I'll start with the board of auditors. The report of the board of auditors is an open document that goes to our executive board, which reviews it and so on. It's a routine report that we have every year for our own executive board. There was a volatile issue in the report that was highlighted in the press by an opposition group, one of the U.S.-based NGOs that is against the agenda of the United Nations Population Fund. It used the word "mismanagement", which is quite outside the real report. If you look at the report, it is not really mismanagement. It's what happens in any organization where processes weren't followed well. Having said that, we follow all the audit reports yearly. We work with the country representatives, if it's at the country level, or with headquarters, to ensure that we respond to all the audit comments. And we go back the next year to report back to the executive board.

I think when that comment came out it also said that the executive board gave me a very hard time on the audit report. Interestingly, I wasn't even in the session. It was the head of our audit division who was there.

Having said that, we take auditing very seriously, and now we have included it as one of the assessments of staff in terms of how much they are responding to the audit comments as they go along. It's part of the annual review, and we make specific reference to their compliance to the audit reviews. However, as I said, what you will find if you look at the audit report is that it's not really mismanagement, but rather it is a case of bureaucratic mistakes and weaknesses that need to be corrected.

In terms of the China program, our budget, for example for 2004, was $360 million. We give China only $3 million per year. Not all of it goes directly to China because we paid for Marie Stopes International and other NGO work.

The issue of China is the following. We know that China has coercive population policies and that's why we are there. We are really the only human rights, if you like, voice in China regarding issues of reproduction and the rights of women. We have been in China...and we are beginning our new program now. In the years we have been there, we have worked in 32 counties. We wanted to demonstrate that if men and women have the right to have family planning services that are voluntary, that have all methods available —not only one or two methods like sterilization but have the modern methods available—that counselling is modernized so there is a one-to-one relationship, there will be a change in the quality of the services and therefore in the quality of life of the people. In the 32 counties we have demonstrated that abortions have gone down because people can plan their families. We have shown that sexually transmitted diseases have gone down because there are services and counselling available, and therefore there has been a clear shift. In these 32 counties we agreed with the government that there would not be any quotas. The one child quota policy will be dropped in this to allow people to make their own decisions. Usually people make the decisions about their families depending on their economy—how much they can afford, and so on. Therefore, we have shown that when people make those decisions, they are really within the one- and two-child limits.

The other aspect of it is that the Chinese government has now taken over this program to expand it to 880 counties. There were a number of missions on this subject. The first one was the human rights report by the U.S. State Department that comes out annually. In 2001 the U.S. State Department report indicated that UNFPA was good for China because it was engaging the government in a dialogue on human rights in terms of reproduction.

There was an all-party U.K. Parliament team that went to China to look at our program, and they came back and said exactly that—the UNFPA is good for China; they should be supported. Then President Bush in 2001 decided to send his own team. It was a team of three Chinese-speaking people. The agreement with the Chinese government was that they would be unchaperoned, that the U.S. embassy in China would determine their schedule, that they would provide all services, and that the Chinese government could not interfere in their work. They did go. They spoke to people in different places and they issued a report.

In the report there were three conclusions and three recommendations. The first conclusion was that there has been a change in these counties in terms of family planning and that UNFPA was good in bringing about this change. They recommended that we be funded again.

The second conclusion was that U.S. money should not be spent in China because it continues as a national policy to have coercive population policies. This had been the set-up before when there was a Democratic Party in government. What we did then was...the U.S. would give us the money. We would deduct from it whatever we would have given China. We put it in a separate account and we spent it on other countries. We would then do an accounting to the U. S. at the end of every year. So basically the team that came back this time said to do the same thing—give UNFPA the money, but don't let them spend it in China.

The last conclusion was that the Chinese government has continued with its one-child policy and therefore it needs to be monitored. The recommendation was that we have to strengthen the monitoring of this policy. As you see, it's the U.S. team that said this, but even with that recommendation, Mr. Bush decided not to fund us again. This was followed by U.S. faith-based organizations going to China. They came back with the same recommendations. That's where we are right now.

● (0920)

The Chair: Thank you. Now we'll go to Madame Lalonde, s'il vous plaît.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you very much, Ms. Obaid.

I have several questions for you, because I am not very familiar with your organization. However, given that you have told us that you deal specifically with women's and families' rights in the matter of planned parenthood, I understand just how important your organization is. I have also taken note of your other objectives, and my questions will be to the point.

Do you provide direct services, or do you work in partnership with local NGOs?

How do you deal with the fact that, in some countries, the rights of women are not respected? In other words, is there a link between your work and the development of the rights of women in certain countries? In how many countries are you present?

Lastly, I am going to ask you a question which will perhaps be deemed out of order; do you think that women in Saudi Arabia will eventually be granted the right to vote?

● (0925)

The Chair: Your question probably is out of order, but I understand that you are asking it because you have visited Saudi Arabia.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Yes, that is right.

In fact, given that Ms. Obaid works in the field of women's rights, I would like it if she could answer this question.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Obaid; feel free to answer. We are very open here.

[*English*]

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: Thank you very much.

In response to the first one, do we provide the services directly, no, we don't. We work with the national health systems and we work with national NGOs and international NGOs. So we have three in Canada; Population Action International is an NGO we work with. We work with other NGOs, including U.S.-based NGOs, and we work with nationals. The whole concept of our work since it was established is to develop the national capacity so they can take care of themselves. Eventually we should be out, but they should be the one to develop their capacity.

In terms of the issue of the absence of rights of women, we deal a great deal with violence against women, with harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation, and so on. The way we do it is we have three levels actually. We work with NGOs to advocate and to pressure the government. We work with parliamentarians to put laws into place. We help them with the information, whatever they need, to be able to adopt laws. In many of the African countries...for example, right now Senegal has a law against female genital cutting, and it's because we were providing the support to have an all-party position on issues like this.

We work in 140 countries, but we have some individual representatives who cover more than one country. We have about 76 representatives in the countries. We are a small organization compared to other sister organizations. From me to the most junior in a country level we are 1,000 staff members on core funds. So we're really a small organization. If you visit our country office you'll find one international staff, maximum two, and the rest are national staff. So it depends on the national structure.

The last question is not really out of order at all. I am a Saudi and I know the process we have gone through. It's interesting that in the elections that took place there were two voices that were very loud: the fundamentalist voices and the women's voices objecting. Seven women nominated themselves for election, even though they knew they wouldn't be able to run, and they had a platform. In fact, in one interview I was asked about it, and my answer was if Afghan women can vote, why not Saudi Arabian women? It's something we're working on, trying to see how we can do it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you very much, Ms. Obaid.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde.

Mr. Bevilacqua.

[*English*]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Thank you very much, and thank you for your presentation.

