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—
Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (1020)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Chairman, on a point of order, I know everybody is anxious to hear from the minister, and I'm no exception, but I want the assurance of the committee that we will deal with the next order of business, which is committee business, before there's any recess for a lunch break. It's extremely important we do this in terms of having balanced, diverse witnesses and in terms of my motion, which was not put on the order paper, although I got it in well before the traditional five o'clock cut-off yesterday.

The Chair: Madam McDonough, I think what we've seen here is that we're late getting started. This committee has been called back in order to hear from the department and in order to discuss the evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon.

I can assure you that we will be dealing with committee business. When that's going to be, I'm not prepared to make any assurance. If, all of a sudden, we go through and we don't hear from the minister long enough, or from those witnesses who are slated.... Certainly, we're on a timeline right now.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: We're in a severe crisis that Canada has got to take some responsibility for. I'm asking for the assurance and consent of the committee that we deal with the committee business about how we're going to proceed with witnesses and motions before we take a lunch break. Or are we just going to have people look on and say, we're all out to lunch?

This is really a very straightforward request, and I don't mean it to be obstructionist in the least. I'm asking for assurance from the chair that we will deal with that matter before we break for lunch.

The Chair: At the present time I'm not prepared to give that assurance, because on this committee each one has their say. When we come around to committee business, or if at 11:50 someone makes the suggestion we do this—and obviously the opposition has more say in a minority government—the committee business will be dealt with. But the timing of committee business will depend on when we listen to the minister and to those witnesses we've called for this meeting.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I register my objection that there's not a willingness to commit to dealing with this priority before a lunch break, but I completely concur that we need to get on with hearing from the minister.

The Chair: I think the sooner we hear from the minister, the greater the opportunity and chance to move to the other things that are on this agenda will be.

I call this 15th meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development to order. This meeting has been called pursuant to a request made under Standing Order 106 (4) of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. The stated reason in the request for this meeting was to deal with the evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon, to deal with how Canada is working with its international community in the evacuation process, Canada's role in humanitarian aid, and also the crisis in the Middle East.

This was brought forward initially by four letters, and those were the reasons that this committee was called back.

We welcome you all to Ottawa on a very warm day. We are so pleased that this committee has so much attention drawn to it. We recognize the crisis that the world is in. We recognize Canada's evacuation of Canadians and how important that is. We look forward to hearing from the minister.

Minister MacKay, welcome to your committee. We look forward to hearing from you.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for the important work that we are about to undertake.

I want to begin by reiterating on behalf of the Government of Canada our grave concern for the victims of violence on all sides of this conflict in Israel and Lebanon.

Canadians have been profoundly affected by the crisis in the Middle East. For many, that experience has been deeply personal and deeply painful. Individuals and whole communities have anxiously awaited the safe return of their loved ones, and sadly, among the war dead are 10 Canadians: UN observer Major Hess-von Kruedener; a Canadian killed in military service, Lieutenant Tom Farkash; and what I would consider to be the height of the harm of innocents, the eight family members from Montreal, the El-Akhras family, who were killed in this conflict.

Families have grieved the loss of life, and all have lamented the tremendous suffering of innocent Lebanese and Israeli civilians caught in this crossfire. I want to extend again, on behalf of the government, sincere condolences to the families of the victims, both from Canada and from abroad. Our thoughts are with them, and words cannot begin to convey the pain and the suffering that they have experienced at this troubled time.

The loss of a loved one at any time is difficult. In these circumstances, it is beyond the comprehension of most of us, having never experienced a conflict of this nature.

I'm grateful as well for the active interest and attention by my parliamentary colleagues on this issue. I thank you for taking the time away from your families and summers to be here with me in Ottawa, where I have been for the balance of the summer, to discuss this most important issue that has captured world attention.

My appearance before this committee affords an invaluable opportunity to detail the government's extensive efforts to, firstly, protect Canadians, respond to humanitarian needs in Lebanon, promote sustainable peace in the Middle East, and finally, articulate the way forward from our perspective.

The safety and security of Canadians is of the utmost concern to the government. Put simply, there is no higher priority or obligation upon a nation. The safe return of Canadian citizens was the pure motivation and goal that we undertook from the beginning of this crisis. For this reason, extensive efforts were undertaken to meet the urgent needs of all Canadians seeking to flee the deteriorating security situation and return to Canada.

I am very proud of the work undertaken by officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and numerous other departments, including CIDA, DND, Citizenship and Immigration, Public Safety, and the Canada Border Services Agency. We continue, to date, to do everything we can to assure the safety and security of Canadian citizens and contribute in a positive way to the crisis in the Middle East. We continue to do so efficiently and safely, and the conduct that we have seen throughout this evacuation has been nothing short of extraordinary on the part of Canadian public servants.

I applaud the heroic efforts and the extraordinary exploits of the dedicated members of the public service who made this evacuation happen. I witnessed first-hand the best example a minister could possibly experience of public servants putting the service to Canadians at the highest level. My appreciation and admiration for them could not be overstated.

I have been involved in this file from the beginning, and I've spoken directly to officials throughout. I've engaged with my counterparts in Lebanon and Israel, colleagues from the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and others—a host of nations that have been involved. I've attended briefings with the task force that was set up in the operations centre in the early days of this conflict, spoken with our ambassadors and officials in country and out of country, and intervened on a number of personal cases and heard directly from some of the victims as to the impact that it was having on their lives. I've met as well with members of the Arab, Lebanese, and Israeli communities here in Canada and heard their stories.

The Prime Minister was similarly engaged and personally involved, in one instance, in the evacuation of citizens from Cyprus.

• (1025)

Suffice it to say, there were many Canadians in need of help, and our government, given the enormous challenge of the distance, the number of citizens, and the assets in the region—which I will discuss further—responded quickly, effectively, and with compassion and diligence. As you are already aware, this involved putting in place

the requisite mechanisms and capabilities to accommodate an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 Canadians in Lebanon.

This evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon is by far the largest effort ever attempted in our country's history: 13,052 Canadians were evacuated. All but a very few are currently back on Canadian soil. This was the second largest evacuation by any country—the first being the United States, where only half of U.S. citizens have currently returned. The third largest was France, with approximately 8,000; Australia with approximately 5,000; and the United Kingdom, 2,300.

To put this into context, 500 Canadians were evacuated from Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, 200 were evacuated from Côte d'Ivoire when the crisis erupted in West Africa in 2005, and even fewer were evacuated from the Cayman Islands and Haiti in 2004. This evacuation of over 13,000 Canadians to date from Lebanon represents an initiative several times larger in scale and scope than all of those prior four operations combined. No other country, except for the United States, has taken more citizens out of harm's way and returned them to safety, without casualty or injury, I might add. The United States took out 1,000 more and had aircraft carriers at their disposal. Countries like Brazil and Sri Lanka, with populations of foreign nationals in the country similar to ours, have evacuated far fewer.

A series of interrelated factors compounded the considerable challenges that this huge operation presented. They include as follows: the rapid deterioration into a rolling and continuous war zone; the Israeli sea blockade, which created a 12-hour window to move ships in and out of Beirut harbour; basic road, bridge, and airport infrastructure damage, which included the Beirut international airport and for all intents and purposes prevented air evacuation without helicopters, of which we had none in the region; the deterioration of communications networks in Lebanon, as many phone lines and radio towers were taken out in the early days; serious capacity shortages in Lebanon's port infrastructure—in other words, only so many boats could dock, and we were sharing limited space with numerous other countries; high international demand for the limited commercial maritime capabilities available for immediate use in the Mediterranean Sea led to a bidding competition with many other countries; the distance between Canada and Lebanon itself being half a world away; and the relatively small size of our embassy in Beirut, which had a complement of 32 staff—nine Canadian-based and 23 locally engaged—which eventually grew to 48, in contrast with the largest resident Canadian community, an estimated 50,000 people, one of the largest of any western country, in Lebanon.

It also involved, as you know, the fluid situation that required the redeployment of DFAIT and other Canadian government personnel within the region. That is to say, we took a number of individuals from other embassies and consulates in the area but had a real logistical challenge to get them in. As I mentioned, we were reliant upon other countries—for example, Cyprus and Turkey—to transport them into Beirut.

There was no Canadian embassy in Cyprus, but an honorary consul; while Mersin and Adana, the two ports that were utilized, were halfway across the country of Turkey, where our embassy is located in Ankara, again requiring challenges necessary to draw down on Foreign Affairs personnel in the region to bring them to those two locations.

• (1030)

[Translation]

Moreover, at that same time as Canadian officials were exerting maximum effort to coordinate a massive operation, the security environment was rapidly evolving. Parts of Beirut, southern Lebanon and northern Israel were becoming veritable war zones. The crisis was deepening rapidly in an unpredictable fashion.

In this context, Canadian officials in Lebanon, Israel, across the Middle East and in Ottawa were mobilized to respond as efficiently and effectively as possible.

[English]

No one, not even the Lebanese government, foresaw the events and the violence erupting so quickly or taking such great consequences for civilians as we saw in the last three weeks. The chronology of events that follows serves as a useful outline for the actions undertaken and the issues, logistic and otherwise, involved in Canada's evacuation.

For several years, Hezbollah has been launching rockets into Israel. They stepped up that violence intentionally, and with the purpose of provoking Israel. On July 12 Hezbollah, a listed terrorist organization, attacked Israel, killing eight soldiers and kidnapping two others after crossing a UN-established border in the south of Lebanon. They provoked a country that had seen similar attacks from Hamas just weeks earlier. Israel responded to the provocation by launching air, ground, and naval offences.

Our actions began immediately. We contacted all embassies. I might note that all embassies do have evacuation plans, but certainly not ones for situations of this magnitude. The airport, as you know, was closed almost immediately as a result of bombing raids that destroyed the runway. Air travel, which is the normal route for evacuation, then became a closed option.

Less than 24 hours after those initial incidents, on July 13, a travel warning for Lebanon was issued, and relevant information was posted on the Internet to apprise Canadians of the evolving and dangerous situation on the ground inside Lebanon. During this time, I remained in constant contact with departments and officials and monitored events.

The following day, on July 14, a decision was taken to convene a departmental task force.

On July 15, the crisis call centre and a full interdepartmental task force were put into operation, involving departments across government. These included the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, CIDA, National Defence, Citizenship and Immigration, Public Safety, and Canada Border Services Agency. Inquiries and assessments as to the available modes of transportation began at that time.

At that point, Mr. Chair, repeated messages to Canadians were being conveyed from multiple channels, both in Beirut as well as back home in Canada. Internet, calls, and a warden system began in earnest. A warden system, I should explain, involves volunteers in Lebanon who literally go door to door to bring information to areas of the country that are less accessible or that may not have the same degree of Internet or telephone capability.

On July 16, airplanes were chartered and contracts signed with evacuation vessels harboured in ports on the Mediterranean. Now, with the requisite capabilities identified and an evacuation plan in place, the evacuation began in earnest. Turkey and Cyprus were acting as the staging points for onward travel; that is to say, this was a two-stage process: after evacuation from Beirut, there was a necessity to then arrange for air travel back to Canada directly. It was during this time that the focus was on communication with Canadians inside Lebanon and their families in Canada—not the media or the broader public—and on securing the capacity to evacuate.

On July 17, the embassy in Beirut began to contact individual Canadians to inform them of the evacuation plan. By this time, the number of registered Canadians had doubled, from 11,000 to 22,000. That number would eventually approach 40,000 by the end of this past week.

Both the Prime Minister and I were actively engaged throughout these initial stages, including direct consultation, as I mentioned earlier, with our Israeli and Lebanese counterparts to require and request their assistance for safe passage of Canadians being evacuated from Lebanon.

The initial evacuation of Canadians began on July 19. Over the course of the next week and a half, over 13,000 Canadians would be moved to safety.

The initial delay, I might add, was the result of clearances sought from the Israeli naval blockade. We had received assurances that we passed on to the ships that we had contracted from the private sector. They sought further assurances; they were not satisfied with the initial documentation that we provided from the Israeli army. We sought those further assurances and received them, and I made a call to the Israeli foreign minister at that time to gain further assurance.

The following statistics, Mr. Chair, demonstrate the sheer magnitude of this operation: our call centre received and responded to more than 35,000 calls and over 12,000 e-mails in the three-week period beginning July 13. At the height of the evacuation, 5,000 phone calls per day were being made by Canadian officials to our citizens in Lebanon, to help pass information and provide them with the information necessary to expedite their evacuation.

• (1035)

Further, to support the evacuation, 358 officials were either redeployed from Ottawa or reassigned from abroad to embassies or consulates in Beirut, Cyprus, and Turkey to assist Canadians in transit, including 174 from DFAIT, 150 from DND, and 34 from Immigration and CBSA. Many of these officials remain on the job on the ground in the region today to support ongoing efforts, because as you know, this evacuation is not complete.

For DFAIT alone, this deployment was more than five times larger than the tsunami crisis, which was the most recent experience, where we deployed 28 DFAIT officials in two weeks. I would add that it was done during a period of rotation, meaning that the standard change in personnel in the field was under way and a number of officials were on vacation. Many of those officials, I'm proud to say, returned to the job. Many volunteered and came off vacation time to spend time in the operations centre.

It clearly required a large number of officials flying out to the region with a few hours' notice, and people were working around the clock at all locations. Serious concerns for officials' health and well-being were expressed by many, including the Prime Minister and me.

To support the 24/7 operation crisis centre, 175 DFAIT employees volunteered their services. Many worked astronomical hours on an overtime basis. I have to say on a personal note that I bore witness to the incredible spirit of patriotism and commitment to the safety of Canadian demonstrated by those officials.

[*Translation*]

In addition to departures by ship from Beirut, we have also conducted an evacuation operation in order to bring people out of the port of Tyre in the south of the country, where the situation continues to be of great concern. Unfortunately, due to the difficult security situation, only a small number of Canadians were able to reach the port.

[*English*]

Canada was instrumental in evacuating others, such as Austrians, Ukrainians, Africans, and Americans, who wanted to leave Lebanon, in what is indicative of the role our country is playing on the international stage. There was great cooperation between nations in this exercise. When others asked for help, we were there. Similarly, some of those countries I've named and others helped Canadians.

I want to repeat that the success we've achieved in mounting this tremendous undertaking is due in large part to the Canadian public servants, who responded to the call of duty with remarkable professionalism and dedication. I want to express my gratitude to the hundreds of members of the Canadian public service, including those in my department, who put in tireless hours for the safe return of Canadians. Their efforts under challenging and often volatile circumstances and conditions merit our utmost respect and recognition. Canadians have every reason to be proud of the work they did in helping fellow citizens to safety.

