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Chair

Mr. Bernard Patry

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• (1105)

[Translation]

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

[English]

My name is Bernard Patry. I'm a member of Parliament, and I chair the foreign affairs and international trade committee in the House of Commons in Canada. There are very few members in the foreign affairs and international trade committee—there are 12 members.

As a minority government, we are also a minority in the committee. There are five members from the government side and seven members from the opposition—four from the official opposition, the Conservative Party; two from the Bloc Québécois; and one from the NDP, the fourth party in the House of Commons.

Welcome to Canada. We are very pleased to have you here from the Council of Europe. I must say that after 9/11 we had a meeting like this one a few years back, and we're very pleased to have you here once again.

I am also pleased to have with us Mrs. Milne, the Canada-Europe chair, and the previous chair of Canada-Europe, Mr. Charles Caccia.

Welcome, Charles. It's always a pleasure to have you here.

This morning it's going to be quite easy. I'm going to co-chair with Mr. Ates from Turkey. There will be two topics. The first topic will be UN reform, and one of the vice-chairs from Canada, Mr. Sorenson, will speak about this.

From PACE, we have Mrs. de Zulueta. Welcome.

On the second topic, preventive war, responsibility to protect, we have Mr. Timmermans from PACE, and from Canada, Madam Lalonde.

Mr. Ates, please.

The Acting Chair (Ates (As an Individual)): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are very happy to be here today with you in these beautiful surroundings and to have this opportunity to share our thoughts on major international problems. We in Europe, especially in the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, often tend to forget that Canada lies on the other side of the Atlantic. We share the same values, and our problems with regard to key political challenges are close or similar. It is all the more important to get together and have a

close look at these challenges. That is why we are grateful to our friends, the Canadian delegation at the Parliamentary Assembly, for the initiative of organizing these meetings here today.

Two of our colleagues, as you mentioned before, will make short introductions on two major files we are working on now. Mr. Timmermans from the Netherlands is preparing a report on the concept of preventive war. We have just had an initial exchange of views on this issue, and we are looking forward to hearing your standpoint.

Mrs. de Zulueta from Italy is working on a report on the UN. Both reports are to be finalized in the months to come, and your contributions today will be most welcome.

I'll stop here and give the microphone to you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ates.

We'll give about 30 minutes for each topic. We'll start with Mr. Sorenson.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Good morning. Again, we welcome you to a great fall day in Ottawa. We're very pleased that you're here now and not when the snow will be falling, perhaps in a month or two.

This morning we want to deal with a number of issues that our chairman has already mentioned. I think one of the priorities that all countries in the world must look at is the relevancy of the United Nations.

In the past, different leaders have questioned how relevant the United Nations is. Is it becoming more relevant? What is the role of the United Nations, given the different issues that different parts of the world are facing? We have seen in history other groups, such as the League of Nations, that diminished to what some would call a debating club. We want to make certain that the United Nations does not become such an agency or body. Is the United Nations relevant? I think the answer is yes. The United Nations is very relevant, and we must work hard to make it more able to meet the needs that the world sees.

I think most of us—most Canadians—believe that United Nations reform is paramount if it is going to be relevant. It must be aimed at developing cooperation in favour of international peace, security, and development.

I think our committee over the last month—yes, sir?

Is there no translation? Apparently the German translation works. The French and the Russian translation aren't working. The German and Russian—

The Chair: We have a problem. We have some static, and I was just told by the clerk that it's going to take 15 or 20 minutes to change all this. We cannot wait 20 minutes because we only have an hour.

What we're going to do is keep going in English and hope for the best.

Go ahead, Mr. Sorenson.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Perhaps the difficulties we face here today are reflective of the difficulties we have in the world. Someone is talking, but is anybody listening, or is anyone understanding? That's the question.

When we talk about the United Nations, we want to make sure we all have the opportunity to speak and that everyone listens and understands the direction the United Nations wants to go in.

Last month, our committee spent a week at the United Nations, in New York and in Washington, assessing the reforms that we had hoped we would achieve, that the United Nations was looking at, and that we were very disappointed did not come to fruition.