Just reading your bio, you seem to have a lot of experience, and it's quite commendable that you dedicate so much of your life to such a worthy cause. Perhaps we can extract from you what, in your personal experience, have been your major challenges in dealing with this issue. I want to hear from you. I don't have long preambles.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: The most important challenge I believe we are facing, even in my personal life, is to get women educated, to get girls educated. I think the key to my life has been education. Had I not been given the chance to be educated, I could not have what I have right now. But more importantly, and it's what women and young girls in many developing countries face, they have to have a family that believes in the right to be educated. That's what I had. I had a father who was very strong about my education. There has to be a government that has the educational system to get us into education, and that is important as well. And, of course, there has to be the personal stamina to do that.

But I think the other challenge is that in an environment where, until now, we have one woman who dies simply by giving birth.... I keep on saying this is the most natural thing that we do, we give birth, and yet women still die. So the whole issue of the right to live, that's the motivating force for me, to ensure that women can live, can exercise the right to life, so that they can have healthy lives, an education, and then they can be productive.

I think the issue we face in many countries right now is the fact that women's issues are seen as women's issues and not as global societal issues, and therefore having the men believe in it and helping to push.... Especially because parliaments, ministers and so on, are mostly men, the challenge is how do you get the men to believe that if women can get educated, can have a better life, and can participate in the society, the whole society will be better? It will impact on the family, on the community, and on the country. To me, this is a major challenge.

We have a program called male responsibility. It asks, how do men participate to ensure that not only the rights of women are protected, but that they, in their own role as men, as parents and so on, also participate in these events?

One thing that's growing now, and it's becoming very serious, is this clear violence against women, trafficking in women. Women have become the new slaves, especially young women, and that is a major challenge. It's linked to organized crime, it's linked to drugs, and so on.

So even though we have come a long way, there are other issues that are coming out that put off balance the long way that we have come.

The final one is, how do you invest? You, parliamentarians, ministers of finance, how can you see that the issues of women are so much of a priority for a nation's well-being that you would give money to national programs that will support these objectives?

● (0930)

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: We just had a budget, by the way.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: Yes, I know.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: We often look at inputs, so people say, we're spending *x* billions of dollars on this program, therefore there's a commitment. I often like to view not only the inputs but also the outputs. In other words, there are things in a society that we can achieve without necessarily money. Give me some examples of what your organization has done that speak to this reality.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: Many of our programs, as I said, have been done with small funds. The best year we had was 2004. Our budget is $360 million, our core budget, which is the highest it has been since we were established. So we're small. This small money, in your sense, does go a long way.

We work with prevention, for example. Prevention is an intangible issue. Prevention doesn't take much money. It takes very little money. So when you're talking about prevention on issues of maternal mortality, being aware, knowing how to conduct themselves, knowing that the women should go to a clinic to be able to access these services, and so on, it doesn't take money, and we do work with that.

In regard to the whole issue of HIV/AIDS and young people, who are the face of HIV/AIDS, to have youth-friendly centres takes little money. But the process of behavioural change is very much non-money, and it's long term. The impact doesn't show right away, but it certainly does impact in the short term or the medium term to show a change.

These are some of the programs we do with very little money to be able to move on. As I said, we don't deal with hospitals, big money; we deal with small centres, and so on.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: From your opening remarks and from some of the answers you've given to my colleagues this morning, I sense you're trying to deal with a lot of issues. Are you concerned about the fact that perhaps by dealing with too many things at once, you may lack focus on some of the major objectives that will result in perhaps the ultimate goal of pushing your agenda forward?

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: Well, I don't think there are many issues; they're all interconnected. For example, you can't deal with maternal health if you don't deal with the whole issue of family planning and HIV/AIDS, because it's related to maternal health. You can't deal with HIV/AIDS if you don't look at reproductive health services, because they are related to each other. So about 65% of the resources go to the area of reproductive health.

The other area, which are the demographic aspects, is very important to be able to plan these services. You have to help governments in the area of censuses, data collection and data analysis, because if you don't have that tool to enable them to know what the population age structure, distribution, and so on are, they will not be able to plan their programs accordingly.

So really we have two main areas we focus on, and they're very much interrelated. Because it is reproductive health, you look at the issues that are related to the reproduction of a human being, be it violence, because violence does impact on the reproductive health....

I'll give you an example. In Rwanda, when rape was used as a tool of war, one-third of the women who were raped are now HIV-positive, and they're dying now. So you cannot separate HIV from reproductive health, from maternal health. They are very much connected to each other.

● (0935)

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Can I ask another question? I need some more time.

The Chair: We'll come back after Ms. McDonough. You'll get it next time.

Ms. McDonough, please.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Thank you very much for being with us this morning.

I do apologize for my late arrival. I'm afraid it was my fourth commitment this morning, and I'm really sorry I missed your introductory comments. I apologize if I backtrack to perhaps some things you've already addressed.

It is very helpful to have you acknowledge and remind us that your work is made more difficult because the reality is that women continue to occupy an inferior status in most of the countries of the world, and women continue to be severely underrepresented in public life, which makes it doubly difficult.

We're coming up to Beijing + 10, and I wonder if I could ask you to comment on where, from your perspective, we are in terms of meeting the goals and objectives set out with respect to reproductive health in the context of Beijing.

Secondly, it's just been mentioned that we had a budget introduced here in Canada. I'm not asking you to wade in on Canada's budget debate at all, but as you know, there is an internationally recognized and supported goal for overseas development assistance of 0.7% of GDP. I haven't been able to crunch the numbers, but I think we've gone from our humiliatingly low 0.24% here in Canada to what might be closer to 0.27%, limping towards 0.3%.

My question is this. There are other countries that have achieved the 0.7% or surpassed it, and I'm wondering if you can indicate whether there is any correlation between those countries that have in fact reached 0.7%, or surpassed it, and the level of support that you receive from those countries for the important reproductive health work that the UN Population Fund does.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: Thank you very much.

On Beijing + 10 and the issues of reproductive health, well, we have a long way to go. As we said, a lot has changed. There are more institutions, more health centres, more women accessing family planning and being able to plan their lives. Maternal mortality, regretfully, shamefully actually, is an indicator that further distinguishes between developed and developing and rich and poor within the same country and across countries. It has been static for a while, which shows that not enough emphasis has been placed on reducing maternal mortality; however, the good news is there are countries that are moving towards that. And some of them are poor countries, like Sri Lanka, for example, and Bangladesh. They were able to bring down maternal mortality, and that's partly because of education and having the services integrated into the primary health services.

On the millennium development goal on maternal health, we believe many countries will not be able to achieve it by 2015. It will be very difficult to do so. That's because of poor health systems, as a whole, less investment in providing the services. Of course, the whole issue of awareness and the status of women is linked to that. So in terms of reproductive health, we still have a way to go. And the Beijing and 10 review will reveal that.

Last year we did a review of our countries,160 countries, a survey. We found out that a good number of them, let's say about 25% of them, have moved on many of the indicators that are related to the health of women, participation and so on, but woefully, lots of them have not; they're still very bad. If we are to catch 2015, we have to be running, and running very fast, and I'm not sure we will be able to make it by then. It's a gloomy picture, but we have to work on it.