Canada is also tremendously grateful to Cyprus and Turkey for their invaluable assistance in supporting the evacuation. I've expressed that to the foreign ministers of both of those countries, whom I saw recently in Rome. We also thank the governments of Israel and Lebanon for their efforts in allowing safe passage of our citizens out of Lebanon.

I would like to turn our attention now to the humanitarian needs.

● (1040)

[*Translation*]

Since the onset of hostilities, Canada has expressed deep concern regarding civilian casualties, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the growing number of internally displaced persons.

We joined with our G8 partners in St Petersburg and I went to Rome last week to call for urgent efforts to address the humanitarian impact of the crisis. We have urged Israel to exert the utmost restraint and seek to avoid civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure.

[*English*]

We have also been a strong advocate for the safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel to facilitate the delivery of immediate humanitarian relief to Lebanese in need. One of our vessels was used to assist Doctors Without Borders ship urgently required medical supplies and equipment to Lebanon on July 29.

I am aware of numerous offers of personal assistance from Canadians, as well as provinces, who have expressed a desire to assist in the humanitarian aid relief.

To date, Canada has announced that it will provide \$5.5 million to respond to pressing humanitarian needs. This was announced in advance of the international donors' conference request from the UN coordinator, Jan Egeland. Your next witnesses from CIDA will be able to address the specifics of Canada's humanitarian relief efforts in more detail.

Overall, however, the international community's humanitarian response must be accompanied by parallel efforts to achieve a sustainable and permanent ceasefire. In this regard, Canada fully supports the G8 summit declaration that emphasizes the importance of a cessation of the actions, which destabilized the region, and identifies a progressive plan of action, to which the Prime Minister was a signatory on behalf of Canada on July 16.

The plan, Mr. Chair, which we continue to support with our partners in the international community, includes a call for Israeli soldiers to be returned unharmed, and for an end to the shelling and rocket attacks on Israeli territory, and to the casualties Israeli civilians have suffered. We also believe that the utmost Israeli restraint is needed to avoid, as far as possible, civilian casualties. The responsibility for the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers is an obligation that must be fully respected under the international humanitarian law. There has to be a ceasefire, Mr. Chair.

Canada has participated in multilateral efforts to put an end to the violence, to find a diplomatic solution that is fair and equitable, and to encourage more dialogue. We are, and remain, in close contact with our allies and all countries seeking a solution. I attended the conference in Rome of the expanded Lebanon Core Group at the invitation of the co-chairs, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Massimo D'Alema, and the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

Canada was given an important voice at the gathering, and the statement that emerged reflected the consensus of participating nations of a further expression of Canada's position—specifically, a determination to work immediately, with the utmost urgency, towards a ceasefire that puts an end to the current violence and hostilities.

From the very beginnings of this crisis, Canada has pursued a dialogue to advocate a path to peace that will last. We've seen quick fixes and temporary solutions in the past that would not suffice, and history has proven this to be the case. Certain conditions must be achieved to reach that stable, durable cessation of violence in the region.

● (1045)

[Translation]

In our view, a ceasefire needs to be lasting, permanent and sustainable. Ordinary Israelis and Lebanese have suffered long enough. Their desires are simple, almost basic — the freedom to lead their lives without fear; the ability to move forward, finally, with confidence; and the security Canadians have come to expect and enjoy.

The Lebanese people should not be held hostage to the extremist actions of an organization designated by the United Nations as a terrorist group. Hezbollah and its supporters should respect the desire of ordinary Lebanese to lead normal, secure lives.

[English]

Mr. Chair, we realize that the violence we have witnessed in recent weeks is part of a more complex and challenging scenario. Any lasting solution in Middle East tensions must be regional. This principle was recognized in Rome and at the G8 and has been the basic premise underlying efforts directed towards resolving the conflict and building peace in this troubled part of the world.

Clearly, the Government of Lebanon has to be an integral part of the solution, and yet alongside our allies and partners we continue to call on all regional actors to contribute constructively to achieving this objective. In particular, we have urged those with influence over Hezbollah and their backers in Tehran and Damascus to persuade them to heed the international community's appeals.

Finally, Mr. Chair, the way forward: We believe the bulk of the evacuation operation in Lebanon has been completed, yet we remain fully committed to facilitating the departure of further Canadian citizens who choose to leave. We will continue to support efforts to address both the immediate humanitarian situation as well as Lebanon's longer-term reconstruction and development. And it will be significant. I was reminded again as I entered the room that there are now over 800,000 displaced people inside Lebanon.

The G8 statement reflects exactly our prognosis and our evaluation of the situation and what got us to this point in time. The ceasefire is one element of the action plan that is called for in that G8 statement, but it is not the first thing or the only thing called for. An eventual ceasefire is part and parcel of the resolution, and the statement calls on all leaders and countries and parties to take a series of actions to resolve the crisis.

Let me be clear. It's not our intention to shift the blame from the extremists who caused this violence and who want it to continue. Hezbollah—listed in this country as a terrorist organization, a terrorist army—which is the party that started this crisis, has a minimum obligation to now cease its actions, its assaults on Israeli positions, and return those soldiers. Everyone agrees there has to be an end to the bloodshed and the carnage in Lebanon.

It appears there is no one who wants this to continue, with the exception of the terrorists. They initiated the violence and they oppose peace in principle. The untold suffering of the people in both Lebanon and Israel is heartbreaking, shocking to everyone's sensibilities, Mr. Chair. The killing has to stop. The recent Rome meeting and the UN's mandate to address this crisis confirmed the commitment of the international community to resolve this crisis.

It's important to state here that there's a marked difference between a democratic country defending the lives of its citizens and a terrorist army intent on death and destruction. We will continue to advocate diplomatic, constructive solutions. Words and wishful thinking will not end the violence.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. *Merci*.

● (1050)

The Chair: *Merci*, Mr. McKay.

We will proceed to the rounds of questioning, beginning with the official opposition. I remind you that you will have 10 minutes in which we will try to keep to very strict timing.

The first round will be split between Mr. Patry and Mr. McTeague.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

I want to ask you first whether the minister will remain with us till 11:25, just to be sure that all parties get to question him.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, I know you have other commitments and I know your schedule, but because of the late start here, can we ask you to stay as long as possible—keeping in mind, though, that we do break at noon?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I will stay as long as you want me to stay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Patry.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, welcome.

I'm going to start with one piece of information. October 1956 was our finest hour of diplomacy, when Lester B. Pearson helped to solve the Suez crisis. This was the time of our greatest contribution to world peace. Then there was the creation of the *casques bleus*, the blue berets, which we're so proud of.

[Translation]

I'd like to begin by reviewing the chronology of events.

[English]

Since that time,

[Translation]

Canada has moved away from its traditional peacekeeping role in the Middle East, which restricts its ability to assist all affected parties in this region to work together to achieve a lasting resolution.

[English]

You say that on exactly July 12 the conflict started, and on July 19 the evacuation started. That was a week later.

I must tell you there were signs. I was in Morocco at the beginning of July, talking with my Lebanese colleagues and members of the Parliament of Lebanon. There were signs at that time that something big was coming in Lebanon.

Were you aware before July 12 that something was coming? It's quite important for the evacuation plan, because a week to start an evacuation is much too long. Something should have been done before that. It was great to have a crisis cell, but it was not fast enough, according to us.

Did you ever think of going through Syria? A lot of other countries—Switzerland and Brazil—passed through Syria. We have an embassy in Syria and they could have helped us. I'm not saying the only route was through Cyprus, but why didn't we also choose to go through Syria?

You also stated that the ceasefire is one element of the action plan called for in the G8 statement, but it's not the first thing. What will make you change your mind and ask for a ceasefire? There have already been three weeks of conflict, with hundreds of civilians killed on both sides and devastation of the country. We're seeing right now a moderate Arab country, moderate Lebanese, changing their minds.

What are you waiting for to call for a ceasefire? Before you do an exchange of prisoners or anything else, you need to start at the beginning, and the beginning is a ceasefire.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

In response to your first question, I think it's fair to say that all countries in the region are far more acutely aware of the volatility of the situation in Lebanon; the presence of Hezbollah, particularly in the south; and the ongoing threat and tension that provides to Israel and the region generally.

Clearly, in advance of the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers and the crossing of the international border by Hezbollah, there was a previous incident involving the kidnapping of a soldier and a similar scenario that unfolded between the Palestinian territories and Israel. So the escalation had begun and the tensions existed in advance of the explosion of military action. Yes, I was aware of that, my officials were certainly aware of that, and we had discussions.

I mentioned in my opening statement that there was an evacuation plan and that there is an evacuation plan in all embassies. However, I go back to my earlier point that because of Canada's geographic distance from the region, the lack of military resources we had in the region, the size of our embassy compared to other countries, and the escalation of violence that occurred as quickly as it did, I don't think it's a reasonable criticism to suggest that Canadian officials did not move quickly, given the resources they had.

Secondly, from the conclusion of the G8, Canada has maintained that a ceasefire had to occur. That was part of the progression of steps called for by the G8 statement, to which Canada is a signatory. Out of Rome there is a similar declaration from participating countries, of which Canada is one, that calls for a cessation of violence.

Simply calling for a ceasefire doesn't make it happen. There has to be more than just words here. I'm also quick to point out, as you know, that a ceasefire cannot occur with only one party participating in the ceasefire.

• (1055)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

You have about four minutes, Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Minister, thank you for being here today. I want to also convey my deepest appreciation to the colleagues beside you: Robert Desjardins, Peter Boehm, and of course Helen Harris, with whom I've worked over a number of years.

Minister, you will no doubt know that the distance between Beirut and Damascus is a mere 50 kilometres. A number of Canadians could have chosen that route. In fact, I'm looking at the Reuters factbox from July 20, 2006, and it suggests to me that a number of other nations had their evacuation plans in place long before Canada and were already putting those evacuation plans into effect.

My specific concern is with the first statement that you made in writing here. You said, "The safety and security of Canadians is of utmost concern to the Government. Put simply, there is no higher priority" or obligation of a nation.

If that were the case, Minister, where were you for the first four days of this crisis? Why did you simply show up for work on the Sunday, when this crisis began on Thursday? Why were you not talking to your embassy in Beirut, which could not possibly take those calls that you had suggested here on the Sunday and the Saturday—messages to Canadians—when in fact that embassy was closed? And why were you not telling loved ones and Canadians how to contact, rather than relying on a website to convey that message?

Minister, it seems to me that your party, and you in particular, perhaps as a result of directions by your Prime Minister, were so severely bogged down in micromanagement that you couldn't make a decision other than to take sides in this particular tragic issue. It's unfortunate today that you have offered condolences; it's taken this committee to do this.

Minister, in a simple question that I think you could have understood, given the tragedies that existed last year, where were you? Why were you missing in action?

The Chair: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Well, I was on the job, Mr. McTeague. You may have been on television, but I was meeting with officials, speaking with officials, participating in the planning of an evacuation—the largest exercise ever undertaken by a Canadian government. That plan did not sit in a filing cabinet at the Lester B. Pearson Building. It took a great deal of time and effort and involved participation of many departments to put in place.

Countries closer in proximity and with aircraft carriers, helicopters, and equipment available to them to act quickly were in a much different and, I would say, more advantageous position.

With respect to your first question, about the preferred route through Syria—and I believe Mr. Patry referred to that as well in his question—an assessment was made on the ground by officials in Lebanon that this was not a safe route to travel. There was passage by some Italians, and several Canadians were included on that bus. They made their way down the road to Damascus and came under heavy fire. Fortunately, nobody was killed, but the assessment was made by our officials there that we would not send Canadians by bus down that road to Damascus.

Other countries came to us, in fact, to work collaboratively to remove people by the seaport of Beirut, and that's the decision we took.

• (1100)

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Minister, my appearance on television was to do your job, to give that 1-800 line, to give to Canadians an opportunity to actually contact the department.

Minister, I note that there is some coincidence in the fact that you appeared only later to announce the death of eight Canadians.

Many of us here we have to wonder, since your Prime Minister knew at the G8 that the conflict in the Middle East was the number one issue, when you actually clued in to the fact that you had an obligation right from the get-go. It's not good enough to put something on the Internet and a website. When were you planning to communicate to Canadians how to contact their government and implement the evacuation plan?

And on that score, Mr. Minister, when did the Prime Minister actually allow the plan that had been prepared by this department, notwithstanding the fact that the airport in Beirut had been bombed?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McTeague.

Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Well, Mr. Chair, we communicated immediately with Canadians. We communicated with those most affected—those inside Lebanon, and family members here.

As I mentioned previously, the number of calls was overwhelming, to say the least. In fact, we received over 35,000 calls over the period of time, and as I mentioned, they ramped up from the very beginning. The initial contact we had was approximately 11,000 people—that is, citizens living inside Lebanon. That doubled in the first week and continued to go up in both phone calls and e-mails throughout this crisis.

As for the Prime Minister's involvement, I haven't heard anybody question whether Tony Blair was involved in the British decisions that were made around their evacuation. Of course he was. It's the same for George Bush. Angela Merkel was absolutely involved. And our Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, was of course involved in the largest issue of our time, participating at the G8 summit with other world leaders, just as I was involved with my colleagues in the meetings in Rome and throughout this period of time, speaking to them directly via telephone while I coordinated efforts here in Ottawa when this crisis began.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We will go to Madam Lalonde, 10 minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Minister, for coming here. First off, I feel compelled to say that Prime Minister Harper's initial statement to the effect that Israel's response to the kidnapping of the soldiers by Hezbollah was measured was shocking and outrageous. His words continue to reverberate widely. The impact was all the more shocking considering that a Montreal family lost eight of its members shortly thereafter. I know that the events in Qana compounded matters further.

Minister, you're quoted in this morning's edition of *Le Devoir* as saying this: "Infrastructures in certain regions of Lebanon, particularly in the south, have been destroyed."

Minister, why do you not support the many countries who are calling for an immediate ceasefire? That's the first question to which I would like an answer. I'll respond later.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci, Madame Lalonde.*

Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are for an immediate ceasefire. We want to see the cessation of violence. But it's not enough to just say the words; there has to be a plan that follows. There has to be, in my view, a robust international intervention that is going to stand between these factions. There has to be a plan in which we see some movement, I would suggest, on the part of Hezbollah to return kidnapped soldiers. There has to be a plan that is going to assure the longer-term stability of the region. Simply mouthing the word "ceasefire" is not going to make it happen.