Canadians take great pride in the inclusion within the document of the United Nations reform of a few paragraphs that set out the principle of the responsibility to protect. The responsibility-to-protect clause is one that Canada takes a great deal of pride in, but other countries perhaps, and even many Canadians, question what it actually means. Does it have meaning if people are not going to respond and carry out what the responsibility-to-protect clause is there for?

For example, Canada and the United States have failed to convince the world that more must be done to protect hundreds of thousands of Sudanese citizens who are being raped, murdered, and displaced by militia backed by the Khartoum government. Sudan has insisted that only African troops can help protect African people. Other countries are reluctant to become involved in this.

These, again, are some of the issues we look at when we talk about the United Nations. We want to hear your thoughts and discussion today on that. We have gone through the scandal with the United Nations' oil for food program, and again, all this diminishes the ability of the United Nations to be relevant when people are questioning its relevance.

I think with that—I know we're on a very fine timeline, Mr. Chair—we can discuss some of these and many other issues. We talk about security, developing humanitarian efforts, and developing countries. I mean, these are the big issues and issues where the United Nations really has to step up to the plate.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sorenson.

We'll now go to Mrs. de Zulueta.

de Zulueta (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Patry, for this opportunity for an exchange of views.

We came with high expectations because of the long tradition of Canadian support for multilateralism and for a treaty-based notion of security. The world has a debt to Canada for, for example, the Ottawa Convention and many other efforts to strengthen the UN.

I'd just like to quickly tell you about what the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is doing and has done in this field. As those among you who have followed our work in Strasbourg know, the assembly has a long history of support for the UN, and this is almost self-evident, given the role of the Council of Europe in the worldwide architecture of multilateral institutions.

We also think the Council of Europe has some relevant areas of experience and competence that can be of interest in strengthening the UN efforts at improving security worldwide, for example, the possibility to follow up on the implementation of conventions. The European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has a follow-up mechanism, which is the Council of Europe Anti-Torture Committee. This, as you know, is being imitated with the additional protocol on the UN Convention Against Torture.

I think these particular efforts are extremely timely, given the context in which we are operating today. I had a glimpse of the cover of *Time* magazine, and it's raising the question about the protection of Canadian citizens who have been tortured abroad.

The latest step we took in our attempts to make our support of the United Nations constructive and coherent was a resolution we voted in 2004 on which I was rapporteur. Before that we had done a resolution on the role of the UN in Iraq and a number of others.

We had meetings with a high-level panel before it closed its report, and we adopted a number of their lines of thinking in our resolution, giving full backing to a process of reform that would strengthen the capacity of the UN. We are disappointed, as you are, Mr. Chair, by the outcome of the September summit. I think you could see the details by reading the resolution itself, but we address the question of the reform of the Security Council, given its lack of representativity and also the paralyzing effect of the current veto system. We also devote some attention to the General Assembly, given that we think it should be revitalized and restored as the premier decision-making and political body in the UN system.

What I'm working on now is an attempt to prepare a report and a resolution on the parliamentary dimension. The assembly has reached a consensus on the idea that if the parliamentary dimension was strengthened in the UN, this could be of some help in improving transparency, accountability, and the democratic credentials of the organization.

We had a very interesting exchange of views with Dr. Heinbecker yesterday; we found him extremely thought-provoking and helpful, and I'm very grateful for this opportunity. Dr. Heinbecker, like the Human Security Centre at University of British Columbia, gave a timely reminder to us all that in spite of the loud declarations as to the irrelevance of the United Nations today, it has actually served us remarkably well in the last decades. Not that this detracts from the urgency of reform; indeed, quite the contrary, but it has contributed to reducing both the number of victims of violent conflict and the number of conflicts themselves. I think this is an important and interesting point to follow up on.

• (1120)

However, the statistics only reach to 2003, which is the year of the launch of the war against Iraq. That particular conflict has broken all the encouraging trends that appeared in reducing both the level of mortality and the number of conflicts. That is a very violent conflict, in which very high numbers of both civilians and combatants have lost their lives.

So the thought—and I'll close here, Mr. Chair—we have for which I am preparing a draft resolution to accompany my report is that the parliamentary dimension would be of advantage, as I said before, in restoring the democratic deficit. It would also help create an opportunity of parliamentary oversight and improve the follow-up to the decisions taken by the General Assembly, for example.