In terms of the 0.7%, Canada is ranked as number 10 among our donors.

There's good news to tell you—it responds partly to your question. In 2001, when I took over, we had 92 donors, which includes developing and developed countries, of course. At the end of 2004, we had set a target to reach 150 donors. We have reached 166 donors. So there has been a lot of growth in the donor base, but the growth is in developing countries, which means it's a commitment by them. We had small countries...Afghanistan gave us $100, Somalia $100, but it was the political commitment that made the difference. So the growth in this donor base is very important.

In terms of those that have reached the 0.7% or above, yes, this has translated into support for us. The Netherlands...Sweden has just given us an increase of almost 30%. So those that have reached that have made a commitment to increase their contribution for reproductive health in the population. So there is a correlation, yes.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Bevilacqua.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Thank you.

I want to go back to our original...and also follow up a little on what Ms. McDonough said in reference to foreign aid.

When you look at the political structures, the judicial system in countries, how much of a barrier has that been to the work you do?

Secondly, you've probably heard of this gentleman by the name of Hernando De Soto. He wrote a book, *The Mystery of Capital*. I just want to know what your thoughts are on his theory about foreign aid and development.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: I haven't read the book, but I can assume what it is. What's his theory?

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Well, basically, it's that when you look at foreign aid, you really need to look at the structures related to the political structure, the judicial structure, the issue of ownership. As you know, once you give rights to people, that can create debt, thereby providing value to the goods or services, and in fact that's one of the ways we need to go if we want to generate the type of wealth required to implement the education systems you care so much about.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: In a sense, I do agree, if this is what he's talking about. For us, national ownership is the motivator of our work. As I said, we shouldn't be there forever and ever, amen. We should be able to help governments develop their institutional capacities to take over.

We say we have three areas that we need to focus on to ensure national ownership.

First, you need to have the correct human resources in the country. Part of our work is to develop the capacity, whether training, technical assistance, or whatever. Second, you have to have the institutions that are strong enough to deliver the services. Third, you have to have national budgets support the programs as well. These are three objectives that motivate us in all our work to move through....

Certainly we do not directly interfere with the political and judicial systems. Our advocacy work and our technical assistance work is geared towards that. When we work with parliamentarians we hope they will be the ones to ensure that laws are in place, that systems are changed, and so on. When we work with ministers we hope they are the ones who will transcend that. For example, right now we are facing a real issue in the ministries of health, where programs for HIV and for maternal health or family planning are vertical. Therefore, you have investment here and you have investment there, you have people here and you have people there, and there is no communication between them. Our position is that these issues are related to one another, and therefore it is most cost-effective to link them to each other so that women, at the community level, can go to one centre to get their maternal health, their HIV/AIDS counselling, testing, and so on, and to be able to use the same resources that are there for both objectives.

This requires a system change in the ministries of health. We are in dialogue with officials to be able to make them see the point so that the necessary changes can take place. We also do that in a different way. We are a small fish in terms of money we provide to countries. We're not bilateral, like you. The whole UN assistance is about 1% of all the aid that flows into developing countries. While you provide the funds, we provide the advocacy, the technical assistance, and so on. We try to work with donors so that in their own assistance through their countries they will pay attention to these issues and try to bring them together.

Many countries now give what they call budget support. Budget support is given to health, education, and so on. We are working with both national governments as well as the donors who are giving budget support to ensure, for example, that in the ministry of health there are allocations made for reproductive health commodities, so in the long run the countries will be self-sufficient in providing these needs, and they are also not dependent on the outside.

Nicaragua is a country you support. We have entered into an agreement over a 10-year period where they will provide 20% of the money needed to buy commodities and we will provide 80%. Every two years they will increase it by 20% and we will decrease it by 20%, until in 10 years they will be self-sufficient, and then it becomes fully owned by the government.

These are the issues we're trying to work with in providing national ownership, changes in structural systems, and so on. But the final decision is the decision of the parliamentarians and the officials in each country.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Mr. Day.

Mr. Stockwell Day: A number of MPs travelled recently to Muslim nations, and Madame Lalonde was with our group.

We are building a report to Parliament, suggesting how our relations should be with a variety of Muslim nations.

In Egypt, when meeting with various women and women's groups there, they told us that the rate of female circumcision, the euphemism for mutilation, was over 80%.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: It's 96%

Mr. Stockwell Day: We even had one tell us that. We were shocked by that. As a matter of fact, when we met with a group of politicians, men, I put the question to them whether there was voracity to that, and also whether it was an element of Muslim faith, whether it was a Koranic imperative. They suggested that it probably wasn't in the Koran. When I asked further what could be done about that, there didn't seem to be a lot of initiative to want to do something.

Have you found anything that has been proven effective to deal with that as a policy item? Obviously we have their concern for respect for sovereignty of other countries and things like that, but we were shocked by that figure, and yet we felt helpless to do anything.

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: As I said, the issue of female genital cutting or female genital mutilation, depending on your point of view, is a serious issue. In Egypt we did a survey about five or six years ago. It was at about 96%, and it holds on.

The problem is the following. In all the countries that have female genital cutting, the argument was originally a medical argument. It makes them bleed. They have problems having children. They have problems with delivery, and so on. So the issue was medicalized. Based on that argument, lots of programs were put in place. For a while, the cultural aspect was ignored.

In Egypt, female genital cutting has become medicalized in another way. It's done by doctors. Often the women we interviewed would say, “Please, just take out a small piece”, because for cultural reasons they want to say, “My daughter is circumcised, therefore her marriage possibilities are increased”.

The issue of female genital cutting is a pharaonic issue; it's a pre-Islamic issue. I come from Saudi Arabia, which is where Islam started. We don't have it. We don't even know it at all. So it is linked to the pharaonic experience and its Egypt-Africa link there.

It's very much a culturally ingrained issue linked to the cultural perceptions of women's sexuality. Women have to be passive. They have to be at the receiving end. And they don't go out and shame their family by having sexual relations. So it is a behavioural change issue that we are all now trying to work on to bring it about.

The amazing part is often it is the mothers who want it. It's not the fathers; it's the mothers. They do it believing it's better for their daughters to do that.

So unless we approach it in a very culturally sensitive way, I don't think we will succeed in dealing with it.

In Senegal, when the law was put in for that, we had to work first with the religious institutions, so that in every mosque and church... and in local African religion, the leaders of the communities had to speak out against it to make it look like they had accepted the change. It was only passed in the parliament because the voices came from the people of authority in the communities, the religious leaders. In Egypt they're working with Al-Azhar on it, and so on.

Actually, lots of our issues are cultural issues. It's not a fight over just whether the service is available or not, but is the change also possible out of behaviour? Since I came in we established a program called culture, gender, and human rights. It's clear that human rights are not being abided in the issue of women and gender, and culture impacts on that. So we are trying to study the links and see how we can access the positive values of any society—accepting diversity and working within diversity to bring about cultural change through positive values. The emphasis has always been on the negative. We need to emphasize the positive to get the community to feel ownership and then to move on with it.