As far as the tragedy, and the toll, and the destruction that has been inflicted upon civilians, inflicted upon in particular the innocent people in Lebanon, are concerned, I hope you're not suggesting, and I don't think anybody in this room would suggest, that any government would favour that type of devastation. And the family members—and I've spoken to the family members in Montreal—are victims in every sense of the word. Their loss is something that, unless you've experienced it yourself, you can't appreciate. And I don't pretend to be able to say that I've ever experienced anything like that. But I expressed to them, in the most personal way I could, the Canadian government's and my own condolences for what has happened.

I think in the context of the statement that you've referred to, made by the Prime Minister, it's important to note that he made that statement on his way to the G8 summit, in St. Petersburg, at the very start of this conflict. At the end of that international gathering he was a signatory on behalf of our country to a statement that specifically calls for the cessation of violence and a ceasefire. That is Canada's position.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you, Minister.

You mention this conference, but we can't forget that in this country, the press was reporting that Mr. Harper was isolated and was forced to change his position, a position that he alone maintained. I wanted to point this out because you continue to state that action is warranted. Of course that's true, but an immediate ceasefire is also needed. Otherwise, those — I say those because there are people on both sides — wishing to achieve the objectives of war will continue to act as long as they have the support of countries like the United States and Canada. International pressure must therefore be brought to bear for both sides to agree to an immediate ceasefire followed by political negotiations with the parties involved.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: I agree with you. The task that the United Nations, specifically the Security Council, now has before it is to bring about a negotiated solution, to bring about a ceasefire that has to involve all parties.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Immediate.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Yes, we can say the word “immediately”. We can say it repeatedly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: That means something.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: It doesn't make it happen. Obviously there has to be the participation of all parties. There has to be, in my view, a willingness and a commitment from both sides in this conflict to make that happen.

Let me remind you, Madame Lalonde, that we are dealing with terrorists. We are not sure who speaks for Hezbollah or whether they would even begin to keep their word in a ceasefire. The difficulty throughout this entire period has been that when there is any indication on the part of Israel that they are going to pull back, we see an increase in rockets going into a sovereign state. Lebanon, on the other hand, is caught in the crossfire. Its government, its people, more importantly, are the victims of this.

In the past, as you know, resolutions have come from the UN Security Council, resolutions that have been debated at the United Nations, which called for the exercise of sovereign authority over all of Lebanon. Resolution 1559 calls for the disarmament of all militants, which would include Hezbollah. Again, it is not simply a matter of words, resolutions, or international calls for the cessation of violence; there has to be participation by those who are involved in the actual killing there.

In my view, the willingness of one party to simply state that a ceasefire has to occur is one thing. I agree with you absolutely that a ceasefire has to occur. Putting those words into effect is something entirely different and something more demanding.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I'll turn the floor over to Maria.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Mourani, you have approximately three and a half minutes of question and answer.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Minister, I don't want to talk about terrorists. I want to talk about the Lebanese and Canadians who are still trapped in Lebanon. I want to discuss very specific cases because my riding office was transformed into a kind of evacuation unit.

Take, for example, the Adhmad Roueida family. Mrs. Roueida is pregnant. Along with her five children, she walked from Aytaroun to Tyre to catch a boat because all vehicles, including Red Cross vehicles, had been bombed by Israel.

Sir, since you have drawn up a range of plans, what do you intend to do to help those still trapped in villages in southern Lebanon, the children, the pregnant women, the elderly who are without their asthma puffers or the insulin to treat their diabetes?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

What we intend to do is what we've done throughout this time, and that is to provide safe passage to people who, through our embassy, through our contacts, through the people—volunteers in many cases, particularly in the south—who pass that information on to us, have expressed the desire to leave. Unless we have some form of contact with them, we can't know of their pain, their suffering, and their fears.

Nobody has cornered the market on compassion in this. I have felt the fear; I have talked to people who have returned from Lebanon, and I've heard the horrific stories, as have you. I suggest all of you around this table have talked to people directly affected by this. We have, in my view, undertaken every effort available, every means available, to get people out.

There was an exercise that involved—

●(1110)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: What is your plan for southern Lebanon? Kindly answer the question.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: If you would, just let me finish.

We put in place in the past a plan that put a ship into the port of Tyre. It was a small number of Canadians who showed up, despite our best efforts to contact people within that region. As you know—and I'm stating the obvious here—the damage to infrastructure, the havoc that has been wreaked in the south, has made many people simply hunker down in their basements. They're not in contact with anyone—their neighbours, let alone the Canadian embassy—so to reach them is extremely difficult. To send people into that region to provide assistance is very difficult.

We have sought, I have personally spoken to the Israelis about, a ceasefire that would allow for a period of time to get evacuees from the south out.

The Bīqā Valley is another specific area near the Syrian border where there was a large number of Canadians whom we tried to help with the evacuation.

We also made early efforts, I'm reminded, to bus people out of the south; that is, to provide passage to Syria by road. Because of the damage to those roads, people like this woman you've described, with her family, would have been given passage to Syria on a bus. The challenge is to contact people, to have the ability to know who they are and where they are.

Many of the members of Parliament sent specific references to our office, which we acted upon. I'm grateful for any further information we receive about the specific location of Canadians anywhere in Lebanon, particularly in the south.

The Chair: Very quickly, Madame Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I understand what you're saying, but I have to wonder why it is American convoys are getting into southern Lebanon and managing to evacuate US or Australian nationals. Why is Canada unable to reach an agreement with Israel while at the same time, the US has managed to do so and send in convoys?

I'm personally aware of two youths 12 and 14 years of age who were evacuated by American convoys from southern Lebanon while bombs were raining down on the region. You're correct in saying that people cannot easily be contacted. They cannot emerge from their underground hiding places because the bombs are falling. Summing up, I think Canada could follow the lead of the United States and go in and rescue these people.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Mourani.

Mr. Minister, respond very quickly. We're already at 11 minutes here.

Hon. Peter MacKay: There's an important point to be made.

I agree. I think that going forward the international cooperation, particularly in the south, is going to be of critical importance. The Americans have more equipment in the region. We have assisted... In fact, the boat that went into Tyre brought more Americans and Australians and, I believe, Ukrainians out of the south than our own citizens. Similarly, other countries, including the Americans, have offered to assist in the evacuation. That will continue throughout, I guarantee you.

Again, I encourage you or anyone who has information about the specific location of Canadians in the south who want to leave—and this is a voluntary evacuation—to give us their names and location.

I would appreciate her information, because we will see to it that all efforts are made to help with her return to Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I know, by the way, that you called my office, and I returned your call four times.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: No.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Yes, I did. It's documented.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: No.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I think all of us are very pleased to see that Canada is working with other nations; that if Canadians showed up and it were a Ukrainian or an Australian ship, we would be helped by them; and that in turn we are helping them.

We'll go to the government side, and Mr. Van Loan.

●(1115)

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Let me pick up on a similar theme. The...

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I'll start again, Mr. Chair, and pick up on a similar theme.

The Chair: Could we have order, please?

Mr. Van Loan, you have ten minutes.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I was hoping to divide my time with Mr. Ohbrai and, if possible, Mr. Casey. I had him in mind.

I wanted to start by saying that the feedback I've been getting from constituents is that Canadians are pretty proud of what Canada was able to achieve with this evacuation. It is seen by them as very much a success story. More than 13,000 people were evacuated without mishap, and that kind of evacuation is a pretty remarkable achievement.

It resonates a lot with me, because I have a personal family story. My family were refugees from Estonia, and there was no government there to help them when they had to evacuate by the Baltic Sea. They had to pull together their own resources with another family and literally buy a shipping company, consisting of a ship and crew, to get out. They were on rough seas and they were seasick, but they were pleased and delighted to have been able to escape and enjoy freedom, and ultimately the freedom that Canada had to offer. When I contrast that kind of situation with the tremendous support Canada has given to its nationals, I understand why Canadians are so proud.

To underline the success, I want to pick up on what the chair said about the capacity we had and the strength of our operation, the help we were actually able to give to other countries because we had enough capacity to do it and our plans were strong enough.

Could you could tell us more about what Canada did for other countries?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan. I acknowledge what you've said.

In the early goings, there were other countries, because of their proximity, their assets—mainly ships and helicopters already in the region—and larger embassy staffs who were able to commence evacuations perhaps 24 hours or 48 hours sooner. We were literally faced with the challenge of securing assets—the equipment, plain and simple—to evacuate people, and that challenge was immediately acute because of the disabling of the Beirut airport.

As you know, this entire operation—and I know we will get to the issue of cost—was done entirely at the expense of the Canadian government, that is to say, of the Canadian taxpayers. There has been no charge, nor any attempt to seek reimbursement from evacuees. Taking people out of harm's way was the right thing to do to, and I believe there is a spirit of generosity running through this country that will affirm that.

As you indicated, I spoke to many of the evacuees and to many whose family members were affected, as you have. Certainly over the past number of weeks we've received hundreds of e-mails expressing gratitude to Canada and, in particular, to the efforts of Canadian public servants who helped in the evacuation. We've also had a number of e-mails from foreign nationals, evacuees from other countries who were taken out of Beirut by Canadian ships, who were attended to by Canadian volunteers or Canadian government employees who helped them.

I don't want to take up a lot of time, but there was one woman I spoke to in Charlottetown who was an evacuee. She told of the difficult circumstances, of the heat and how uncomfortable it was making that crossing, and they had to wait. Upon landing in Larnaca, they were allowed to take only the possessions they could carry. This was a war zone, and those people were facing very trying circumstances; there was a lot of emotion involved. Many people were fearing for their very lives and those of their loved ones.

I can understand the frustration they felt. I can appreciate the immediacy with which they felt they had to leave Beirut, and the gut-wrenching decision it must have been to have to leave behind

other family members in some cases, as well as pets and possessions. It was a difficult, life-altering decision, to say the least.

For many, that crossing was harrowing. But this woman told me something else. She said she's been going back to Beirut for many years and made that crossing many times. She said many of those crossings in the last 20 years were similarly harrowing, because of the weather, the water, or the boat itself.

We went with the best available boats we could get, we secured them as quickly as possible, and we moved on with an action plan that eventually evacuated over 13,000 Canadians. That was a remarkable effort, and this evacuation was a success, in my view.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I want to address the question that the opposition member, Mr. McTeague, just asked: "Where were you?"

Let me tell you, we don't go on television like you do, running this country, when the crisis is there—

Hon. Dan McTeague: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chairman, I want to make it very clear where the minister was. The minister was with me in my riding, talking—

Hon. Dan McTeague: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. McTeague, on a point of order.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Chairman, I think you will find that my questions are not only in order, but unlike Mr. Obhrai, who has part of the position of handling consular affairs, neither he nor the minister were in fact there for the first four days.

The Chair: That's not a point of order, Mr. McTeague.

Continue, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, I have 5,000 Lebanese in my riding who are extremely concerned. When this crisis took place, they had family members there and they wanted to talk. The minister took time out in Calgary to come to meet with members of the Muslim and Lebanese communities to assure them about what Canada was doing for them. For them, that was very important.

These are Canadians. That is where he was, with me, totally engaged with the people, and that is how the government should run. We cannot ignore our own diaspora out here who were affected by this, and I want to thank the minister for taking time on such short notice to come to talk and assure these Canadians that the Government of Canada was there.

So I would like to thank the minister again.

I will now ask the minister how much engagement he has done—we have done—with the local Lebanese who are here and concerned for their loved ones.

The Chair: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I thank Mr. Obhrai for the question.

I know that he, and not just during the period in which this crisis has occurred, has met repeatedly with representatives of not only the Lebanese and Arab community, and the Muslim community, but many groups across the country on behalf of the government and on behalf of his own interest in international affairs. I thank him for that.

As far as the necessity to communicate with other groups that were affected is concerned, families in particular who had loved ones displaced or involved in the evacuation, it was an ongoing and in some cases overwhelming task. As I mentioned, there were over 35,000 calls that were coming in. The initial operation, which was receiving calls in Beirut, had to reroute calls to Ottawa because of the sheer volume. With 32 staff in the embassy, it was impossible to field those calls.

There was initially a wait, as you might expect, because of the backup of calls, but when that rerouting started happening in Ottawa, we started bringing more people into the call centre, and the wait times dropped to five minutes within days.

As far as communicating directly with the families and with those inside Lebanon is concerned, that was the priority. Getting information directly to them about how they could make their way in the most efficient and expeditious way to Beirut, to the port, for evacuation purposes, that was the priority. I don't apologize for putting the emphasis on getting people out of the country. Communicating with them directly was the best way that we could do that. We used every available means to do it: phones, the Internet, and the warden system of individual volunteers.

You, as well, were involved in setting up a number of meetings that I've had during this period of time in your own constituency. In Ontario, Mr. Casey set up a similar meeting here in Ottawa with representatives who wanted to come and speak about their concerns. I met yesterday in Charlottetown with another group of citizens, some of whom had returned from Lebanon. And we will continue to do this. This exercise is not complete. That's why the input of you members of this committee, and you, Mr. Chair, is very helpful.

Will there be lessons learned from this? Certainly. We did the best we could in the circumstances we were in.

•(1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Casey, you have about a minute, so please proceed very quickly if you have a comment.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): A minute—

Hon. Dan McTeague: On a point of order, I think the record has to be cleared here, certainly given the testimony that we just heard. If I'm not mistaken, the minister was actually at the stampede in Calgary. I don't know how, and considering what Mr. Obhrai has just—

The Chair: That's not a point of order, Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, if it's possible for him to speak to Mr. Obhrai's constituents, why could the minister not speak to the nation? That's the critical point here that we're trying—

The Chair: All right, Mr. McTeague—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: On a point of order.

The Chair: Another point of order. Mr. Obhrai, let's leave it alone, and we're going to go to Mr. Casey.

Mr. Bill Casey: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. MacKay, thank you very much for being here with your officials.

It's a troubling time for all of us, and it must be tremendously troubling for you. It must be very difficult. It's troubling because of what's going on in the Middle East, and it's also troubling because of what's going on in Canada, because we're seeing our communities divided. That's very disappointing and troubling to me and to all of us here.

I commend you for the evacuation. I think it's incredible that your team was able to organize an evacuation of 13,000 people from anywhere.