Here I refer to the Cardoso report. As Dr. Heinbecker pointed out to us, it lacked a strong political champion in the discussion that ran up to the general assembly in September. Lacking a political champion, it seems to have slipped out of the attention of both the Secretary-General and the member states.

However, Cardoso has some interesting thoughts on how parliamentarians could and should be involved, and he points out that their involvement should be systematic. We add that it should also be linked to the deliberative process of the General Assembly, and finally, that this participation should be democratic, legitimate, and representative. Parliamentarians can add something if they actually improve the democratic dialogue, represent opposition and majority views, and improve, as I said before, the accountability of the assembly as a whole.

Our hope is that we could work toward setting up either a network of parliamentarians who would meet on a regular basis as a consultative body under UN auspices or a network of regional assemblies. Perhaps also—and this is a Cardoso idea—there could be parliamentary committees composed of parliamentarians who would work on UN priorities. Dr. Heinbecker suggested parliamentarians in the fifth committee, the budget committee, as a strong step in that direction.

I would be very interested to hear your own thoughts on this subject.

Thank you.

• (1125)

The Chair: Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much.

Are there any other colleagues on either side who would like to comment on Mrs. de Zulueta's or Mr. Sorenson's comments? Any questions?

[*Translation*]

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Goulet from France.

Mr. Goulet (As an Individual): Colleagues, joint chairs, you will not be surprised if I speak again following my comments at yesterday's meeting. I think we have to be realistic. I am opposed to some extent to the creation of a new parliamentary structure. Whether we call it a network or a committee, we are heard neither by the European Parliament, nor by the OSCE. I think that while this motion may be very ambitious, it is also very utopian, in my view, because it will be very expensive. Better governance does not mean establishing new structures that automatically involve new administrations.

On the other hand, parliamentarians must be heard, and the best way to do that may be to use existing structures. I want to talk about our ambassadors, who, in each country represented here, could report yearly or twice yearly on their activities and give an overview of the situation to their respective national parliaments. I think that would give us a guaranteed follow-up. That is my motion.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Goulet.

[*English*]

I know the translation doesn't work that well. I'll try to translate a little to English what Mr. Goulet just said.

He's opposed to a new structure—that's his main goal, to oppose any new structure—because it is very costly. He says it's Utopian to have another structure, even a parliamentary structure, in the United Nations. This is his opinion, but he said also that we should have the ambassadors in our own countries come to talk to parliamentarians about their activities in the United Nations.

I want to pinpoint here that our committee has the possibility, and it's within our duties also, to call any ambassador from anywhere in the world to appear in front of the committee. In Canada we can do such a thing. And we do it. Sometimes we have called ambassadors in depending on the subject in the country when they're serving.

Merci, Monsieur Goulet.

Are there any other comments?

Mrs. McDonough is the foreign affairs critic for the NDP party, and she is the former leader of the NDP party here in Canada.

Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to give a heartfelt welcome to our visitors and applaud you on the work you've been doing around the parliamentary dimension.

I actually just returned late last night from the United Nations, where I had an opportunity, as part of the 60th anniversary celebrations and also in the kick-off of the United Nations International Disarmament Week, to speak on behalf of the Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament. This was in conjunction with the Mayors for Peace as well.

I have a very specific question. It's obviously a big leap from where we are now to establishing the kind of parliamentary assembly that you're talking about. I'm wondering if there are those among you who might comment on the interim step that the Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament, to use one example, might provide as a kind of incremental step in the direction of more direct input from parliamentarians.

I think it's fair to say, and I don't think any of us across party lines would disagree, that Canadians are overwhelmingly multilateralists. I think there was great disappointment in Canada that at the September summit there wasn't more progress made with respect to UN reform with respect to the non-proliferation treaty review process in the spring. It was devastating that it really fell apart.

I wonder if you would comment on whether you feel, if there was more involvement from the grassroots mayors, from parliamentarians who represent people on the ground, there would be more likelihood of being able to get our own government to be more reflective of our own citizenry, and whether you see this as a positive development in the direction of meaningful reform and a more effective outcome from the UN agencies and the work we're all very much committed to.

• (1130)

The Acting Chair (Ates): Thank you.

Are there any more comments from this side?