● (0950)

The Chair: Good point.

Yes, you're right when you say that, because during our trip to Egypt they also mentioned that the Christians in Egypt perform this too. It's not just within the Arab communities.

I have one question for you before we close. You have done a lot of work on issues of social development and the status of women in the Arab world, where many countries are also facing huge demographic challenges, as underlined by the *Arab Human Development Report*. We know what the problems are. The question is this. The issue of the rights of women is very often sensitive in the Arab Muslim society in cultural and religious terms. What population assistance in educational approaches would you recommend to Canada and any other donor nation in order to be able to make progress in ways that can be accepted by these societies?

Mrs. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: The issue of the rights of women, especially in Muslim societies, is quite challenging and it's also controversial. It basically emerges from how Islam is being interpreted and how men are interpreting it.

There are a few things that are happening. I'll give you one personal example.

I remember my father telling me—I was married and I divorced my first husband—"Get all your rights that Islam has given you and supplement them with civil law that has not been covered by Islam", meaning don't totally reject sharia—because that's a way in, in many ways—but then develop it further.

I think this is what we need to work on. How do you interpret sharia in a new way, from a woman's point of view, with the idea that Islam itself has made a qualitative change in the lives of women from pre-Islam to now? How do you take that spirit and move on with it to be able to make a different interpretation?

We are working with Al-Azhar university. UNFPA established the International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research ages ago, about 15 years ago. We have worked with Al-Azhar over all this period for them to provide us with information on what it is in Islam that can be used to promote women's rights, family planning, and so on. Now we are in the process of taking these Al-Azhar notes and turning them into popular messages that can be used in Muslim societies as a whole.

So what can you do?

Right now the Middle East is going through a very difficult stage of instability. I think it should not be viewed that change in the status of women is what the west wants, but rather it's what is good for the country and the women. De-linking this from the western/U.S. agenda is very important for psychological reasons.

I believe working with the educational system, through youth clubs, and working on programs where young people from childhood on see issues of women and men in a different way is very important. You can invest in educational programs that bring about this kind of behavioural change from a young age. It's too late to start later. Start much younger and let the programs go up that way.

● (0955)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I would like to thank you and your colleagues for having accepted to appear before the committee this morning.

[*English*]

It's very much appreciated by our committee. Good luck. Keep up your good work.

We're going to suspend our meeting for five minutes for our next guests. Thank you.

● (0957)

(Pause)

● (1005)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): We'll call this meeting back to order.

We're now resuming pursuant to the order of reference on Bill C-25, an act governing the operation ofremote sensing space systems.

We're pleased to have with us today Professor Ferdinand Bonn, Canada research chair in earthobservation,department of geography and remote sensing at the University of Sherbrooke.

Welcome today. Thank you for coming on such short notice. We look forward to your testimony and what you have on the satellite systems.

Mr. Bonn, as I understand it, you're prepared to give a ten-minute introduction. We'll then field questions from the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn (Canada Research Chair in Earth Observation, Department of Geography and Remote Sensing, Université de Sherbrooke): Thank you. I am going to make my presentation in French, but I am happy to answer questions in either language. Sometimes, although not always, the terminology is more accurate in English.

I would like to thank you for your invitation, but also ask for your indulgence. I only received your invitation two or three days ago, at which time I knew very little about the bill in question. I have, however, read through it quickly. Tomorrow I am leaving for Vietnam; we have been involved in an earth observation cooperation project with our Vietnamese partners for some 12 years now. The projects are funded by CIDA and the IDRC, and we will be presenting our results to our Vietnamese partners at a seminar tomorrow. As you can imagine, we are somewhat frantically trying to get ready.

I quickly read up on the bill, reading both the bill itself and the legislative summary. I should point out that I am a scientist, not a lawyer. I have some 30 years' experience, both in Canada and abroad, in the field of remote sensing applications development for environmental purposes and natural resources management. My team and I have worked in Africa, we have worked with European colleagues, and we have worked in various sectors here in Canada.

My perspective is that of an end-user of remote sensing data who, as the result of circumstances, has followed developments in the field, and has also contributed to making earth observation data easier to use for various purposes. My specific fields of expertise are water and soil conservation and natural disaster prevention.

Recently, I have also been involved in fostering cooperation between Canada and the European Union in the field of remote sensing, specifically by means of the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security Program, also known as the GMES Program. I have also been privy to information on the implementation of GEOS, the international program on Global Earth Observation of Systems, which is led by the United States and in which Canada is involved.

Allow me to give you a brief overview of the situation. I would imagine that the majority of you are not very familiar with remote sensing; therefore, rather than giving you a lecture on the subject, I am going to give you a brief overview to allow you to understand the context of the bill.

Earth observation satellite data has been available since the late 60s, but really took off in 1972 with the launch of the first American satellite, Landsat, which had a multispectral scanner which offered 80-metre ground range resolution. At that time, the pool of potential end-users, working in fields such as geology, agriculture, the environment, cartography and oceanography, were not yet ready to incorporate the data into their daily work, given that technology, and in particular computer technology, was not as advanced as it is today. Furthermore, in an effort to generate interest in spatial data, certain parties overstated the advantages it offered, which, at times, had the effect of discrediting it in the eyes of clients.

A second generation of satellites came into being in the mid-80s. In particular, progress was made in the field of optical satellites, with the launch of the thematic mapper Landsat 4, which offered 30-metre resolution, and the French satellite SPOT, which boasted 10-metre resolution. The dawn of higher resolution satellites paved the way for a whole range of new uses, such as updating maps to a scale of 1/50,000, crop forecasts, deforestation monitoring and natural disaster management.

In the mid-80s, several western countries had conservative governments; Thatcher in the U.K., Reagan in the United States, Mulroney in Canada, and Chirac, not as President, but as Prime Minister, in France. At that time, governments began privatizing the sale and distribution of remote sensing data.

● (1010)

This led to an immediate, and substantial, price hike, as well as the implementation of binding copyright rules, which was first introduced by the French company Spot Image. In the wake of these changes, the United States set up EOSAT and Canada set RADARSAT international.

Scientific or environmental end-users often did not have the necessary means to buy images or data at full price. As a result, space agencies and distribution agencies had to introduce lower cost alternatives for research and training. In spite of this measure, more than 90 per cent of satellite images were not used and simply remained in archives.

Progress in the 1990's brought with it a new generation of satellites, particularly in the field of radar satellites: the Europeans launched ERS-1 and ERS-2; the Japanese launched JERS-1; and, closer to home, Canada launched RADARSAT-1. For these radar satellites special is their capacity to monitor the earth surface regardless of the amount of sunlight available. This means that earth observations can be carried out night and day, even in cloudy conditions.

At the same time, users and computer technology also became more specific. Applying data became easier, particularly in the context of geographic information systems. This gave rise to an entirely new discipline known as geomatic.

As a result of the launch of companies such as RADARSAT International, date distribution remains semi-privatized.