Anyway, I want to move on to beyond the current crisis. You suggested humanitarian relief efforts. Canada chairs the working group on refugees, and the Palestinian refugees are in a terrible plight and they need a lot of assistance. This organization was set up through the Oslo Accord, but it was stopped in 1996. The League of Arab Nations has now indicated that they would support Canada restarting it. Canada chairs this important committee. I've discussed this with the Israeli ambassador, His Excellency Alan Baker, and I've heard direction from him as well. The secretary-general of the Arab League has indicated to me in writing, through the cooperation of the Egyptian embassy, that they would support Canada restarting the refugee working group.

I believe this is an important time and the right time to do this. Would the government agree that this is the time to restart this initiative?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Minister, very quickly, please.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Casey.

I know you've had a long-standing interest in the Middle East. You've put a great deal of your personal time and effort into meeting with groups, and you have amassed what I would consider to be a vast knowledge of some of the useful steps forward, one of which you've just mentioned. Although it has been suspended, I think this working group, which is currently chaired by Canada, is a great piece of the puzzle that will lead to peace in the Middle East. This is a multi-faceted, complex, historical Gideon's knot, to say the least.

I think that any useful dialogue at the United Nations, in the international community, and between citizen's groups is going to be helpful in contributing to that solution. As far as your references to the dispute in Gaza, that has to be part of the overall broader solution.

Although the focus right now is with Lebanon, Hezbollah, and the Israelis, the situation in Palestine can't be ignored. I think you're going to see that there will be broader discussions. As you know, Canada continues to provide humanitarian assistance and has made further contributions recently to the cause of Palestinian aid and humanitarian relief in that affected part of the Middle East.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

To Madame McDonough.

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

I too want to thank the minister for appearing, although I had to gulp down a psychological Valium so as not to overreact to his decision to spend 23 minutes of testimony on self-congratulations and self-justification around the evacuation. I think a consensus could very easily have been achieved here to congratulate Foreign Affairs staff, embassy staff, and NGOs for the incredible work they did around the evacuation. I suppose I didn't really expect the minister to address the question of the Prime Minister's micromanagement and photo op approach to dealing with this situation.

I want to go directly to the issue of a ceasefire.

I don't question that the Minister of Foreign Affairs is genuinely concerned about the death of eight Canadians, the El-Akhras family, although I think it would be more appropriate to increase that number to eleven because three more have died as a result of that massacre. I don't question that he regrets—those were the words he used—the murder of a Canadian peacekeeper. What I do question is the disingenuousness of a position that says a ceasefire has to be delayed for this, that, and the other reason, while talking so eloquently about the carnage and the destruction of the infrastructure—basically, describing the disproportionate response of Israel in violation of international law. It's not the words of the minister, but the action or, more accurately, the inaction of this government.

Notwithstanding all the words about wanting to ensure a safe passage for the remaining Canadians in Lebanon, would the minister not agree that no such safe passage can or will be assured without a ceasefire?

Secondly, would he also not agree—he's the lawyer—that the UN Charter makes it absolutely clear that every citizen's life in the world is equal to every other citizen's life, and that every state is equal before every other state? The decision of his government to hide, almost alone in the world, behind these self-justifications and delays in demanding and pressing for an instant ceasefire puts us absolutely in lockstep with one party only, and that's the Bush administration. It puts us almost entirely and obscenely out of step with practically every other member of the international community.

•(1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame McDonough.

Mr. MacKay.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the member for her questions.

I take issue with the fact that my statement was about self-congratulations. I tried as best I could to express my personal

gratitude to the officials who have carried out this extraordinary exercise.

I don't think heightened rhetoric is going to bring about a solution. I think the result is the key. The result is obviously a ceasefire. I agree with the member that a ceasefire is absolutely critical and instrumental to not only the provision of humanitarian relief and the removal of the injured, the displaced, and those who simply want to leave. It can't happen without a ceasefire, or it can only continue in the fashion that it has, which is very dangerous not only to those who wish to leave and seek assistance, but to those who are trying to provide that relief. However, a ceasefire, as I mentioned earlier, is not a one-sided affair. There has to be a number of conditions that accompany the ceasefire.

I would suggest that an international intervention, unless some country emerges that is willing to take this on, will not happen, in fact. They must be simultaneous. There has to be a ceasefire before an international intervention can occur. That is part of the important labyrinth that the UN is trying to navigate currently in their efforts.

As far as the UN Charter is concerned, in international law all states are certainly equal. The protection of human life is sacred beyond any codified law. I'll take no issue with that.

As far as being in lockstep with anybody is concerned, we're a member of NATO. We're a NORAD country. We're a country that has a vested interest in protection of human life, not only within our own boundaries. We believe very strongly in this country in some of the important values—democracy, human rights, the orderly and fair treatment of individuals—and we are not living in splendid isolation in North America. We certainly have obligations to the broader world, including the Middle East. That's why we have been active participants in these discussions, at the G8, at the UN, and at this hastily convened meeting in Rome.

Canada is an important player on the international scene and will continue to offer a voice of reason and an opinion on all of these subjects and more. So for me it's not a difficult choice between siding with a state, a democratically elected government, a democracy that's being attacked by terrorists, and a group of cold-blooded killers.

•(1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Madame McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: You know, I think this statement by the minister just reinforces the utter horror of Canadians in how far Canada has been cut loose from its moorings and abandoned the role, which has been valued in the world, of Canada being extremely one-sided about one thing—that is, standing behind international law, humanitarian law, behind our obligations under our various UN agreements.

I want to ask the minister, is it all of Canadians who are wrong? Is the international community all wrong in their perception that this government has decided unquestionably to take sides with one of a two-sided—in fact, multi-sided—dispute that he himself has said is complex and historic? Are we all wrong in thinking this government has abandoned that role as an independent internationalist multi-lateralist that is prepared to use its middle-power weight to try to bring about a ceasefire immediately by putting pressure on both sides, instead of signing on to one side of the hostilities? Are we all wrong, and are he and his Prime Minister the only ones who see it in an enlightened way?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, let me answer this way: Canada is certainly not alone. We have a lot of international allies that we've been working with constructively and productively from the very beginning. I don't need to list the G8 countries. I don't need to list all of the countries that are actively engaged in this exercise both at the UN and in other meetings that are taking place simultaneously.

Lebanon is being held hostage by Hezbollah. There can be no doubt about that. Hezbollah is a cancer on Lebanon, which is destroying stability and democracy within its boundaries. The EU has just released a statement that says that the council calls for an immediate end to the hostilities, to be followed by a sustainable ceasefire. That has been the position of Canada and it has been the position of other nations throughout this time. It calls for a ceasefire by all parties involved, and one of those parties is a terrorist organization.

I don't think I'm alone. A recent article in the *Ottawa Citizen* quotes Liberal Senator Colin Kenney as saying, "I'm sorry, Canada's traditional way is picking sides, getting on the good guy's side and going for the win."

It goes on to say, "If you give me a choice between the state of Israel—the only democracy in the Middle East—and Hezbollah—a bunch of thugs who are out to assassinate and disrupt society—that's a no-brainer."

He went on to say in reference to some of his other colleagues and their comments in the news, "...there's nothing nuanced about a bunch of terrorists shooting rockets into a country like that, and when that happens I expect the country to use all its force to eliminate them."

Mr. Chair, I don't think Canada's position is isolated in any way. I don't think we have done anything other than participate productively and actively in looking for solutions that will lead to a ceasefire. That's what we've done from the beginning, and that's what we'll continue to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

You have more time, Ms. McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I think there is an overwhelming consensus, and one that's growing, that there is no military solution to the long-standing complex hostilities in the Middle East. Yet this government seems to be prepared to ignore the international law that says, yes, a country has a right to defend itself, but it must do so in proportion to the threat, and it must use only necessary force. There is overwhelming evidence that disproportionate force is at work there.

Has this government openly demanded an investigation into the deaths of 11 members of a Canadian Lebanese family and demanded an apology from the Government of Israel for both those deaths and the death of a UN observer killed in the line of duty, attacked essentially for doing his job? The attack implied that there was something wrong with these UN observers since they didn't know there was a war going on and that they should get out of the way. Has this government officially demanded an inquiry and officially demanded a public apology? If not, why not?

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame McDonough.

Go ahead very quickly, Minister MacKay.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I have sought and received assurances from Tzipi Livni, the foreign minister of Israel, that it will embark on an investigation. I think she has publicly said that. She expressed to me, as I understand did the Prime Minister of Israel, sincere condolences for the deaths of all the Canadians that have tragically lost their lives in this conflict. To that degree, the answer is yes.

As far as the international law is concerned, it applies to both state and non-state actors. Again, I underscore the need for Hezbollah to agree to this ceasefire as well as other conditions that have been requested. We will continue to advocate that position, as have others. We will continue to look for any and all means that will bring about a peaceful solution to this current conflict, but it has to be—and everyone I've spoken to agrees—a lasting peace. It cannot be simply a temporary solution to allow for the rearmament of the terrorist body in order to begin the violence again.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We'll go to the second round, Mr. Van Loan and Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. McDonough just finished taking a shot at you for talking about the evacuation and self-congratulations. I'd remind Ms. McDonough that the reason we are here at this committee is because Madame Lalonde asked us to come and discuss just that.

In her letter asking the committee to meet, she wrote:

[*Translation*]

"First, it should evaluate the concrete results of measures taken by the Canadian government to evacuate Quebec and Canadian nationals from Lebanon."

[*English*]

That's why we're here, so the minister was quite right to be discussing that. I suppose it has been such a success that there's a desire to change the subject.

Mr. Patry did so, and he referenced Suez 1956 as the height of Canadian foreign policy.

In 1956 Canada was not neutral; Canada took a very clear side. The Liberal Prime Minister of the day, Louis St. Laurent, was in lockstep with the Republican U.S. President, Dwight Eisenhower. They took a clear side, and by taking a clear, principled stand, we were able to be honest brokers in the creation of peacekeeping, which arose later out of that conflict. So it's not in the Canadian tradition to be neutral, even when we were creating peacemaking.

I'm very concerned and troubled by what I hear from the Bloc and from the NDP, in particular, about the suggestion that there's some moral equivalency between the parties here. Hezbollah is a listed terrorist group under Canadian law. That happened under the Liberal government. Why? They were party to a series of kidnappings of westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s. We all remember the suicide truck bombing that killed 200 Americans in the barracks in Beirut. Some of us remember the 1985 hijacking of TWA flight 847—that's the one where a gun was held to the head of the pilot out the window. This is a terrorist group. There were major attacks outside of Lebanon, in Argentina on the Israeli embassy. About 29 were killed there, and I think there were 95 killed at a Jewish community centre.

Jan Egeland, the UN humanitarian top guy in Lebanon, has talked about their use of civilians—women and children—as human shields in the current conflict, and how they take pride in those casualties as a way of helping their promotion. This is a terrorist group.

I simply ask the minister, is it in Canada's tradition to be neutral between such a terrorist group and a sovereign democracy?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Certainly not, Mr. Van Loan. Canada cannot be neutral on issues that relate to fundamental issues such as the protection of civilians, the sanctity of human life, and the cessation of violence. All of that leaves a clear choice when it comes to a terrorist organization that is the perpetrator and the provocateur of this crisis. Hezbollah has indicated no give, no willingness, nor any desire to talk or to engage in diplomatic solutions.

Like Ms. McDonough, you referenced the UN peacekeeper who was tragically killed in this. As I understand, that will also be investigated, and there is an undertaking at the UN to demand further information.

There has been a lot of discussion about the tactic used by Hezbollah of invoking human shields, whereby, as I understand it, locations are sought out in the very centre of civilian populations—in churches, mosques, schools, hospitals, and private residences—from which rockets are fired.

I don't profess to be a military expert, but I understand that the equipment being used to return fire traces the path or the trajectory of those rockets. So you're absolutely right to suggest that Hezbollah is deliberately putting innocent civilians in harm's way, as a base from which they launch their rockets.

Alan Dershowitz, a renowned human rights lawyer, wrote an article about this quite recently, which was republished in the *National Post*. He talks specifically about the options this presents when civilians are used as human shields. He says there are only two options presented to democracies victimized by those tactics. They can do nothing or try to destroy the rocket launchers, with the inevitable toll of civilian casualties that any such counterattack will produce. Both options produce a victory for the terrorists and a

defeat for the targeted democracy. It's not an easy choice, by any means.

But if countries are going to go to whatever extent they deem necessary to protect their civilians, it's easy for us in the safety and sanctity of this building to try to measure that response to a nicety.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I just want to answer Mr. Van Loan for 10 seconds—

The Chair: No, it's coming into your round now.

Mr. Bernard Patry:—just about history. I just want to let him know that in 1956 we had Great Britain, the U.S., France, and Canada standing with the United Nations. If it's to be the United Nations, it's not neutral, that's the fact, but we didn't attack the United Nations. That's the difference from 1956.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that commentary, Mr. Patry. You being the historian, I will not argue with you.

But it is your round, and the time is coming off your clock, Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Minister MacKay, thank you for being here today.

I just returned last night from Geneva and Rome, where I had extensive meetings with UN organizations and NGOs on this issue, and quite frankly, they cannot believe the ideological one-sided approach that Canada has taken on this and the abandonment of our principles of being a fair-minded, effective player in this very difficult arena.

This began as a very legal response on the part of Israel, but unfortunately it has deteriorated to the wholesale destruction of a good chunk of Lebanon. Do you know, Minister, that before this started, Hezbollah had only 13% support in Lebanon? Now it's 89%. Of the 800 people who have died, 40% are children—40%. Humanitarian access corridors are being choked off.

Minister, this is the first that we've heard of a ceasefire, and it has to happen for the security of all the countries there, including Israel, because the violence that is taking place there is actually affecting every country's security—every country's—and the seeds are burning brightly and dangerously not only for the region but also for Canada and the international community, and I think you know that.

My question, sir, is very simple—I have three. First, the goal is the security of all countries in the region. Why has it taken so long for the Canadian government to call for a ceasefire? Which side is actually participating in calling for that ceasefire in the region?

Will you ensure, and what are you doing to ensure, safe access corridors for humanitarian goods into the area?

Last, three conditions that will enable a ceasefire are the exchange of prisoners on both sides, a peacekeeping force into the area, and the return of the Shebaa Farms. Will you support those three conditions for a ceasefire?

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm going to ask Ms. Guarnieri to pose her question, and then we'll have the minister respond.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you.

On a side note, I want to congratulate you on your recent appointment of John McNee as ambassador to the UN. Those of us who have worked with him know he's a superior choice.