I see none.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I know that you always speak French, Mr. Paquette, and that is your right. However, if you wish to avoid having me translate—

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): No, you translate much better than I could speak English.

I just wanted to mention, while acknowledging the difficulties raised by Mr. Goulet, that the fact remains that there really is a problem with respect to the role of parliamentarians in international bodies. Whether at the United Nations, the World Trade Organization or elsewhere, the states are represented, and within our own countries, parliaments are increasingly marginalized in favour of the executives. In this respect, I take note of the document, but this leads me to a point which I consider unavoidable.

Here in Canada, for example, Parliament never deals with treaties. That is a privilege of the executive. Recently, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien decided that Parliament would vote on the Kyoto Protocol. However, if there had been a decision on the war in Iraq or some other matter, the government would absolutely not have had to put the issue forward for debate.

This bothers me a great deal, and I think it creates not a mistrust, but rather a certain indifference among people with respect to the work done by parliamentarians, because people get the impression that the decisions are made elsewhere. In that regard, the comments put forward seem relevant to me. Perhaps we will in fact have to devise a more effective way of guaranteeing parliamentary input within the various institutions. But there is an unavoidable problem here.

I would conclude by saying that even with respect to the organizations of civil society—I'm thinking of the World Social Forum, for example—it is very difficult to organize a forum of parliamentarians, but civil society feels the need to give parliamentarians a role, and that is something that our states sometimes have difficulty acknowledging.

So I do think we should continue to think about our role within these bodies.

[*English*]

The Chair: Briefly, what Mr. Paquette just mentioned is that there is an international problem, as he phrased it to respond to Mr. Goulet, in the sense that parliamentarians don't have much room within our governments or any governments in the world—as he mentioned, in the United Nations and the WTO also—and for that reason he thinks the reflection about parliamentarians with the United Nations is something we should go on to discuss. Maybe it's not going to happen, but we need to discuss it, because it's quite important not to marginalize all the members of Parliament of every country.

He also said that here in Canada there is a big difference between the executive and parliamentarians, in that any treaty is a resort of the executive, and even if the government asked the opinion of the House of Commons, of parliamentarians, it's not bound by their decision; it's up to the executive to go ahead, as in the case of Kyoto.

I also have Mr. Chong—very rapidly, because we need to go to the second subject. I have Mr. Chong and Mr. McTeague. We'll go to the R2P—“responsibility to protect”—after.

Mr. Chong, I'm sorry, you'll be second.

Mr. McTeague.

• (1135)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, thank you. Welcome all.

I will be very brief here. Concerning the evolving role of the United Nations and its international role, I'd like to canvass your ideas as it relates particularly to regional organizations such as the Council of Europe.

That's as brief as I can be, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame de Zulueta, do you want to respond?

[*Translation*]

de Zulueta: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will try to do what you do in Canada when you make your speeches in your great country's two official languages.

I feel encouraged, even though our comments have been very brief, because I think there is a consensus on the principle underlying our attempt to draft a resolution.

I would like to say to Ms. McDonough that we too try to be realistic and to come up with a procedure that moves forward progressively, or incrementally, as you said. This could be an initiative promoted by the organizations and the regional assembly which would independently assume responsibility for mobilizing parliamentarians in order to strengthen the United Nations. In particular, we could have a discussion subject on a matter of great urgency, such as the responsibility to protect. However, there are many others.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I hope we will have an opportunity to explore this discussion in greater detail, because I feel a consensus is emerging.

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Ates): Thank you, Madame de Zulueta.

We know this parliamentary dimension of the United Nations is a new concept. The Council of Europe started to work on it, and we appreciate your contributions. The big things start very small. Let's see how much we can achieve along these lines at the United Nations. What can we do? We'll see in the future. Again, we appreciate your contributions.

The second topic is going to be presented by Mr. Timmermans. He is from the Netherlands and is preparing a report on the concept of preventive war. This is also a very interesting and new subject, and the Council of Europe is working on it.

Now I give the floor to Mr. Timmermans.

Mr. Timmermans (As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'll try to be as clear as I can to avoid misunderstandings around the table.

First of all, I would like to thank our Canadian colleagues for their hospitality, which is really wonderful. We're having a great time here in Ottawa.