Further more, in the late 90's, and at the beginning of this century, optical satellites made another leap forward in terms of resolution. The Indian satellite IRS offers five meter resolution, for the French satellite SPOT 5 achieved to 2.5 meter resolution by means of a photo montage system. In addition, the Americans have IKONOS and QuickBird, optical satellites offering one meter and 60 centimetre resolutions respectively. In actual fact, these American satellites are former satellites which have been declassified and made accessible to the general public.

IKONOS and QuickBird are exclusively managed by the private sector. RADARSAT-1 is managed by both the Canadian Space Agency and by RADARSAT International, a private company which is responsible for distribution. RADARSAT-2, which will offer two to three meter resolution—which is slightly greater than the equivalent degree of optical resolution—, is currently being developed and tested. It is expected to be launched at the end of this year or the beginning of next year, and will be exclusively managed by a private company.

A few years ago, when RADARSAT-2 was first approved, the United States expressed some concerns about free distribution of very high resolution radar images, given that such images would allow for certain camouflaged military objectives to be observed. Personally, I do not believe that it would be the case, because RADARSAT-2 is a satellite which operates on C band, and C band, which has a 5 centimetre wavelength, does not offer a high degree of great penetration. This means that it would not be the radar of choice for the armed forces. In fact, the armed forces probably prefer to use radars with much longer wavelength, such as a P band or something similar, which would allow them to see into forests and underground. However, such radar satellites are not available to the general public.

I would imagine that Bill C-25 has probably been drafted in light of these considerations and as a result of the climate of fear which has existed since September 11, 2001.

During the Irak war, it was not possible, for example, to purchase IKONOS or QuickBird images on the majority of the strategic zones. On the other hand, international agreements between different space agencies and remote sensing data suppliers are also being developed. An important aspect of this cooperation has been the introduction of an international charter called Space and major disasters. It is a share initiative of the European Space Agency, the French Space Agency, CNES, the Canadian Space Agency, the Indian Space Agency, the Argentine Space Agency and the NOAA, which is the American national oceanic and atmospheric administration.

Thanks to the charter, in the event of a major catastrophe, the majority of satellites can be mobilized simply by placing a call to a hot line. The system was used at the time of the tsunami, which you have all heard about, but since the charter was signed three years ago, the system has been activated some 50 times in response to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and oil spills.

● (1015)

Everybody has heard of the infamous *Prestige*, the oil tanker which sunk off the Spanish coasts. If Bill C-25 were adopted, I wonder whether such swift mobilization of Earth observation resources would still be possible.

I would now like to turn to the questions which came to my mind as I was reading Bill C-25. In terms of principles, it is understandable that the government want there to be parameters governing the use of remote sensing systems, systems which have been primarily paid for out of the public purse, in other words, by taxpayers' money, but which are operated by private companies. I am not going to enter into a debate on the wisdom of privatization, because I believe it to be a political decision, and one which it would be difficult to go back on at this stage of play.

In my view, the bill contains certain elements of ambiguity, and is, in some ways, inconsistent with Canada's other international obligations. Allow me to give you some examples. I should point out that I have only read through the bill quickly, and have not sought legal opinion; I am simply going to highlight a few points which struck me as I was reading it.

Firstly, there are a few differences between the English version of the text and the French version. For example, “raw data” and “remote sensing product” have different meanings in English than they do in French. In the French text, the term “produit dérivé” or “derivative product” is used, while the English version favours “remote sensing product”. In French, in the remote sensing community, we often use the term “raw data” to refer to an image which has already been processed whereas, reading between the lines, I get the impression that what is actually being referred to here is what those in the radar field term as signal tape, in other words, non-reconstructed information from the initial processing of the data.

Sections 5 and 6 do not specify whether the remote sensing systems referred to have to be Canadian. Furthermore, paragraph 6 (d) seems to extend the scope of the legislation beyond Canadian borders. In the remote sensing field, it is perfectly common place to have data receiving stations situated in various places around the world, as it is to have an Internet-based distribution system with File Transfer Protocols. How will it be possible to manage this legislation and jurisdictions which are not our own? That is a question to which I have no answers.

I would now like to raise another important point. When the bill refers to remote sensing, it is as if the same operator were responsible for all the various elements of the system. The bill's definition of a remote sensing system is not necessarily reflective of reality. In real life, there are situations where the satellite operator is in one country, the receiving station is in a second country, and the companies responsible for data distribution are in a third. In such cases, how will the operator be able to maintain absolute control of the system? On this point, I would refer you to clauses 8(4)(a) and 8 (4)(b), which deal with licences in foreign countries.

Canada is a full partner in the international GEOSS program, which was ratified and extended at the third Earth observation summit, which was held in Brussels last week. The 10-year GEOSS plan which included clauses on universal access to data, with certain restrictions related to the degree of resolution, was approved at the summit. The plan also includes clauses on the interoperability of space systems, and clauses on making remote sensing products almost universally available, and virtually free for developing countries. It would seem to me that clause 8(4)(e) is inconsistent with these principles, to which Canada must adhere as part of its international commitments.

The Canadian delegation which approved GEOSS program was headed by the Department of the Environment, and supported by the Department of Agriculture and Agrifood, the Canadian Space Agency, Natural Resources Canada and the Office of Critical Infrastructure Protection and Emergency Preparedness. In spite of this, and although they are the principal consumers of remote sensing data in the federal government, these departments appear to play only a minor role in Bill C-25.

● (1020)

In particular, these departments do not appear to be involved in the process of granting or revoking licences, which is referred to later on in the bill.

Under the Canadian Constitution, the provinces are responsible for managing natural resources and tend to be voracious consumers of remote sensing data, which they use, for example, for updating forestry inventories and agricultural statistics. For this reason, several provinces contributed financially to the development of RADARSAT-1 in return for free access to certain data concerning their territory. I know that at least Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta contributed financially to RADARSAT-1.

The bill does not make explicit mention of agreements with the provinces, who will, therefore, be treated like ordinary commercial clients.

Furthermore, there are differences between the English and French versions of clauses 8(6) and 8(7). The French version uses the word "and", while the English version uses the word "or". For example, the English text states the following:

[*English*]

> The conditions may include requirements that, in specified cases or circumstances, the communication of the raw data
>
> (a) be subject to the Minister's prior approval; or
>
> (b) be done only under a legally enforceable agreement, entered into in good faith, that includes measures respecting their security or their further communication.

[*Translation*]

In the French version, no mention is made "or". The two are not, therefore, identical. This is something which can be noted on several occasions in the bill. The English version always uses the word "or"—that is to see—either one—whereas the French text appears to imply that both criteria have to be met. That is my understanding of the bill; I am not a lawyer, but I think that a little proofreading is required.

Lastly, in clause 8(6)b), we read that the receipt, communication, processing and storage of these data are not controlled activities. In other words, on the one hand, ministerial control is being requested, but, on the other hand, it is stated that such activities are not necessarily controlled. Personally, I had some difficulties in understanding this part of the bill. Perhaps if I had spoken to a lawyer I would have been able to understand it. In any event, my questions are on the use of the famous "or" and controlled activities.