I know my colleagues have focused in on the evacuation and the reasons so many Canadians were put in dangerous and difficult circumstances. You stated that Canadians were at risk because air transport, which is a normal route for evacuation, was a closed option. It occurs to me that the reason this entire circumstance and the challenges came about was the bombing of the only airport in Beirut, an action that the Prime Minister knew about and supported when he declared the action "measured".

Were the military benefits worth endangering Canadians and putting thousands through an ordeal of evacuation? This one act has cost our country millions of dollars and thrust thousands of Canadians into humanitarian emergency. So perhaps you can tell the committee whether you, or whether the government, rather, continues to be satisfied that the bombing of the one useful escape route for Canadians was justified and measured.

As well, my colleague has eloquently mentioned that to date the human cost is beyond measure, and to date there is no sign that the tragedies are bringing us any closer to a ceasefire. You've stated in your text, as has been pointed out, that ceasefire is not the first thing called for. So my question quite simply is, does the Government of Canada believe the bombardment of villages is going to bring an end to this conflict or in fact make peace harder to achieve?

If we turn from tragedy of the present to hope for a better future, specifically how does the Government of Canada define peace in Lebanon? How does the government foresee implementing Resolution 1559 with a shattered national government, a devastated economy, an inspired guerrilla group with support from Syria and Iran, and no sign of security to come for northern Israel? Who would you propose as participants in a negotiated peace, and what do you think that peace would look like?

That was quite a mouthful.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, members, for those questions. We're trying to keep it within the five minutes, and we're way over here.

Mr. Minister, just take your time to answer Mr. Martin and Madam Guarnieri.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'll do my level best. I don't think I could accurately answer all of those questions in five minutes.

The Chair: You don't have five minutes. There are five minutes for the questions and the answers.

Hon. Peter MacKay: As far as there being bombardment of a civilian airport is concerned, we were not consulted, nor did we advocate the removal of the only means of air transport out of the country of Lebanon. The Prime Minister was certainly not talking specifically of that act when he made the statement early in this crisis.

Am I satisfied that we have done and continue to do everything possible to assist in the evacuation and removal of Canadian citizens who have contacted us, or whom we have contacted, and expressed a desire to leave? Yes, and we'll continue to do so through every means possible when roads become more secure and that airport is eventually repaired, which we hope will be soon. I think planes have now landed there offering humanitarian relief, which is a positive sign that some of those runways are open. I think you will see Canada's participation in the humanitarian relief and reconstruction begin right away.

Do I think that bombardment is a path to peace? Certainly not. This human tragedy cannot be lost on anyone who has a drop of the milk of human kindness. This has been one of the most horrific things I have seen in my lifetime: the suffering that Mr. Martin has described and all of us have borne witness to, either through the eyes of the victims who have recited their stories or the depictions we've seen on our national broadcasts. No one with a heart or soul can be immune from being affected by this and those graphic pictures.

How do I define peace in Lebanon? It's certainly the cessation of violence, and the immediate attention of the world and the international community to come to their rescue and make significant contributions to the rehabilitation of their entire country. The sad tragedy that exacerbates or even doubles this crisis is that Lebanon was well on its way. Beirut in particular was one of the most vibrant cities not only in the region but in the world, and I think many of you who have been to that region would affirm that.

How do we implement Resolution 1559? This seems to have escaped the international community generally. As you know, it calls for the securing of all of the borders and the sovereign exercise of democracy over the entire nation, including the south. It also calls for the disarmament of all military groups, which includes Hezbollah. Why has that not happened? That is a question for everyone—for the UN in particular, where this resolution emanated.

So peace in the Middle East, peace in Lebanon, will occur when people adhere to those international commitments; when the international community, through collaborative efforts, is finally able to bring about an end to the violence. Simply put, that is my definition of what has to occur here. It has to occur quickly, and it has to occur inside Lebanon.

Mr. Martin asked a number of questions about the timing of our call for a ceasefire. As a participant at the G8, I hearken back to that statement of July 16, which was four days into the conflict:

The most urgent priority is to create conditions for a cessation of violence that will be sustainable and lay the foundation for a more permanent solution. This, in our judgment, requires:

The return of the Israeli soldiers in Gaza and Lebanon unharmed;

An end to the shelling of Israeli territory;

An end to Israeli military operations and the early withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza;

The release of the arrested Palestinian ministers and parliamentarians.

This applies to both sides. An adherence by Hezbollah and Israel to those conditions will be a ceasefire and a cessation of violence.

The Rome statement, of which we are a signatory, says:

The Rome conference participants expressed their determination to work immediately to reach with the utmost urgency a cease-fire that puts an end to the current violence and hostilities. The cease-fire must be lasting, permanent and sustainable.

● (1155)

That statement, of which Canada is a signatory, is dated July 26.

On July 16, and 10 days later on July 26, Canada called for a ceasefire, along with our international partners.

What do I think Canada's role going forward is going to be? I think we can continue to be a reasoned participant in these discussions at high levels both at the UN and elsewhere, at whatever meetings take place around the most important questions, which I think both of you alluded to, which are these: What will an international force look like? Who will lead that force? What will its mandate be? What will be the timing of its entry into Lebanon? And what will its role be once inside Lebanon?

One of the suggestions I've made is that this force should secure the borders, with the active participation and involvement of the Lebanese army, to cut off the supply lines to Hezbollah to ensure that no further rockets munitions are going to be brought in, either through the ports or through the border with Syria. That, among other efforts, is again part of the larger participation that isn't a military solution, but it's part of an international peacemaking exercise that has to occur.

What Canada's role might be in that international intervention is yet to be determined, because the mandate has not been set. That, I believe, is the most primary, principled, and urgent task that the UN has before it right now.

The Chair: Very quickly, Minister MacKay.

The last question, I think—

Hon. Peter MacKay: I have one final point.

With respect to the stabilization of the country and the humanitarian relief, I think Canada can play a leading role in that regard, and this includes, of course, emphasis on the protection of civilians and the core element of a mandate of the force that will enter Lebanon, which I think is going to be very much akin to some of the humanitarian relief efforts in which Canada has a great deal of expertise.

I'm not saying here today that we are making specific commitments as yet, but we are certainly going to be participants in what the mandate will be. I think we would be certainly negligent

if we were not at the table and being informed of what this international force is going to look like, what its mandate will be, and when it can begin its important work, particularly when it comes to the protection of civilians now and the humanitarian relief that is needed immediately.

● (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKay.

A very quick question, Mr. Goldring. Just a very quick question.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Minister, for appearing here today.

As a primary purpose of this meeting here was to discuss the evacuation, I personally want to add my congratulations to your department and to the public servants who worked on this. I think all of us had a chance to interact, whether phoning for particular people to try to locate them, and the cooperation and involvement from the departments involved was just marvellous given the circumstances that were existing at the time.

I wanted to ask one question. With the number of ships that Canada had arranged for to evacuate personnel, were there other ships that were arranged for by other Canadian groups or organizations that might have been there to be able to assist? Were there other Canadian groups or organizations that might have hired ships there too, or were they all organized by the Canadian government?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'm going to defer to Mr. Boehm, who was the individual, along with Mr. Fox and other leaders in this exercise, who made arrangements for the leasing of ships, as well as the important second component, which was the leasing of airplanes to bring Canadians back directly to Canada.

In all, there were 32 ferry passages—31 out of Beirut and one out of Tyre—and all individuals were processed either through Cyprus or Mersin, Turkey.

We had seven contracts signed for sea transportation, ten contracts for air transportation. There were 52 flights back to Canada—31 from Cyprus, 21 from Turkey. There were 425 emergency passports issued in this period, which again required a great deal of person-hours to process that exercise. A total of 12,555 evacuees have now safely returned to Canada.

Your question about specifics of who we were competing with and how these contracts were arrived at, I think, can be best answered by Mr. Boehm. But there was competition—fierce competition—bidding, in fact, for the use of the limited number of ships that were available in both Turkey and Cyprus for this exercise.

Mr. Boehm.

The Chair: Mr. Boehm, go ahead, please, very quickly.

Mr. Peter Boehm (Assistant Deputy Minister, North America (and Consular Affairs), Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Foreign Affairs)): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Goldring, as part of our evacuation and contingency planning, we had contacts already with various shipping companies, and with the charter airlines as well, and it was a matter of activating them. So when we contracted ships, we had to go through brokers. There were many brokers who were acting for the shipping owners. And we did that obviously by contacting them. They were, of course, being contacted by other countries as well.

To the greatest extent possible, we were also dealing with the heads of task forces of the other countries to ensure that we could develop as smooth as possible an operation. And that is why we ended up taking some Australians, a fair number of Americans, etc., and it went the other way as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Lalonde, go ahead, please, very quickly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Minister, thank you for joining us here today. However, before you leave, since we haven't exhausted the subject, I'd like to ask you a question.

First of all, what is your take on the fact that in Israel — I regularly read the newspaper Ha'aretz — “a Hezbollah victory” is seen as having fairly dramatic consequences for the Middle East? Furthermore, Israel, a country reputed — and I believe it's true — to have the most efficient intelligence service, indeed probably more efficient than the US intelligence service — has attacked Lebanon, and not Hezbollah, with the kind of force that the vast majority of observers have deemed exaggerated and excessive. Hasn't Israel given Hezbollah, which Lebanon was in the process of demilitarizing, the opportunity to demonstrate that it is in fact defending Lebanon?

Mr. Minister, the situation today is far more complex than it was prior to the onset of hostilities. I'll leave you with that. However, the situation does warrant some reflection, because I'm deeply concerned about your comments regarding a permanent and sustainable ceasefire, in light of what's happening in the region.

● (1205)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you for your question, Ms. Lalonde. It's very interesting to see you present a reasonable position.

[*English*]

I'm not going to comment on what information was or wasn't available to the Israeli intelligence or how they telegraphed their moves to Hezbollah. I think the important issue is the necessity on the part of the Government of Israel and its military to play an active role now in securing its own borders and its own national security force. Hezbollah have been acting, as I mentioned earlier, like a cancer. It has a political wing, members of which are representatives elected to the parliament, and it has that democratic outlet to express its desires for such things as the Shebaa Farms, mentioned by Mr. Martin, and other outstanding issues. That one in particular appears to be one of the greatest motivations it has for its very existence.

That does not in any way, shape, or form justify the indiscriminate rocket attacks that have gone on literally since the withdrawal of Israel from the country of Lebanon and the withdrawal, by the way, from Syria. Lebanon was well on its way when Hezbollah

commenced this unprovoked attack on Israel. And so, if there is any wisdom in all of this, clearly it is going to involve support for the Government of Lebanon to finally bring about the actual implementation of Resolution 1559 along with several other interconnected resolutions from the United Nations and the resolution of the land dispute over Shebaa Farms.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame McDonough, do you have a very quick question?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I'll be very brief.

I'm sure the minister will be aware that the support for Hezbollah in Lebanon has dramatically increased as a result of the bombing of innocent civilians and massive destruction of infrastructure and the threat that still hangs over their heads. Does the minister understand that continuing on that military path is bound to increase and is already showing signs of increasing the support for the other side in this hostility? And in view of the overwhelming evidence of this, why will he not refrain from constantly feeding and fuelling that kind of process?

And secondly, can the minister indicate whether Canada will participate in a military presence — the more immediate the better — to maintain that ceasefire, and if so, in what way and to what extent?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Firstly, I'm not advocating violence; I'm not advocating further military action, which you've extrapolated as the reason for greater support for Hezbollah. I don't follow that logic.

Canada has consistently looked for ways to make a positive contribution to this process and will continue to do so at every available opportunity, at every forum. We support the establishment of this multinational force; that much is clear. That's been very much the preoccupation of much of the discussion around what can be contributed to lead to the ceasefire and to make it lasting, to make it durable.

Canada, as you know, is already heavily committed in its operations in Afghanistan; we have other commitments to Haiti; we are increasingly looking at the contribution that we can make in Africa, in Sudan. There has been no request for Canada to participate militarily in this international force that is quantifiable. There has been no mandate set for the international force. There has been no decision taken as to what other countries will participate. Those are all questions that require answers before we could even contemplate what role we might play.

In the meantime, I think and I believe, we have demonstrated our commitment already to the humanitarian effort, to the diplomatic effort, and to certainly be participants in the discussion around what the mandate of the international force should be: the timing; what it will be comprised of; what countries will and will not participate; what role NATO might play, if any. Those are all big, important questions on which the United Nations security force and, I suspect, a group of countries that will include Canada will focus their attention now.

As I mentioned earlier, I think you would expect no less than for Canada to be at the table and to help influence, in whatever constructive and positive way we can, what that multinational force should look like and what its role should be in bringing about a lasting, durable peace in Lebanon.

•(1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We want to thank you for taking the time today to come on this very important issue. Not just Canadians but the world is gripped with what's happening in the Middle East, and many people, as you suggested, understand very well that loved ones and friends were trapped there in Lebanon. Thank you for coming and explaining Canada's role in the evacuation process, and thank you for taking the extra time.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I want to express my thanks to you, to my parliamentary colleagues, for their informed, compassionate, and important interventions. I commit to working with this committee and with all of you as we go forward. Any and all information about the location—again, I reiterate—of citizens inside Lebanon in need of our help is appreciated. Please forward it to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Chair: We'll do that.

Thank you very much. We will now suspend and we will come back at one o'clock.

•(1212)

(Pause)

•(1306)

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), we will resume this morning's meeting, requested by four members of the committee, in relation to the current Middle East crisis and the evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon.

We are pleased to have with us here today the Canadian International Development Agency. They will give us their presentation, please.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, this morning we had committee business in the order of the day, and there is none this afternoon. I move that before hearing from the CIDA officials, we go to committee business.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Seconded.

The Chair: So we have a motion that we go to committee business.

Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I don't understand why we would do that right now. We're at a point where we want to hear from some witnesses. This meeting was not called by the government; it was called by representatives of all three opposition parties to, first and foremost, hear and take evidence—in the words of Madame Lalonde—on the efforts of the Canadian government with regard to the evacuation. So why would we proceed to committee business before we have heard the witnesses? I find that extraordinary. I think we should hear them.

Secondly, we have a very real concern. We have before us a number of witnesses from CIDA whose time is very valuable right now. They are working on the humanitarian efforts in Lebanon to ensure that humanitarian aid gets delivered and that we help with the crisis there. They've already been kind enough to indulge the committee and wait until one o'clock to deliver their evidence and be away from their other work. If we're going to have some strange

procedural tactic right now that requires them to wait, we are going to have a direct impact as a committee on their ability to carry out their work. We are interrupting their work in delivering that humanitarian aid.