I also want to thank them for the opportunity to discuss this topic with them, because Canada is one of the very few countries in the world where this issue has been studied very thoroughly. Many ideas have come forward from Canada on issues such as humanitarian intervention and other issues relating to the latest developments in international relations. So I specifically want to thank you for contributing to the discussion and invite you to continue the dialogue with us on this topic, because it's a very difficult topic to develop. It's tempting to take a very clearly defined stance on what is not allowed by international law, thus avoiding a discussion, perhaps a very painful discussion, on some of the realities of international relations.

If I can summarize, my own position in this report, or what I'm trying to achieve with this report, is to prevent preventive war, without being naive about what is actually happening sometimes in this world and without being naive about the possibilities that preventive action can have in preventing large-scale catastrophes, be it with weapons of mass destruction or be it in the humanitarian sphere.

Many of us, and especially on the Canadian side, have seen the publications...we would have loved to have seen preventive action

taken in the Great Lakes district, instead of having to witness the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people while the Security Council debated details of definitions.

So coming from that background, we need to define the concept or limit the concept of preventive action, to embed it in international legal safeguards so that it is not misused as it has been in the recent past. It can be an instrument, a legal instrument, within the framework of international relations today that can help us prevent atrocities and prevent unleashing wars with weapons of mass destruction.

That is the background of the report. It gives, until now, a very extensive analysis of what has happened in history with this concept, but we will have to give it more political dimension in the coming months, leading up to the final discussion probably in the April session of the Council of Europe. I once again would like to invite you to participate in this discussion and help us make a good report.

Thank you.

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame Lalonde, you want to reply briefly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I would like to say a few words about Mr. Timmermans' excellent report.

There has been a great deal of debate about the concept of preventive war at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade and within Canada. We are the neighbour of the United States. We have talked a great deal, and we developed an idea based on the fact that the UN Security Council did not approve the U.S. preventive war. I think that in the final decision, this was an extremely important issue.

Mr. Timmermans' report gives a very good overview of the issue. He suggests two types of conclusions which, in terms of international relations, are unacceptable. In both cases, the result is a power struggle. In his conclusion, he states:

[...] [TRANSLATION] we can [...] nevertheless allow the realistic view whereby States will only feel bound by international law if this is in keeping with their overriding national interest [...]

He adds:

[TRANSLATION] We must therefore prepare ourselves to include in international law a definition of the difference between preventive war and preemptive war [...]

This nevertheless brings us back to a power struggle.

I'm going to speak about the international community and what we were able to do at the time of the Iraq war. There was a broad coalition of people who were opposed to this war. The reason the United States and Great Britain were able to go forward is that power was on their side. However, we cannot build an international community based solely on the power of certain members, because that means we will always have to give in to it.

Whether we like it or not, the United Nations remains an extremely important institution. Either a reformed UN some other power over the years, will not be able to avoid a challenge from another power at some point. This is not an optimistic view, it is an international relations view, hence the importance of the Council of Europe and the parliamentary assemblies which put forward changes that might enable us to resolve conflicts in ways other than force, and particularly other than war.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde.

[English]

Thank you.

I'm not going to translate everything, because I would prefer to have all your comments. I'm just going to say that Madame Lalonde said that we're the neighbour of the U.S., and we've debated that subject many times in our committee. We're very pleased that the General Assembly accepted its responsibility to protect in the last meeting. We hope the Security Council will do something pretty soon about this because we feel it's very important for the future of the world.

I will accept some comments.

Mr. Chong, please.

Mr. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The first thing I want to say is

[Translation]

welcome all of you to Ottawa and to Canada.

[English]

Second, I want to say thank you to Mr. Timmermans for your report and all the work you have done on it.

[Mr. Chong speaks in Dutch]

I find the report interesting. It's nuanced. The world isn't always black and white, and I think you've pointed that out in your report.

One of the interesting things I found was that you seem to come to the conclusion, or to present the possibility, that preventive war, or what is also known as the Bush doctrine, may be legitimate in certain circumstances.

So my question, what I put out there for all members here, especially for those members of the delegation...[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Chair: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Mr. Timmermans: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]...the Bush doctrine on a par here. Of course, we're all thinking about the Iraq War, but when I remind you that if we had abided strictly by what the Security Council wanted, Milosevic would still be in Belgrade and would probably still be murdering in Kosovo today.