Furthermore, the whole matter of granting and cancelling licences seems to me to be somewhat difficult to apply. The explanation of causes leading to licence cancellation makes no mention of a licence operator potentially being bought over by a foreign company. The bill assumes that the satellite operator is Canadian. However, the possibility of the operator being bought over by a foreign company is very real and, given that we're dealing with private companies, is something which could happen at any time. Stock market law dictates that a profitable company will be sought after.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman, but the parliamentary secretary is making it somewhat difficult to hear the witness.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): The parliamentary secretary was only drawing my attention to the clause that Mr. Bonn referred to about the minister not being mentioned. I apologize for that.

Please continue, Mr. Bonn.

● (1025)

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: Okay. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): We're at about 18 minutes.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I am about to finish.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): That's fine. Take your time. We're interested in what you have to say.

You're on a roll here. Keep going.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I would like to come back to the issue of the vulnerability of a private operator under foreign control.

Clauses 14 and 15 make also mention a possible interruption of service and priority access. However, RADARSAT-1 was successful because data was made available extremely quickly. By way of example, let us consider the fact that the European Union regularly uses RADARSAT-1 to monitor fisheries off the coast of Iceland. The European Union buys satellite images from Canada. RADARSAT-1 is the satellite of choice because its data is more user-friendly and is made available in a shorter timeframe than images generated by European satellites. If data supply is no longer guaranteed, and becomes subject to unexplained interruptions, clients may well turn to non-Canadian suppliers. My concern on this front is rather professional.

I will not go into detail on the inspection and sanction mechanisms which are described at length in this bill. If the bill is to be adopted, I think that inspection and sanction mechanisms will be required. That seems perfectly reasonable.

My final queries are to do with the involvement of departments other than those mentioned in the bill. In particular, I have questions about the main environmental clients, in other words, those dealing with the Kyoto Protocol, ice and the atmosphere, natural resources, geology, forests, cartography, the Canada Centre for Remote Sensing, and agriculture and agricultural statistics, especially as regards Canadian grain exports. It is important for Canada to have access to reliable agricultural statistics, not only on our own agricultural production, but that of other countries as well. There is also the Department of Fisheries and Oceans which deals with oil spills, navigation and so forth. Lastly, I would point out that the provinces and international aid projects are the primary consumers of this sort of data.

It seems to me that little attention is paid to the role of these stakeholders in the bill. Is there any possibility of an expanded interdepartmental committee studying how the act could be implemented with a greater degree of flexibility?

I will end on that note. Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Bonn.

Just to instruct the committee, we have another committee that meets here at eleven, so we're going to be pushed for time. We're going to really keep you to four to five minutes, starting with Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Professor Bonn.

This has been most interesting, most fascinating, and it's a very difficult discussion for us. I thought I knew a little bit about it, but obviously I don't know much. And thank you to Madam Lalonde for recommending your name.

The international context concerns me. Some of the other presentations we've had.... You really have to wonder about...you know, we've talked about shutter control and those sorts of things. This is international. It's up there. It's not just looking at Canada.

I guess I'm concerned about shutting off the information after the fact. How do we deal with that? Does this act deal with that? Do we have adequate control?

I recognize the value of this. I'm a farmer, and I recognize the value of what you just said about mapping world crop outputs, looking after potential famines, you know, being able to have food ready to deliver to an area that isn't going to have a crop. Those are wonderful opportunities. But we have some risks here.

There are a number of other things I would like to address, but we'll try to keep the questions short.

Could you address this? Is it dealt with adequately in this bill?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I think the question of delivery and possible shut-off of the system is really dealt with in the proposal within the optics of security issues for Canada, issues that might prevent Canada from either managing its own security or fulfilling its international obligations. And I think it's reasonable, because security is always on top.

In the present-day operation of RADARSAT-1, the top priority for programming the satellite is a maintenance system to keep the satellite alive—and that's normal—and the second top priority is probably disasters and natural hazards, these kinds of things, where you need imagery quickly.

The most famous case was the Manitoba flood in 1997, where the RADARSAT data were sent operationally to the crews on the ground and they knew where to go to protect...and to erect the dikes, and so on. And there are other places in the world where these things can happen.

So the possibility of shutting down the whole system might be potentially detrimental to Canadian commercial operations, because a country that buys remote sensing data has a learning curve, to get used to.... RADARSAT does not operate the same way as the European satellites do or as the optical satellites do, so there is a learning curve and investment on the side of the customer. They will do that if they are sure there will be guaranteed delivery for operational use, but if you don't have that, or if you have that *épée de Damoclès*on top of the delivery, then there might be a risk for the Canadian commercial operators not to have a big enough consumer base internationally.

I don't know if I'm clear with that.

● (1030)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Do you have another one?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Would you elaborate on your quick comment about sanctions and inspections?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I did go over this section quickly, because if the bill is adopted, it will need something. A law cannot be enforced if it does not have power, so I think that's part of it. I didn't go into the detail about how many days you have to go in and send an inspector and so on. I'm not a lawyer at all, but my feeling is this is a normal procedure if you want that law to be enforced.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): The minister does have the power to revoke or not to issue a licence. Are you suggesting that clause 10 wouldn't be enough sanction, that there should be other sanctions over and above that?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: No, my concern was more that the major ministries involved in remote sensing—which are basically the external affairs department, first, and then the defence department, and then the Solicitor General for the emergency preparedness aspect—are not there. Environment Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada are the major users in Canada.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): All right. We can come back to that.

Madame Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Bonn. Unfortunately, you have to leave, and time is running out. I will try to cut to the chase.

Do you not feel that the problem lies in how priorities will be determined when the company becomes completely privatized? From what we have been told, a company wishing to do business with RADARSAT-2 will be able to get priority service by paying a higher price. Could that not result in a conflict between RADARSAT-2's commercial gains and its responsibilities to the government?

Secondly, would it not be rather difficult to foresee Canada international obligations?

When the director of RADARSAT-2 appeared before the committee, he told us that we ought to clarify what is meant by activities relating to Canada's international relations constituting a priority. There seems to be a problem on this front. You are very familiar with the workings of RADARSAT-1, do you have any idea as to how we can solve this problem?

● (1035)

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: When I read through the bill, I got the impression that the question of priority was fairly clearly defined regarding matters of national security. The RCMP is mentioned, and so forth. Issues of national security and natural risk have to be considered. If we take the example of boats and ice, we see that these are very important questions. An oil tanker running aground is very problematic.

However, obviously, a private company will give priority to the client who pays the most. Nevertheless, I think the bill contains provisions which strengthen the minister's position and allows him or her to say that security matters supercede all else.