So as the agenda calls for and Madame Lalonde's letter requested, I would like us to go straight to hearing evidence on the Canadian humanitarian efforts right now. It's beyond me why we would abandon that through some kind of strange procedural tactic, interrupt their work, and keep them from their work even longer.

The Chair: Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I agree it's a very frustrating situation we're faced with. I'm sorry to say I think it's of the government's own creation, and I think it's not out of order to say there was no traditional consultation whatsoever with committee members about how we would proceed.

The parliamentary secretary, Mr. Van Loan, has just cited for the third time that the purpose of this meeting is to deal with the evacuation question. I was one of four petitioners for this meeting. I made it very clear we were asking to deal with the escalating Middle East crisis, which has many aspects. I think it's time for the committee to take some shared responsibility—which even in a majority government would happen, never mind in a minority government—to set the course of our work for the rest of the day. The less time we spend debating that, the more time we can allow our officials to get on with their other work.

I think this committee has a responsibility to re-establish some kind of order to our proceedings. So far, what we've had is a completely unilateral assumption of responsibility by the chairman. I guess he accepts responsibility for the fact that some witnesses have been lined up with no consultation with the steering committee. So we're conducting committee business that hasn't actually been put together by the committee.

In seconding the motion, I would argue that we move very quickly to deal with some of that committee business and then come back to hearing with great enthusiasm from our CIDA officials, who are doing an incredible job in spite of the horrors they're dealing with.

•(1310)

The Chair: Just let me, please—

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I happen to take great exception to the characterization of the chair having unilaterally set the agenda of this meeting. The agenda of this meeting was set by the request from the opposition.

Madame Lalonde's letter clearly says:

[*Translation*]

“Second, it should look at ways Canada could contribute to the humanitarian relief effort underway and help the people affected.”

[English]

That is what Madame Lalonde asked that this meeting deal with. That is what the witnesses in front of us are here to deal with. That is how the agenda of this meeting was established, according to the request from the opposition that set it. I say we came here to do work; you, in the opposition, asked us to do work; let's do the work. Let's hear the evidence.

I don't know why we would go into committee business and make decisions before we've heard the evidence. I've never heard of a court of law in a democracy that decides to pass its verdict first and then hear the witnesses later.

The Chair: Mr. Van Loan, let me just respond to the...I wouldn't call it an accusation; I give Madam McDonough more credit than that. For a number of reasons—because this morning's meeting was late starting and because it went past the 12 o'clock time—we did not adjourn. We suspended the meeting so that we could pick up where we were.

Certainly, I do not want to cut committee business short. I want to give Madame Lalonde, who I know will be bringing forward a motion, ample time to deal with that.

The other point you made was that unilaterally the chair put forward witnesses. There are two things. First of all, all witnesses who applied through the chair were then forwarded to the clerk. I did not screen witnesses. Every witness, as far as I know, who came in to our office was just forwarded to the clerk as per the norm. It is up to the parliamentary group, the clerk's office, to choose the witnesses.

Never has the steering committee picked and chosen witnesses. We pick and choose topics. We bring forward witnesses. If I could pick and choose, if I could veto certain witnesses coming forward, I would suggest that would be a terribly dangerous situation. No, the steering committee does not veto or pick and choose witnesses. We choose the direction that the committee is going, and that's what we tried to do.

The opposition brought forward the parameters of what this committee would be called back on. The researchers and clerks understood the different parameters, and we waited, as you have done always in the past, for witness lists to appear. Maybe I should check with some of my colleagues to see if they sent witnesses to my office, but I don't believe they did. As far as I know, we did forward all witnesses.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I just want to pinpoint something, Mr. Chair. First of all, if you had adjourned this morning—

• (1315)

The Chair: I didn't.

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, if you had adjourned this morning, there would be no more meeting this afternoon. One way or the other, we need to suspend, and from the reaction this morning at noon...I say we suspend for two minutes and get to the committee business right now, at 12:05. You decided on the other way. Now you need to take the responsibility—

The Chair: And I will.

Mr. Bernard Patry: The second thing is this. I was chair of this committee for many years, and the clerk never chooses the witnesses. It's not the clerk's job to choose the witnesses. They provide names to the chair, names to the committee, and the standing committee, the full committee, decides who the witnesses will be in accordance with an agreement with all the committees.

We have a motion right now to go to committee business because there's none on the afternoon schedule. It was not there. It was there on the morning schedule. We're going to go now; you have a motion, and I ask you for the vote right now. You have a motion to go to the vote right now.

The Chair: That's fine, Mr. Patry.

We have a speaking list, and this is a debatable motion.

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, no, no.

The Chair: I'll refer to the clerk.

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, no. I asked for the vote; when the vote is asked for, you need to call the vote.

The Chair: Can I ask the clerk for procedural...?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Angela Crandall): Calling for the question is not acceptable in committee.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Chair, it might be helpful to ask you a simple question, if I may have the floor.

I agree, I too am very disconcerted with how this has arrived. Was there in fact, pursuant to the request by the members, a call for witnesses by you? Yes or no?

The Chair: I'll have to talk to the clerk. For myself—

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Chair, if you could answer that question now, I think it would certainly give rise to support for what my colleagues have been saying here—that we ought to immediately go to business. Given that there was no call—I'm going to assume there was no call—

The Chair: Yes, just wait. I can tell you what I clearly passed on to the office of the clerk. I'm not sure to whom I spoke at that time, but what I said was...because at one point in time, we had been requested to have one meeting of the foreign affairs committee.

I spoke to another member; in fact, Madam McDonough called me, and I appreciated it. She said, "Mr. Sorenson, we do not want this thing just to happen in one quick meeting." I don't think I'm breaking any confidence; I don't know if that phone call was confidential. She said we want to give time for this committee to meet. I won't put words into her mouth, but the idea was that we wanted to have extended time. At one point it was a Monday and possibly a Tuesday meeting.

So we asked the clerk's office, Mr. McTeague, to make sure we had enough people who could be brought forward, whether that would be the departments or CIDA or whoever, and to arrange for that and—

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Chair, I appreciate that, but I also respect the fact that no member—

I'm sorry. Can you hear?

The Chair: I'll take Mr. McTeague, and then we'll come to you, Mr. Obhrai.

Hon. Dan McTeague: I think it's very clear, Mr. Chair, that the request by the members for this meeting, which has been accepted, did not make, in fact, a call for witnesses, nor did you proceed with a call for witnesses. As such, in order for this committee to properly examine this issue, given the time constraint we have, and honouring what Mr. Van Loan has said—he is very concerned about the time that can be spent by these officials—I suggest we get on with this vote and that we respect the fact that you did not make a call for witnesses and that what you have is a very selective group.

Normally, on any other committee—and I sat on this committee, as you did, Mr. Chair—we would take the time through a steering committee to select and go over the names of people. I'm sure there are probably witnesses here right now, or people who want to be witnesses who could not be here, and I think in fairness to this issue, if we really want to take it seriously, Canadians expect us to be balanced in terms of who we bring forward.

Given that there was no call, I suggest you honour what is an obvious answer, and that's that there was no call for witnesses and therefore there ought not to be witnesses.

The Chair: There was a call for witnesses, in that we knew we were going to have more than one meeting. It's the responsibility of the table, I guess, to make sure we have people here to give testimony, and that's what they attempted to do. That constitutes, in my opinion, a call for witnesses.

Hon. Dan McTeague: No, it doesn't, Chair, and you've not asked for witnesses. I think there's a more formal way—

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Both of my colleagues on the other side have talked about being chairs of the committee. They seem to forget we were also part of this committee. When somebody calls for a special committee meeting, which they did... They went out of their way and they wanted to talk, as Madam Alexa McDonough said, on the important issue of the Middle East crisis, and we agreed. We all agreed. This is important, so let's come forward and let's talk about it.

As for the spirit that was given, as per Madame Lalonde's letter, she put forward a motion, which is before us, that they want to discuss.

What has happened, from our perspective, is that this thing is turning into a political football right now, whereby they want to score political points by saying these witnesses can come, and those cannot come, and to choose. They had time, because they are the ones who put the motion forward, and should have attached a list of witnesses, as you have rightfully pointed out.

What I'm saying is that in the spirit of cooperation, because the crisis is going on, we need to discuss this. People are watching us, so let's hear what CIDA has to say, to give people an idea, and let's hear the witnesses who are here and get their point of view. Then, if they want to have additional witnesses, they are more than free to call them or whatever they want to do. But to say now, at this juncture, when we've all come here and this is televised, no, we don't want to talk to these witnesses after the taxpayers have already paid for them to come here....

Just let's listen to everybody. Let's get to what we want. Let's hear from CIDA, let's hear from the witnesses, and if that does not satisfy the committee members of the opposition, nothing stops them from calling in more witnesses later on. In that spirit, I say let's move forward.

• (1320)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

To clarify one thing, I want to make sure the opposition understands what is on the agenda here. We're not proposing that everything be pushed back until after the witnesses. We're proposing that we listen to CIDA and then do committee business as per what we have on the agenda this morning. It's not that we're going to push committee business right back to the very tail end of the day. It's that we have an opportunity to hear CIDA, so we have ample opportunity for committee business, for Madame Lalonde's motion.

I recognize Madame Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chairman, on July 19 last, my colleague Diane and I took it upon ourselves to request that the committee be convened, in accordance with one of the two rules of procedure whereby committees may be convened when the House is adjourned. We made it clear that we wished to discuss the following three topics: the evacuation, humanitarian relief and the crisis itself.

You deemed it best that we take the second approach to convene a committee meeting, namely that we collect four signatures. Therefore, in addition to our own signatures, we collected those of Alexa McDonough and Bernard Patry. You ultimately agreed to call a meeting. This isn't the first time that I've resorted to this approach. I did so during the 2003 crisis when Iraq was attacked.

As I recalled — and I verified the facts — when the Chair receives a request of this nature, he must convene the committee which then decides whether or not to consider the motion and if so, how. The committee also decides then whether or not to hear from witnesses. In this particular instance, the following request was ultimately made:

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), we the undersigned members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development request that you convene at the earliest opportunity a meeting of the committee to discuss the tragic events in the Middle East.

To be honest, Mr. Chairman, it was neither my intention nor that of my colleague to undertake a lengthy study of the situation. Rather, it was our wish to draft a motion for consideration by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. We maintain this position. I have a great deal of respect for those who wish to testify, but if we go down that road, then we will have to be fair.

I for one have not called anyone. To my knowledge, there are very few Quebeckers, despite their keen interest in this crisis, who would be prepared to appear, unless it was a last minute decision on their part. In an emergency situation, the committee should use this valuable time to endeavour to adopt a majority position. Later, we could pursue or complete our study on Lebanon or the Middle East. However, we cannot hear from witnesses in a fair and equitable manner. That would take a great deal of time. In my opinion, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development mustn't waste any time on this.

I stand by my position which hasn't changed since I requested a committee meeting.

• (1325)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Lalonde.

Madame Folco, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): I believe that's all.

[English]

The Chair: Madame McDonough, go ahead, please.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I certainly don't want to use up the time of the committee repeating much of what my colleague Madame Lalonde has said, but I'm very concerned—and I don't mean this as a point of order, but only as a point of discussion—that only part of the exchange I had with the committee chair on Friday was brought forward to the committee. I'm sure it wasn't his intention, but I called precisely because I got a notice of meeting with a list of witnesses on it, and my instant response and reaction was that this represents a very narrow range of interests. It's not that they're not legitimate voices to be heard—I don't say that for a moment—but they are not broadly representative. It's not a comprehensive list, and in fact, most of the witnesses on there are clearly identified with a small, fairly well-defined position.

I'm not talking about our officials. Let me make it very clear.

The Chair: What position?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: My argument was that if there are going to be witnesses—and I wasn't prepared to hear from witnesses who looked very much as though they represented one particular set of interests—I was not prepared for us to hear witnesses unless and until we had a more balanced, broadly representative range of witnesses. We don't have that now.

I think what we should do is spend a few minutes in committee to decide where we go from here. I greatly value and respect the time and the testimony of our CIDA officials who are here with us, and the Red Cross officials. I think we should then go back to dealing

with the longer-term plan for what we're going to do. But let's be fair here. I'm very concerned that the clerk's office will get scapegoated, much in the same way as the Lebanese are getting scapegoated by people taking up one side of a position.

When I contacted the clerk to say I'm concerned about this very narrow range of interests that have now been confirmed as witnesses, with no consultation, I was told that the clerk simply contacted the people he was instructed to contact by the chair. I don't want to see the clerk's office scapegoated in this.

But I think what we have to do, as we always have a responsibility to do, is to come up with a broad, representative set of witnesses on this occasion and any other occasion when we're dealing with issues. Since the very point of the overwhelming concern about the government's position is that it's unilateral, that it's narrow, that it doesn't take into consideration the vast complexity and range of interests involved, we don't need to turn around in an all-party committee, especially in a minority government, and repeat that sin.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam McDonough.

Let me make it very clear, there was no solicitation. I submitted the names of those who came forward. I did not screen to see who.... You know what? I don't think I have met any of the witnesses ever, and I may be proven wrong, but they were forwarded as I felt all opposition parties were submitting.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Chair, you're debating about witnesses. That's not the idea. We're not debating about witnesses. We have a motion that is going on.

The Chair: No, Madame Lalonde was first. I'm sorry.

Madame Lalonde.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Marleau-Montpetit notes the following:

A committee may wish to hear testimony from private individuals, representatives of groups, or public officials concerning the matter which it is studying. Witness selection may be carried out in a number of different ways. Normally, witnesses are proposed by individual committee members. The committee may also invite potential witnesses to indicate their interest in appearing. The selection is often delegated to the Sub-committee on Procedure and Agenda, subject to ratification by the full committee.

It is the responsibility of the committee as a whole to determine which witnesses it will hear. Practical considerations, such as the length of time allocated for a study, limit the number of witnesses the committee will be able to accommodate. While any member of a committee may propose witnesses, the committee makes the final decision as to who will be heard.

• (1330)

[English]

The Chair: Correct. If that's what your committee business is, the point of debate right now is whether or not we're going to hear from CIDA or if we're going to committee business. If we go to committee business, I know it's going to take a fair bit of time to deal with your 25-point motion.

I recognize Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Mr. Chairman, the purpose of the meeting here was, in three points, to evaluate the evacuation, the humanitarian aid, and the ongoing crisis.