It is logical for us to think about the latest developments when discussing these issues, but we should keep, I believe, the broader context in mind. When I talk about preventive war, I don't want to be

put into the same batch with the neo-cons who want to restructure the world regardless of what the rest of the world thinks about that, nor do I want to strictly only think about the Iraq situation. We have to take the broader context into the discussion, because we will face in the future other Rwanda-like situations where perhaps we cannot immediately come to an agreement, for instance, in the Security Council, but humanitarian needs will oblige us to act.

Just look at the disgraceful way in which the Darfur crisis was treated, where there was a lot of bickering about the definition of what genocide was. Everybody knew this was genocide, but nobody wanted to call it genocide, because then, of course, immediately the obligation would come into play to actually act and do something about it.

So, please, let's keep the context as broad as possible and not narrow it down simply to what the Bush administration is doing in Iraq.

• (1150)

The Acting Chair (Ates): Thank you.

Does anyone from the Council of Europe side wish to comment?

Yes, Madam de Zulueta.

Russell-Johnston (As an Individual): I really just wanted to say one sentence.

I very much sympathize and go along with the approach that Mr. Timmermans has already outlined, and I quite understand that he wants to have some clear—would it be blue—water between himself and the neo-cons.

What worries me, as somebody who has for a long time believed that there are certain conditions in which the old principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state can be breached in order to defend human beings, is I fear that if Kosovo had happened post-Iraq instead of before Iraq, we probably would not have intervened, and that is an alarming thought.

The Acting Chair (Ates): Madam de Zulueta.

de Zulueta: I was wondering if Mr. Timmermans might consider renaming his report, referring to the Canadian proposal as the obligation to protect. A disquisition on the definition of preventive war seems to lead into a thicket of misunderstandings, and it is too closely associated with the concepts that were outlined in the U.S. strategic concept as outlined by President Bush and as endorsed by a neo-conservative agenda on military intervention, which is very different from the thinking behind Mr. Timmermans' report.

So I was wondering if we might consider renaming his report.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Timmermans, thank you for this report and thank you for your very timely intervention. We are very pleased, of course, with the recognition of the thrust of responsibility to protect and the initiative by our Prime Minister, Paul Martin, and the success he's had, certainly as far as international norms are concerned.

I want to move one step beyond the question of principle and norm in international law and to the operational side of things, particularly as it relates to trying to provide, or to build, international capacity to respond to things like war crimes and genocide, crimes against humanity. In regard to places such as the Great Lakes region within Africa, which I think you mentioned, I'd like to canvass your ideas in terms of how we equip, or how we better enforce, regional organizations such as the African Union to be able to respond more effectively, more immediately. And if in fact that is part of what I would consider beyond the question of normalizing the concept, but also putting it in its proper context and to actually put it into practice, as it were, to create an operational situation, working with our regional partners can be far more effective than the actual concepts would betray, certainly in terms of some of the conflicts as to whether or not a particular organization based out of a particular part of the world could be more effective given the regional dimensions of many of these conflicts.

• (1155)

The Acting Chair (Ates): Mr. Iwinski, please.

Iwinski (As an Individual): Thank you. Very briefly, almost as briefly as Mr. Russell-Johnston.

Frankly speaking, it's a very interesting report of Mr. Timmermans. It seems to be an *essai scientifique* on the political preparation, and such an approach has a lot of advantages. Let me say this. Like a professor of the university, putting aside being politicians, because to be politicians, at least in Europe, is always transitional work—you can be prime minister, minister, deputy, but it's not a profession.

Coming to conclusions, I'd like to say that this discussion about pre-emptive and preventive war lasts all of the 5,000 years dating back to the beginning of the China state.

In fact, *nihil sub sole novum*, to quote an old Roman Latin proverb; there is nothing new under the sun.

So we could discuss this. This is very interesting. The only pity is that unfortunately it has been transformed into realpolitik, and realpolitik is this world.

We should as parliamentarians probably only aim at again sending it back to the university cathedrals.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ates): Thank you, Mr. Iwinski.

Mr. Timmermans, would you like to respond to these interventions?

• (1200)

Mr. Timmermans: Absolutely, with pleasure, Mr. Chairman.