There is talk of security and, after that, there is a brief sentence on Canada's international commitments. It is very vague; international commitments would include GEOSS, the Kyoto Protocol, agreements with FAO, or, for example, early warning of famine in Africa. That is something which is very important, and it is thanks to remote sensing that we are able to provide early warning. International commitments is a very broad term. I fully understand why the company's CEO had queries on that point, it could include virtually anything. However, I do not have the answer.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: But do you have any suggestions that might be of help to us?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: Perhaps more detail should be provided on what is understood by the term, but it is not something which can be exhaustively defined. If you try to draw up an exhaustive list, it would become too restrictive from a legal point of view. I think that an effort should be made to identify national priorities.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Can I ask another question?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Yes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you.

The first time that we met, I expressed concerns about the missile defence shield, even though the government had announced its intention to say that Canada would not be involved. The fact remains that we are dealing with a private company which could, for example, be approached by American companies. You said that, technically speaking, it is possible to change the direction that a satellite is facing.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: Allow me to come back to that point.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Is that not what you said?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: We once turned RADARSAT-1 when we were mapping the Antarctic. The satellite was turned in the opposite direction, because it was unable to monitor the South Pole due to the way the orbits are formed. It was a risky operation. We managed to do it, and it was a great success for RADARSAT-1, but it really is a satellite which is intended for earth observation purposes. So, even although RADARSAT-2 offers a three-metre resolution, one would not be able to use it to detect objects moving about in the atmosphere. A whole other range of systems is used for that purpose.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you.

Do I have any time left?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Fairly well. You have nine seconds, no eight, no seven.

Yes, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): I will be very brief.

It has been suggested to us that exports of this data ought to be governed by the same regulations which govern the export of military goods. I would like to hear your opinion on that subject. In my view, if we are talking about security, it would seem rather logical to apply the same regulations to images generated by remote-sensing satellites as those applied to military goods.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I think that people are getting a little carried away as regards strategic information that can actually be reviewed by RADARSAT-2 images. Certainly, some information can be extracted, but the images really do not contain that much information which is truly military or strategic. We have enough problems as it is getting information with RADARSAT-1. For example, soil moisture is very important to people working in the field of hydrology, predicting floods, and so forth. These are questions which are virtually still at the research stage. RADARSAT-2 will be more effective, because it will have multipolarization, etc. However, as military targets are often very small, there is a fairly significant risk that they will be confused with other objects. I therefore do not think that C band RADARSAT-2 will be of much military use. If it were P band, for example, then that will be a different kettle of fish.

● (1040)

Ms. Francine Lalonde: They are the ones who say they can do these things.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: The capacity to detect the presence of ships is indeed very important. It will be very easy, and very important, to be able to locate boats such as oil tankers, fishing boats, and trawlers. The Coast Guard will indeed be able to use the satellite for this purpose. However, I have my doubts about using it to monitor submarines. It certainly cannot be done if you are under water. Perhaps if you are on the surface, but I do not think so.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you.

Mr. McTeague.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Bonn, thank you very much for being here today. You have been most helpful. I would also like to thank Ms. Lalonde for having drawn you name to our attention.

I have consulted with some officials from the department. Your comments on the wording of the bill will be taken into consideration to ensure that your proposed changes be implemented and that the differences between English and French version be amended.

I have to apologize to the chairman. Earlier, he asked me to correct the text to reflect the nuances of your comments on « *or* ».

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: It is a mistake which is made on several occasions.

Hon. Dan McTeague: I did not want to, Ms. Lalonde, but he asked me to do so.

Your presentation is really interesting on certain points. In clause 14, it is stated that : « would be injurious to Canada's conduct of international relations or inconsistent with Canada's international obligations ». One witness said that the definition ought to be fairly broad to allow us to meet our obligations,

[*English*]

in essence, that we cast a wide enough net to ensure that international obligations indeed reflect the essence of what Canada has a responsibility to do. Given your concern about shutter control, that it's confined to the two ministers, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and National Defence, I'm wondering if we can resolve these things by cabinet. But it seems to me the whole essence of why we have regulation is primarily because of security and Canada's interest within that.

That, in essence, is what you're saying. Is that correct?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: Yes.

Hon. Dan McTeague: How would you propose to expand it to, say, agriculture or to, as you mention, I believe, the Kyoto Protocol? There are other considerations, to be sure, and the Kyoto Protocol is an international treaty, but it doesn't deal, I suspect, with the question of security, although it may deal with the question of international obligation.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: If you look at the Kyoto Protocol, it is directly related to the extent of tropical forests, for example, and RADARSAT is one of the best tools to map the extent or the changes in tropical forests under cloudy conditions, because you cannot have optical imagery to do that in an operational mode.

So Canada might be willing to monitor the changes in tropical forests in order to contribute to the global current budget of the planet, and this is part of Kyoto. There might be a certain number of issues like that, where these kinds of data will be useful. There is no other way, I would say, to make a global current budget other than—

Hon. Dan McTeague: I understand that, but would you want the government to exercise shutter control in that circumstance?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: No.

Hon. Dan McTeague: So clearly you have no concern about the departments of foreign affairs or defence within that very defined area?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: No, but if they do shutter control for a security reason somewhere, then maybe the acquisition of data for other purposes might be affected. That's what I wanted to say.

● (1045)

Hon. Dan McTeague: I understand that. I'm just saying that in terms of how one exercises shutter control...and of course even the questions of whether or not there would be compensation in those circumstances are there. The exercise here for us is to ensure that something is not taken by a client on behalf of whoever; that is, taking a picture of, say, troop deployment in Afghanistan that might wind up in the wrong hands. I think that's quantifiably different from the concern about the soil conditions in Afghanistan, unless for that reason.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I understand that. That might be a very targeted, limited shutter control. I have questions about the practicality of that.

With us, foreign affairs has a committee that can use, case by case, any image request that is going to be sent to the company. They can look at it and decide whether it's sensible or not sensible. How will it work in practical terms? It might generate a lot of bureaucracy somewhere between the government and the company in the day-to-day operations.

Hon. Dan McTeague: I take your point. I think this is captured in the sense that what we have here is very limited, very definable, reasonable grounds—and we're back to what the lawyers think are reasonable grounds. That's a fairly interesting comment.

How do you then proceed with ensuring that it's done for very specific reasons? We're dealing with a private enterprise that is selling its products to clients, but we don't want those products to go necessarily to those clients. That's why we want to make sure they're licensed and registered, so we know who they are, and that there is an understanding that this won't, for purposes of national interest that also are our treaty obligations, fall into the wrong hands.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I remember when there was that arms ban for South Africa during the apartheid period. People were not allowed to sell anything to South Africa during that period. I imagine that if some customers are legally blocked by a government request of the company, that they are not allowed to sell, it might be okay, but then people know there are always ways to go around that. You have third parties in between.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Are you suggesting the penalties may not be severe enough to prevent that from happening? Your concern is circumvention. Are you suggesting the penalties—removal, suspension of licence, etc.—contained in clause 10 are not broad enough or specific enough to prevent that from happening?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: It's difficult to say. Maybe the system is lacking flexibility.