In a situation like this where the witnesses clearly have been called, and they have been laid out, and they're here ready to make their presentation, I think it's a matter of respect that we should proceed with this and listen to this. And as well, there's the simple fact that I would certainly like to hear from these witnesses to be able to formulate in my mind exactly what the end result of this will be if it does come to a vote. I think it's ignoring that fact if we go into committee business, which may very well impact on a decision to be made, without hearing from the witnesses. I think it's absolutely imperative to hear from the witnesses first, and this is the way the meeting had been structured.

The Chair: Mr. Casey, did you have a point?

Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I just heard Madame McDonough and Madame Lalonde give lengthy discussions on witnesses. I don't see anywhere in the motion, which has been put, that we move to committee business.

We're discussing whether to hear the witnesses in front of us or deal with committee business now. I think we were actually discussing the committee business. I'm only speculating, because I don't know what they wish to put. The only committee business I'm aware of is a motion by Madame Lalonde, which will be quite lengthy. That motion should only be dealt with after we've heard evidence, so we can make a reasonable decision, rather than prejudging matters before we hear the witnesses.

However, I did hear Ms. McDonough say that she has no problem with the witnesses from CIDA. If that is indeed the position of the other parties, then I see no reason for us to be upsetting our agenda if there's no problem. Then we have committee business scheduled to take place after the witnesses from CIDA.

I know from discussing this with them, when we asked them to indulge us and come back at one o'clock, that they have very important priorities and business regarding humanitarian aid right now. If the opposition is genuine—and the crocodile tears they cry for the humanitarian situation in Lebanon right now—they would not be seeking to detain and delay these officials any longer, with regard to what seems a wholly unnecessary reordering of procedure.

As I understand it, at least from Madame McDonough, there's no problem with hearing CIDA, and we're happy to hear CIDA. We can have whatever other discussion regarding witnesses after CIDA has appeared. I see no problem there, and I don't understand why we need to delay them. We have an agenda and it's set out already. We have work to do. Let's do the work that the people of Canada sent us here to do.

The Chair: Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chairman, I know the record will clearly show—and if members choose to recall—I tried to prevent what is happening here. I begged the chairman to assure us that we would deal with it before we adjourned for lunch, and possibly not

adjourn for lunch at all. Over lunch, we could have dealt with this committee business matter without subjecting our colleagues to this.

I think it needs to be recognized that this is a situation created by unilateral decisions made on the government side, and by the chairman, to not acknowledge that there was a problem about the scheduling of witnesses, which we should have discussed over lunch, if necessary, to be able to carry on. I think it's not acceptable for members to say that what we're now creating is terrible. This morning we tried to prevent this from happening.

• (1335)

The Chair: Not necessarily. The fact of the matter is that we have witnesses. When we extended the one meeting to more than one, which happened only because we wanted to cooperate as much as possible with the opposition, we needed to fill that extra time. At that point, the names had been submitted, and I'm not scapegoating the clerk's office, but they contacted those people. I didn't know who they were, but some were brought here, and as I understand, some came from all across the country.

All we're saying is that we can have other witnesses at other dates and times when we come back this fall. I'm certain there will be balance. I hope there will be balance in hearing these witnesses today. I have no indication there won't. All I have are some accusations from the opposition that it's lopsided—one viewpoint. I don't believe that. I think they are people who are going to give their opinions on what they saw when they were evacuated and on how it went. There are all kinds of different groups represented here.

Mr. Martin, were you waving your hand?

Hon. Dan McTeague: No, I was.

The Chair: Mr. McTeague, and then Mr. Obhrai.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Patry, go ahead.

Mr. Bernard Patry: All right, I'll go.

I want to state one thing, Mr. Chair. You talk about fairness, but we had a gentleman's agreement at 11:55 to keep going until the minister left and then do committee business. You said yes. That was a gentleman's agreement, I'm very sorry. I challenge you on this. We had a gentleman's agreement to proceed, and you said it would take five or ten minutes maximum. Then you decided to suspend and come back at one o'clock. That's fine, no problem, since you stated that we were going to start with this. That is what you told me, and I have witnesses. You decided not to do it.

If you want us to keep working as a committee in a unanimous way, I think it's great to have the opposition on your side. I must tell you that some other colleagues provided you with some witness lists, but it was said that the list was closed. That's not the way—

The Chair: At what time? When?

Mr. Bernard Patry: We provided that to you. We asked for Médecins sans frontières.

The Chair: Wait a minute. That is an accusation that the witness list was said to be closed. That is not correct.

Mr. Bernard Patry: You should not be debating, just listening. You're not the vice-chair, you're the chair now. Listen to the vice-chair. We don't have to provide that to your office. We provide this to the clerk's office. There's a very big difference.

The Chair: That's fine. Did you?

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, some other members did.

It's up to you. If you don't want these witnesses to appear, go ahead, it's your decision.

You have a motion on the table, and the motion must go on. Let's vote on it.

The Chair: We also have a speaker's list.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I heard from the other side about a gentleman's agreement, and I heard from the NDP that these are government witnesses. Let me tell you as a member of this committee that I have not submitted any names. I have not been involved in any of these things. I genuinely came here. There is a motion here, and we are looking at it.

I don't know where you are getting the idea that these are government witnesses and that we've called them in. I want to put on the record very clearly that I as the government did not call any witnesses. This went out, people wanted to come, and the witnesses are here.

As somebody who has come here to openly listen, I am saying let's listen to the witnesses. Then we can have further discussion with everybody involved.

You, Mr. Patry, talked about working together. This is what we are trying to do, but you are throwing grenades at us and telling us that we have these witnesses who somehow belong to us. Alexa McDonough is saying it. That is wrong. We did not forward any names, so let's state that very clearly.

I just want to ask, why are you afraid of hearing from them?

The Chair: We'll come back to Mr. Obhrai.

There is a point of order.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Obhrai, I never used the words "government witnesses". I never said that.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: You said "colleagues".

Mr. Bernard Patry: I said "colleagues", I didn't say "government". I just want to pinpoint that. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Madam Mourani.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I move that we proceed to committee business and I request a vote. I request a majority vote, because the majority of those present would like to proceed with committee business. I say we vote and move along, because we're wasting time.

There are people waiting and others who want us to act. You want action? So do we. Therefore, let's get on with business. If we must vote, then so be it. Let's get on with it.

[*English*]

The Chair: That is exactly the point of debate, Madam Mourani, and we have a speaker's list to that point.

The next one is Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chairman, I'm concerned. There are people in this room who were told that the committee list was closed before there was any assurance by the committee that we had balance and diversity and representativeness in the lineup of witnesses. When I called to register my objection, I made it very clear that the process had not taken place, that there'd been no consultation, and that there was a responsibility for the committee to assure there was balance and diversity in the selection of witnesses.

Personally, I'm distressed that you would say, rather boastfully, well, I didn't know who they were or where they were from or anything else. Yet you agreed to the closing of the list.

When I called, I pleaded not to close the list, but here we are. The list was never expanded beyond what it was. Yet we are told this isn't a violation of the normal practices and responsibility of the multi-party committee to ensure that there is balance, representativeness, and diversity.

If it's not the chair who has decided to act unilaterally, taking some responsibility for this, then who does he think should take responsibility? Other members of the committee are saying that they are taking some responsibility. That's why we're in this discussion. That's why we think we should go immediately to committee business, deal with it, and conduct our committee the way the committee decides it wants to be conducted.

The Chair: Madam McDonough, I want to clarify something you said. You said it was indicated that the witness list was closed. From what I am told from the clerk's office, that did not happen. What they were told was that the list is full for today, and as I understand the clerk, she is still keeping track—

An hon. member: You don't have the authority to make that decision.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: There is a roomful of people who were told it was closed.

The Chair: Okay, and that witness list is still being taken down. She has taken those names.

The responsibility of the clerk's office is to make sure that we have witnesses for the meetings that are being called today. The witness list was full for today. All right?

She told them yesterday. It wasn't last week. You had five days to put forward the letters, which you did, and those witness lists could have come forward as well.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, I phoned on Friday, the moment I saw that list—

The Chair: Yes, you did.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: —and said groups had been told it's closed. That's not acceptable—

The Chair: No, they were not.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: —and I was asking you to give assurances that this would not be the case, however long it took.

I argue that we should meet for at least the rest of today, into the night and tomorrow as well, to accommodate a broader diversity, a more representative range of witnesses.

But I think it's somewhat tragic, given the severity of what's happening in the Middle East, that as an all-party committee we can't come to an agreement. It would be great if it could be unanimous; otherwise, I think democracy still exists in this committee. The majority of committee members should decide how we want to conduct our business from here on, for the rest of the afternoon. Why don't we go to a vote and do that before we look as though we aren't actually concerned about the real issue at hand?

The Chair: Madam McDonough, I'll respond this way, in that you called Friday evening and—

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Within an hour of getting the list.

The Chair: All right. You called Friday evening, and I am told—

Ms. Alexa McDonough: No, I called earlier in the day and you returned my call Friday evening.

The Chair: All right. Well, whenever, but I was told by the clerk's office that no one was told that on Friday. They were told that on Monday.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: It's not true.

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin: We were told on the 28th that the list was closed.

• (1345)

The Clerk: It's possible that my office did. I wasn't here on the 28th.

The Chair: I was not aware of that, and I am still not.

Madame Folco, you're on the list.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Thank you very much, Chair.

This is an important question we have in front of us, which is not whether we should have one witness or another. The real question is, what should Canada do and what should Canada say about the situation in the Middle East?

I would strongly suggest that there have been mistakes on both sides, from what I understand.

I do understand, from my former role as the chair of a committee, that it is up to the committee, as Madame Lalonde explained, to decide who are going to be the witnesses. I would suggest that rather

than call for a vote, we have another gentleman's understanding on both sides of this table that we hear the members from CIDA, that we hear the Red Cross, and that immediately after, we have discussions about committee business.

It is obvious that various people understand various things about it. So that there is no misunderstanding on this, please let's have a gentleman's—

The Chair: Are you speaking for your party?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I'm asking you as chair to go around and ask people whether they would agree to then go on to hear this particular group of witnesses, who are *fonctionnaires*, who are here.

The Chair: Madame Folco, are you speaking on behalf of all the Liberal Party or just—

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, I am speaking.

The Chair: Well, just wait. You can speak, but in order.

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, you asked her a question.

The Chair: Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Patry, I believe Madame Folco has made an eminently sensible suggestion. I've heard nothing, not one suggestion from anybody on that side of the table, why we cannot hear from CIDA and then do committee business later.

Perhaps there's an objection on the part of the opposition to hearing CIDA. I haven't heard anybody voice that. What I've heard is a lot of discussion of what I think would actually be the discussion we might have if we were at committee business, which, if we were there, might end up being academic.

The only thing that I know is on committee business right now is the motion, but Madame Folco has put forward what I think is an eminently workable and practical suggestion to get our work done. It would allow the CIDA people to say their piece and to be heard by us; it would allow them to get back to the very important priorities of delivering that humanitarian aid and working on the situation in Lebanon.

In the absence of any reason why we can't hear from CIDA before dealing with the business, I think Madame Folco has hit the mark right on.

The Chair: It is Madame Folco's recommendation, and if the government is—

Mr. Bernard Patry: Madame Folco, we have a motion. You cannot have another motion if we have a motion on the table.

The Chair: We were thinking it might be an amicable agreement.

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, I'm just telling you. You think what you want to think; those are the rules.

Now, it is a fact that you have a motion on the table. The rule is to answer Mr. Van Loan. You told me at 11:55 we were going to go to future business, committee business, right away, and suspend there. The question is, do we trust you as a chair or don't we trust you as a chair on this side of the committee? If you want our trust—you see that we can all work together—you need to go along with what you said. You said that, and we have witnesses.

I'm very sorry. You've got a motion? There is no motion on the table. You vote on this motion or keep talking. That's it.

The Chair: If we could have suspended or adjourned.... Some said to adjourn and do committee business. I wasn't going to adjourn; we hadn't heard from CIDA.

Mr. Bernard Patry: When you're adjourned, there's no more committee. Everything is ended. You're suspended.

The Chair: All right, but it would have.... With the logistics of how this room was—with the media, and the room was packed—you could not suspend and come back in one minute. You know, Mr. Patry, that it would have been virtually impossible at a quarter after 12, when the next meeting was coming back at one o'clock.

Mr. Bernard Patry: That's fine. We'll start now.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To my esteemed colleague Bernard Patry, who was the chairman last time, we cooperated with you. There's nothing at all telling you not to cooperate. You are giving unreal threats. I don't know why. You have been a chairman in the past, and we have cooperated.

You can take that motion out right now and go on to what Madame Folco said, which is one of the most important things, but you are being stubborn and you are refusing to do that. You know, for a man of your stature...when you were the chairman, you were far more compromising, and all those things. It gives me cause for concern when you accuse us of not helping, but we are. You can withdraw.

As for what Madame Folco said, in the best interests of everybody and so we can move the committee forward, we'll go back to the committee as well. Nobody is saying that we are not going to committee business. All we are saying is let's hear them and get a better idea of what is happening, and then talk about committee business. We haven't declined that, and I think her suggestion is the best.

I think that while Mr. Patry, on a procedural tactic, can talk about the motion on the floor as the mover of the motion on the floor and as a former chairman of the foreign affairs committee in which we all cooperated, it is in our best interest for Mr. Patry just to say he withdraws, and we can move forward.

• (1350)

The Chair: Mr. Goldring is next.

Mr. Peter Goldring: To repeat, the concern is that this meeting on the committee business might deprive us of hearing from the witnesses before a decision is made, and we really should have been apprised of what the witnesses can say.

I really feel that Madame Folco has made a very good offer on this. It makes sense. We are allowed to hear the witnesses—they're here, they're ready to go—and then deal with that committee business after we've heard from the witnesses. I really don't see why the opposition parties would object to that, unless there are some other ulterior motives on the committee business that could impact it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Casey is next.

Mr. Bill Casey: I just want to add my support to Madame Folco's proposal. It follows the agenda. The committee business is on the agenda. We've wasted 50 minutes of valuable time. I think we should go back to the agenda as first adopted when we came in this morning.

The Chair: Is there anyone else?

Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I'm going to reiterate. I have yet to hear a single reason why we can't hear from CIDA now from any member of the opposition, unless there is something coming forward that involves debating Madame Lalonde's motion in full, which I don't think we should do before we hear witnesses. I don't believe anybody thinks we should do that before we have all the evidence. I hope they don't believe we should be taking positions before we have all the evidence. That would be one reason you might want to go ahead.