First, there is the issue of possibly renaming the report. I want to give it some thought, but we have to keep in mind that the obligation to protect is more or less limited to humanitarian catastrophes, whereas the concept of preventive war also talks about action when a state is presumed to have and presumed to want to use weapons of mass destruction, which is a different situation.

I don't want to avoid a discussion and analysis of this second situation. I understand it would be a lot more comfortable to avoid discussion on it and to concentrate solely on humanitarian issues, but

I think it would be, in a way, politically slightly dishonest to avoid a debate on what we do with what have been called rogue states that acquire the capability of using weapons of mass destruction, when other states see this as a threat to their very existence and therefore want to prevent the use of those weapons of mass destruction. I believe this is an issue we cannot avoid talking about.

Second, there were Mr. McTeague's remarks about regional organizations. I fully agree with him that one of the tasks we will have in the near future is to empower regional organizations to take care of regional issues themselves. We've seen some promising developments in Africa in the last year, with the Organization of African States taking up a number of peacekeeping tasks at great peril and risk to themselves, and doing so with a lot of courage, very often, and also success. But I also see the tendency of western countries to use that as an excuse to themselves become disengaged in Africa, and that would be of course the worst possible outcome of the situation.

I believe that if we want to empower regional organizations to take care of these issues themselves, we have to show commitment, not just giving them some money, but commitment also in committing troops, activities, rebuilding, and other humanitarian efforts to show them that the solidarity we extend to them remains, even if they take a greater responsibility. In that context, I would fully share your views.

Finally, to my colleague Iwinski, yes, of course I have chosen a scientific approach in preparing the report, but rest assured that this report will have to lead to a resolution, and resolutions in our organizations are always political. You might find me over-ambitious, but my ambition is to make a resolution that will find majority support in our organization, defining our views on how this issue should be tackled within an international legal framework.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I have one comment and a question just before closing.

My comment is that the responsibility to protect started after the new millennium, at the request of Mr. Kofi Annan. He requested our Prime Minister to launch a study concerning that responsibility to protect. He came out with a good report, and it is a little bit more than just about humanitarian catastrophes. I think it involves many other matters. It is mainly preventive.

We are focusing on preventive measures. You talk about Africa. If we had this in Côte d'Ivoire.... I'm very involved as worldwide chair of the parliamentary francophone association. We need to work with these international bodies, such as the Commonwealth, la Francophonie, and all these bodies, because we can do a lot by prevention.

The fact that it has now been accepted by the General Assembly and is going to be discussed in the Security Council is a major step by the General Assembly. After that, even if we don't succeed 100% because of the sacrosanct view that you cannot touch the sovereignty of a country, within the responsibility to protect you could make an effort to ask the countries to really work much more than they are right now. Looking at what's happening in Sudan, I think we can succeed as parliamentarians in pushing our governments in that direction.

My question is, what are your thoughts on the proposal to give the UN its own military capacity by giving it a permanent rapid reaction force? That's another issue.

Mr. Timmermands: Here I react purely, of course, not as a rapporteur, but in my national capacity as an MP. My country and my party are strong and staunch supporters of this idea, and we've fought alongside Canada for many years to bring this across. And also the previous administrations in Canada—we're going to see Lloyd Axworthy this afternoon—have done excellent work in this field. Small arms, land mines—these are really historic achievements of Canada that have always had the full support of the Netherlands.

On the issue of the UN being able to dispose of its own troops, this has always been a joint initiative of our two countries that I strongly support. But again, this is purely a comment in my national capacity.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

That's all the time we have. Our committee is sitting 15 minutes from now, and we also have some other issues. I hope you find the

visit here in Canada very useful, and we're looking at the possibility of seeing you.

Did you want to add something, Mr. Ates?

The Acting Chair (Ates): I would like to thank you again for these stimulating discussions. Let's hope we can keep this close relationship between Canada and the Council of Europe. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Before we close, I will ask the president of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, Madam Senator Milne, to say a few words.

Do you want to say something?

The Hon. Lorna Milne (As an Individual): Yes, please.

Thank you, Dr. Patry.

I just want to assure all the delegates who are here that they assure us that this sound system will be working properly by this afternoon, and I can assure them that if it's not, heads will roll.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are adjourned.

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