Hon. Dan McTeague: I don't know how flexible you can be on questions of security.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: Yes. I understand.

Hon. Dan McTeague: I don't think we'd be going.... I think you quite rightly pointed out....

[*Translation*]

You said that Bill C-25 came about as the result of September 11. I do feel that this really is the reason why we are here. It is not only a matter of regulating the private sector, but, rather, on above all, it is a matter of ensuring that the defence of our country be a priority.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I fully agree with you on that. We have to recognize that technology has evolved; RADARSAT-2, with its extremely high resolution, will be the world's most advanced radar. However, there is more than RADARSAT-2 up there. The legislation is more generic, and refers to any remote sensing system. Canada's next earth observation mission will be a hyperspectral mission. It will probably be principally focussed on issues of water quality, soil quality, the stress which vegetation is under, irrigation and the like. These are issues of interest to society, but which, to a certain degree, could also have a strategic interest. For example, the early warning of a pending famine is very important from a strategic point of view.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Bonn.

Ms. McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate very much your attempt to educate us on another aspect of the legislation we're dealing with. I think we're all admitting that there's a big stiff learning curve for us.

I wonder if I could ask you to comment on a couple of suggestions that were put forward by previous witnesses, if I can do them justice. There was a suggestion that responded to some of the concerns we were raising about ensuring that there is some kind of normative framework within which this legislation is lodged—in other words, some way of making explicit the public interest that needs to be served, notwithstanding the privatized operation we're now facing in terms of RADARSAT-2.

Second, there was a suggestion that there needed to be an independent regulatory body that would be dealing with such matters. This raises the question of what's there now and what needs to be developed.

Third, I guess the question was raised, so some of us now are trying to grapple with this question, of whether this legislation should exist for the purpose of dealing only with remote sensing satellites or whether there is a need for a broader, more generic piece of legislation that would deal with the whole range of satellites, not just remote sensing. I wonder if you could comment on that.

Finally, you've raised the question—which again has been very much before the committee—about there being nothing whatsoever in the bill to deal with the possibility, and it's certainly not impossible, that the now Canadian-owned company that owns and operates RADARSAT-2 might in fact sell it into foreign hands. What should be done to address that?

● (1050)

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: For the last question, I think the only way, if Canada wants to keep control, is probably the revocation of licence. It is possible, but the text does not address this specific issue of the company being sold to foreign interests. Maybe it's raised somewhere else, but I did not see this in the text.

I think it should be in the clauses for revocation of licence. There should be something. It's important to keep Canadians in control of this system. It's Canadian taxpayers' money, and it's important information for Canada.

On the other side, the independent committee, there was in the past, several years ago, an intergovernmental panel on remote sensing .

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Do you mean federal and provincial?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: No, it was at the federal level.

When the concept of RADARSAT-1 arose, there was a committee called the Canadian Advisory Committee on Remote Sensing, which had representatives from the different ministries—agriculture, fisheries, and the space agency. I was part of that committee in the 1980s.

The RADARSAT concept itself was developed under the guidance of this committee. I think something like an interministerial or interdepartmental advisory committee would be a wise thing, so the interests of the different departments would be balanced in the decision-making process. Also, sometimes you have pressing issues, and it's difficult to pull that committee together and so on.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: What about the normative framework specifying what the government's intention is with respect to the public interest being served? I guess that's more of a legal framework question than it is scientific.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: The definition of public interest is something very important. Canada must show its ability to manage its resources and to take on security, and to do it for the well-being of everyone. There is some need for balance between different things. You cannot have a black and white answer on these kinds of things.

● (1055)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Bonn.

We'll go to Ms. Stronach for a very short question and then just a point by Mr. McTeague.

Ms. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Do other countries have similar legislation that they're contemplating at this time?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: The situation is different because the only country that has completely privatized observation systems at present is the U.S., which has those two companies, DigitalGlobe and another one that operates IKONOS. For the other ones—for example, the Europeans—it's the European Space Agency that operates the satellites, so it's under government control anyway.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you.

Very quickly, Mr. McTeague, just a point.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Bonn, you'd suggested to Ms. McDonough some concern that you had about the transfer of the licence or of the ownership. I'm wondering if you're not satisfied by subclause 16 (1), which is very clear:

> No licensee or former licensee shall permit a command to a remote sensing satellite of the remote sensing space system for which the licence was issued to be given from outside Canada or by any other person unless the licensee or former licensee

And it goes on. There is obviously ministerial oversight on this—and in fact it amounts to a prohibition—on the transfer of control.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: But if you see paragraph 16(1)(a), it says "can override the command from Canada". That's okay. If someone can command the system from a foreign country, but you can override that from Canada, it's okay. But you can override it from Canada by belonging to a foreign-owned company. You can be located in Canada. That might be the point to look at in this clause.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): It's a point to consider.

Ms. Lalonde, we're out of time, but we're just going to let you have the last question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you.

I would like to continue on the subject. In the case of RADARSAT-2, the private company in question will become the owner in return for its financial contribution. If that company was to become majority owned by an American company, as has already happened in the past, it would no longer be eligible for a licence. However, that is all what the law stipulates, from what I understand, the company would remain the owner of RADARSAT-2. If that is not the case, then it should be stated in the text. Otherwise, it is only the operation of the satellite that is controlled, which, I would imagine, means that it would be possible to move the satellite and even operate it out of the United States. As the text stands, would it be possible to operate the satellite from the United States?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I am not an expert in legal affairs. Therefore, I would not want to answer that question.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Would it be technically possible?

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I know that the Europeans joked about RADARSAT-2 being a Canadian funded American satellite.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Okay. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: That is a great note to end on! Did you hear that? Would you mind repeating it for the benefit of the parliamentary secretary? Just to make my day.

Mr. Ferdinand Bonn: I was saying that when RADARSAT-2 is discussed at remote sensing symposiums in Europe, the Europeans say that it is a Canadian funded American satellite.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Yes, but the company must always hold a Canadian licence.

[*English*]

You can be Chinese, American—it doesn't matter.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: No, but the ownership can be—

[*English*]

Hon. Dan McTeague: I understand, but I mean my point is important because you must have a licence to operate. It doesn't matter what country you come from.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): We have to conclude there. Thank you very much.

We have the chair from the environment committee here. They are supposed to be meeting. You know, those environment guys can get pretty pushy after a while, so we want to conclude.

We want to thank you, Mr. Bonn, for coming. Certainly your testimony today has given us a great deal of help. We'll go through the blues and see the written testimony. We appreciate your being here.

Just before we suspend, I would like to make a suggestion to the chair. Because we go to clause-by-clause the first Tuesday we're back, can we try to get our amendments in by Friday, March 4, so we have an opportunity to see from the government side and from all of the different parties the different amendments that are there, and we can be better prepared for Tuesday, March 8?

Ms. Francine Lalonde: And may we hope for some changes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): And hope for some changes, Ms. Lalonde says.

So do we have a consensus on that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Agreed.

Thank you very much.

We adjourn.

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