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Chair

Mr. Bernard Patry

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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.)): Now we're no longer in camera.

We have a motion from Madame McDonough regarding Haiti's state of election readiness, Canada's ongoing involvement in training the Haitian military police, evaluation of Canada's involvement in Haiti since the removal of President Bertrand Aristide, and assessment of the impact of Canada's involvement in removing President Aristide on Canada's relationship with CARICOM, the Caribbean community.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): The principal objective I want to underscore is that it is really appropriate for us to hear from the foreign affairs minister at this point on these issues. I think everybody's very concerned about the wildly differing reports and reviews of what is happening, whether it's around the issue of whether elections can proceed under the current circumstances or not. There are very different versions of what's happening, and there are a lot of concerns about the question of whether a truly democratic election can take place with the amount of violence that's occurring, and so on.

Canada is in on this; we need to know what our current governmental position is, and the minister is in a position to report to us, it seems to me.

The Chair: Mr. Paquette is next, followed by Mr. McTeague.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): The problem isn't the principle of the motion, but rather the wording. As far as we're concerned, the "removal" of Aristide is already a matter of debate. The motion could read "departure of President Aristide", without any kind of qualification. The use of the word "removal" conjures up the very claims made by Aristide himself. Furthermore, we support the UN resolution

Therefore, if Ms. McDonough were willing to substitute the word "departure", which is neutral, for the word "removal", then we would be on side. However, we have no wish to endorse the theory that Aristide was removed from office.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. McDonough, did you understand the request of Mr. Paquette? Section c) of the motion says, "Evaluation of Canada's involvement in Haiti since the removal...". According to the United Nations, it was a departure. It was not a removal in itself. It's the same thing in section d).

• (1210)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: People have various opinions on the removal and how it came about. We could debate it, but I don't think that's the point of it. I mean, it's a fact that he was removed, and the question is—

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: No. He left office.

[English]

Ms. Alexa McDonough: What we want to talk about is where we are now. That is really the issue, so—

The Chair: Here is my understanding, Ms. McDonough. When we talk about departure, it could be removal. You could ask a question of the minister about whether it was removal or not removal. I would not mind that, but on the motion itself, section c) as it is written right now is subject to discussion, and I would prefer to see the word "departure". He left. How he left is another point of view.

I am in agreement with changing it.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: You know what? If it's a euphemism we're looking for, we could call it "departure". I don't want to get hung up on that. I guess we have differing views; I think the record is fairly clear.

I want to get back to my objective, which is to hear from the minister and the appropriate advisers.

The Chair: If you want to get a consensus on this committee, you should use "departure" instead of "removal" in both c) and d).

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I do so to facilitate the objective, which is to get the minister and the officials here. I don't do so because I agree with that interpretation of it.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): I believe there is consensus between the two parties of the opposition. We have not heard from the official opposition.

Mr. Sorenson, I'm sorry; I didn't want to jump in front of you.

We have no trouble with bringing the minister in, and we have no trouble with this motion, as it has been suggested that the one word be changed. It is subject to the timing, of course, which I will leave to Mr. Sorenson to make some comment on. We have no difficulty with bringing the minister.

The Chair: Ms. McDonough, I will go to Mr. Sorenson, and I have one request.

Mr. Sorenson.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): First, we fully support hearing more on Haiti. We recognize that Canada does have a role in Haiti. We have 100 people there helping with maintaining the peace, and it's always good to have an assessment of how it's going and what we're doing there.

However, it goes back to our future business as we look at the timetable. It hasn't been all that long ago, but I think it was last spring when the minister and an ambassador came to speak on Haiti one morning, and hardly anyone from the committee showed up. There wasn't a huge turnout to hear what was happening last spring. Maybe something has been happening this summer, and maybe we should hear again of what's happening there, but we've just gone through future business and every time slot there is pretty precious. Would this be taking up one of our time slots in the next—

The Chair: No, I don't intend to take one of our slots. It could be an evening or it could be another slot. I want just to be sure that we agree in principle about this.

I have one request from Madam McDonough. You've put in the minister—that's fine—the Prime Minister's special adviser, and the Canadian ambassador. If we just get the first two, I want to be sure it's okay with you. I'm not even sure we can have the Canadian ambassador—we can see—because he has some work to do there, and his time is precious there, concerning the next election and things like that. I just want to be sure that if I have two of the three, it's enough to call them. To get all three together at the same time... I'm not sure.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I think that's really the most.... I would hope we would extend the invitation.

I just want to respond to Kevin Sorenson's point, and I believe I'm correct in this—please correct me if I'm not. I don't think this committee had the ambassador before it. What happened was an individual member arranged a meeting that wasn't a meeting of this committee, and some of us turned up. You're quite right; it was surprising how few people turned up, given the urgency and the currency of the issue. But I don't believe we've had the ambassador before this committee. It was a completely informal—

A voice: It wasn't this committee; it was a special morning—

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: You chaired it.

The Chair: I chaired it. Yes, I remember.

Monsieur Paquette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: First of all, I want to know if in fact the word “departure” was substituted for the word “removal”.

• (1215)

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Fine.

Secondly, there's a small error in the French version of the motion. It should read: “[...] l'ambassadeur du Canada en Haïti [...]”

Thirdly, I'd like to know if we could possibly invite NGO representatives at the same time. I know that a number of NGOs work in the field. For instance, if we heard from the Minister at 1 p. m., we could allocate the other hour to these representatives, without having to specify this in the motion per se.

Fourthly, I want to remind you that we also adopted on June 15 last Ms. Lalonde's motion calling on the committee to examine the situation in Haïti and to consider the possibility of asking the House of Commons to grant MPs permission to travel to Haïti.

I simply wanted to remind you of this motion as we begin our work for the fall.

[*English*]

The Chair: I want to answer you. The motion of Madame McDonough is about the same as the one of Madame Lalonde. But I don't think we're going to be granted permission to travel to Haiti. First of all, there's no money left for international travelling in the budgets I defend until January. If you ask me, until January, don't think to travel there. Security of the members also is very important.

We'll try to find a spot and maybe get an NGO. The North-South Institute is very important. There's Droit et démocratie also, from Montreal, with Mr. Roy. You'll see an ability to make a certain sense concerning this situation.

But if we all agree with this motion of Madame McDonough, with the removal or departure of both items (c) and (d) it would be amended.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Is there any other business?

Merci beaucoup. The meeting is over.

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