Another reason you might want to go ahead is that you don't want to hear from CIDA, but there is absolutely no reason that we can't have committee business—procedural discussion—after we've heard from CIDA and after we've heard from the Red Cross as well, as Madame Folco has suggested. There is no reason at all that we can't proceed in that fashion.

Absent that, there seems to be no need for the motion that is on the floor, a motion that has now cost an hour of time that these individuals and officials would have spent working on the humanitarian issues in Lebanon. An hour of time has been lost already. How much more time will be spent when we actually do debate committee business? This has been a debate not on the actual substance of committee business, but on whether to even do it. Does anybody here realistically think that if we're going to have a lengthy discussion like this on the substance of committee business, we're ever going to hear from them today? No, we'll lose a whole day of their time, and that would be most unfortunate.

In the absence of a single argument, a single proposition put forward by any of the members of the opposition as to why we can't hear from CIDA before we deal with committee business, I see no reason why we shouldn't hear from CIDA.

The Chair: Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I think there's a motion on the floor. It's well-known where opposition members stand and where government members stand. It seems to me that the way to deal with this efficiently and with dispatch is to have a vote on the motion before the committee. On the basis of the democratic decision of the committee, we should proceed with the rest of our business here today.

I know there isn't a procedure that allows us to demand an immediate vote when you call for a vote, but I call for a vote in the spirit of what's been said on both sides. Let's get on with the business. The immediate business is the motion that's before the committee. Let's vote on it and get on with our business.

The Chair: Do we have any other comments?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I just want to note that I think we're coming to a conclusion. What we're seeing here is a political play by the Liberals and the opposition to change the agenda to meet their own political requirements. This was supposed to be a straightforward hearing on everything that happened. Unfortunately, one hour of talking and the former chairman's stubbornness in not moving on can only lead me to believe that this agenda is being hijacked for political purposes, not the actual reason why we all came here.

I came here to listen to everybody, come to an idea, and understand the whole picture with the foreign minister and everybody here. So I want to make it very clear that this has now become a political hot potato, and it's no longer what we came here for.

Thank you.

• (1355)

The Chair: Is there anyone else?

Are we ready for the question? The motion is that we postpone CIDA until later and proceed to committee business.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I am going to ask you to leave your chairs, CIDA, and we will now go to committee business.

Omar, I'd love to accept your point of order, but you aren't a member of the committee.

We'll move to committee business. I assume we want to deal with Madam Lalonde's motion.

Madam Lalonde, you brought forward a motion. It has received the adequate timelines for bringing it forward. Would you like to speak to the motion?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chairman, even if these aren't the best of circumstances, I would have liked to see people be more open to discussing this important question.

I have drafted a motion that some may find long, but that really isn't given the import and complexity of the subject. I will read it and provide brief explanations as needed. I'll start with the "givens".

Given the strong bonds of friendship that unite Canada, especially Quebec, with Lebanon, a pluralistic and francophone democracy and given that it is committed to its security;

Given that Canada is a long-standing friend of Israel, that it actively contributed to its creation and that it is also committed to its security;

Given that these friendships require a balanced position that takes into account the interests and viewpoints of both sides of the conflict;

Given that Canada's balanced position has, in the past, earned the respect of all camps in the Middle East conflict and allowed it to further the peace process;

Given that, of all Western countries, Canada had the largest number of nationals in Lebanon at the outbreak of hostilities and that the government's apparent lack of preparation to the crisis has raised questions and dissatisfaction;

Given the right to self defence included in international law in article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of proportionality;

Given that the parties involved in a conflict have the obligation to respect international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Convention...

An hon. member: [*Editor's note: inaudible*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I'm sorry, but I'm familiar with the contents.

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll proceed, Madame Lalonde.

Could we have order? She's bringing forward her motion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Given that the parties involved in a conflict have the obligation to respect international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian persons in Times of War and the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, which are an absolute imperative in the conduct of war and place personal criminal responsibility on those involved;

Louise Arbour recently called this to mind.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs:

Offers its sincere condolences to the families of Canadians who have died during the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon and deplores the lack of compassion shown by the government;

I'm referring here to Canadian victims; that's why I've not mentioned victims in Israel.

Questions the government's delay in implementing an evacuation plan for Canadian citizens in Lebanon, calls upon it to extend the evacuations to Canadian permanent residents [...]

We discussed that matter this morning.

[...] and to implement concrete measures to help those who are in the southern part of Lebanon [...]

As Marian Mourani so aptly described.

[...] where the hostilities are the most intense;

No one disagrees with that.

Recommends that the government hold a public inquiry into the evacuation operation as soon as possible and draw lessons from this experience;

During the evacuation Swedish nationals praised their government for its efforts. The tsunami proved to be a nightmare for Sweden but it drew on the experience gained from the ensuing inquiry.

Condemns the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah;

Condemns the Israeli bombings that followed the two kidnappings as not respecting the principle of proportionality that contrains the right to self defence;

Believes that the Government of Canada, the only country in the world to have called Israel's attack on Lebanon "measured", not taking into account the extent of the destruction of civilian infrastructures, destroyed Canada's reputation as a trusted third party abroad, and urges it to reconsider its position to conclude in the disproportionate character of those attacks;

Strongly condemns the launching of Hezbollah rockets on Israeli territory;

Strongly condemns the bombings that affect in an indiscriminate way civilians [...]

Like those in Qana.

[...] and destroy civilian infrastructures essential to the populations such as roads, bridges, airports and electricity plants;

Among other things.

Urges the government to support the calls of almost all other countries for an immediate ceasefire on both sides;

Urges the government to require Israel, by the time a ceasefire — which should be immediate — is declared, to make a far greater and more credible effort to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure;

Strongly deplors that, by taking sides, the government has prevented Canada from playing a conciliatory role in restoring and maintaining peace in the region;

Questions the Prime Minister's weak reaction to the bombardment of the UN post that led to the death of a Canadian UN military observer;

Reminds the government that Canada's official foreign policy is still based on the need to resolve the conflict through negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and the Arab world and that the Committee expressed this same opinion in its report on Canada's relations with countries of the Muslim world, adopted unanimously on March 25, 2004;

Considers that there will be no peace in the region without a global and negotiated settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict;

Maintains that the use of force will never resolve the conflicts in the Middle East;

Reiterates its commitment to the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Lebanon and deplors that the damage caused by the bombardment has weakened the ability of the Lebanese government to effectively oversee its territory;

Calls on the Government of Canada to provide aid to Lebanon so that the Lebanese Government, with the help of the international community, can peacefully disarm the militias;

Urges the government to announce an assistance plan for Lebanon that is appropriate to the needs;

Decides to report this resolution to the House, including its preamble.

I truly hope the committee will vote in favour of this motion which is carefully drafted in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law and which seeks a fair peace, a peace that recognizes that armed conflict will never resolve the conflicts throughout the Middle East, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There can be no talk of Lebanon and Hezbollah without reference to the Palestinian cause. Need we remind people that Hezbollah was founded in 1982 further to another Israeli invasion.

This is, in my view, a balanced motion. It may seem harshly worded to some. It wasn't an easy motion to draft. I would have preferred to skirt certain issues. However, as members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, if we want to be respected and to wield any kind of influence, we must adopt a stand consistent with international law and international humanitarian law. We must call a spade a spade. Compassion, truth and justice are the key consideration. I'm not saying by any means that this motion cannot be amended. However, I do hope that overall, it will garner the committee's support.

• (1405)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Lalonde, for a very comprehensive motion. Certainly, it covers most parts of the Middle East crisis.

We'll go to Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Now we have the outcome I exactly feared when we were debating going into committee business: we're being asked right now to make decisions and take a position before we hear the evidence of the witnesses, which Madame Lalonde in her letter asked us to be debating.

She wanted us to discuss humanitarian aid; she wanted to hear about that. Her motion "urges the government to announce an assistance plan for Lebanon that's appropriate to the needs", yet every member of the opposition just voted to prevent CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency, from providing evidence on exactly the humanitarian assistance plan that is in

place, that is being implemented—the \$5.5 million of humanitarian aid. We know nothing of it.

I'm shocked that we have a decision by the opposition, and now a motion that we're debating, to make a decision. Never mind the facts; never mind the information. We want to shut down democracy; we've already made up our minds. We're going to close our ears. Here's the motion; let's go. That's what's happening here.

We had witnesses we wanted to hear from later from the Lebanese community, who are on the agenda, who have travelled from Vancouver, from Montreal, from Toronto, from all across this country, to let us know about their experiences with the evacuation—some are evacuees—and to let us know their position. Well, apparently we're being asked to decide in the absence of that.

This is a country that is supposed to be standing up for democracy. This is a country that is supposed to be standing as an example of how democracy works. This is a committee that, through the opposition, is deciding to make decisions without even hearing the evidence and the facts.

Earlier today I spoke about the notion of a justice system where judges make decisions without hearing the evidence. That's what this committee, through the decisions of the opposition today to proceed with this motion now, before hearing the evidence of witnesses, is doing.

That's not justice. Madame Lalonde had the temerity to use the word "justice" in her discussions. Justice? What kind of justice is it when you make a decision first and then choose to hear your witnesses later. That's what this committee is being asked to do. That, to me, is not justice. That's shutting down democracy, and it's a shame.

It's a shame, what we're doing here. But the reality is that we've been dealt these cards. There was no request to add additional witnesses. We would have happily done that. Mr. Obhrai, on behalf of the government, was happy to do it. So it's a false argument that you didn't like the witness list. He said we'd be happy to have more, and we could have done it. But no, we have to jam it through. It's a nice summer; we don't want to work hard. We'll call you back, but only long enough to pass a motion, not enough to actually do any work, not enough to actually hear from the Canadian people on this issue. We call back the committee to hear from the Canadian people, but now that we're here, let's not bother; let's just go ahead and make a decision.

That's what we're being asked to do right now. I'm saddened by that, and it's shameful.

That's the hand we are dealt by the opposition in this matter, and I'm very sad about it; however, on behalf of the government at this point in time, what I would like to do is propose an amendment to Madame Lalonde's motion, and I'll provide copies to the clerk to circulate.

We've been working all night on this, and all day, and you will see in this amendment references to statements made by members of the opposition today during our discussion—including Madam McDonough's statement that she wishes the session had started today with a motion to congratulate the government on the evacuation; we inserted that.

Yes, we've been working all day on this, Mr. McTeague. We've been working on making sure we can do the best we can under the circumstances, without the evidence to take a position. However, I will—

Yes?

• (1410)

The Chair: I would ask you to speak to the motion. I'm going to ask you also, because this is in one official language, to read it into the record. Because this is an amendment to a motion that was brought forward today, you'll have to read it into the record.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: That's no problem.

It says "Amendment to Motion"—

The Chair: He's reading it into the motion. He's making an amendment.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Yes, but I want to get a copy.

The Chair: One moment here.

Mr. Patry, you've chaired this committee before and you understand that amendments can come out of committee. They can be made just before and they can be read. What Mr. Van Loan is about to do is to read the amendment to the motion, and the clerk will have record of it and give it back to you.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, with reference toward what Mr. Patry has said, I would like to go on the record as saying that the letter we received from Madam Lalonde was only in French and not in English.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, that is not a point of order. That letter was given and was all that was requested, and it did not have to be in both official languages. Mr. Obhrai, that is not a point of order.

We are back to Mr. Van Loan. Will you read the amendment into the record.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: If I may, I will read the amendment and thus make it verbally. And you will all have a copy for your own benefit.

I move that the motion be amended by removing all the words after "given", in line one, and substituting the following:

Given the strong bonds of friendship that unite Canada with Lebanon and given that it is committed to its security;

Given that of all Western countries Canada had the largest number of nationals in Lebanon at the outbreak of hostilities;

Given that Canada is a long-standing friend of Israel, that it actively supported its creation, and that it is also committed to its security;

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs:

Congratulates the Government of Canada for the successful evacuation of over 13,000 Canadians from Lebanon;

Calls on the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to conduct a review of the procedures utilized to carry out the evacuation so that the successful principles can be applied to planning for future similar emergency contingencies that may arise;

Offers its sincere condolences to the families of Canadians and all others who have died during the recent crisis in the Middle East;

Recognizes that Israel was attacked on its territory by Hezbollah unprovoked, and that Israel, as a sovereign democracy, has a right to defend itself;

Strongly condemns the launching of Hezbollah rockets into Israel;

Calls upon Israel to exercise the utmost restraint in its military actions and take all possible measures to protect civilian lives and infrastructure;

Calls on the Government of Canada to continue to support the Government of Lebanon and to support its efforts to peacefully disarm the militia;

Supports the G8 summit declaration, which emphasizes the importance of a ceasefire that is sustainable and emphasizes the importance of working towards a permanent solution.

That is the amendment, and I understand that is seconded by Mr. Casey.

If I may, I will continue by speaking to the motion.

I think what we have here is something that is shorn of some of the rhetoric, which I think is a little one-sided, and more accurately reflects Canada's traditional position. Canada has strongly supported the establishment of the new government in Lebanon and welcomed the departure of the Syrian troops that took place a couple of years ago, which helped to allow the sovereign government to begin to reassert its authority. We very much support the United Nations resolutions 1559 and, I believe, 1680, both of which call for the disarmament and disbanding of Hezbollah.

I remind everyone, in particular the members of the Liberal Party who, as a government, listed Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.... I believe all of us around this table, I hope all parties, support those United Nations Security Council resolutions that call for Hezbollah to be disarmed and disbanded. It's international law that I believe this government strongly supports. I believe all parties support that. I certainly hope that all parties around the table support it. Mr. McTeague may not support the disarming and disbanding of Hezbollah, but I believe most other Liberals do.

• (1415)

Hon. Dan McTeague: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, again Mr. Van Loan is attempting to suggest other members are taking a position before we come forth or respond to his resolution or his amendment.

For the record, Mr. Chair, he has responded to a comment along the lines that all resolutions of the United Nations, including those of 1967 and 1973, must be respected, which he has conspicuously ignored in his commentary and diatribe.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McTeague.

I ask the committee to, in a way, cool down a little, all sides, and let's listen. Part of the problem here is that when someone is speaking and everyone else is heckling it's disruptive and causes grief down the road for all parties. Let's give the courtesy.

Continue, Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: If I could. Thank you.

I think it's important to recognize Canada's special relationship with Israel. It is a special relationship. In the wake of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust, Canada strongly supported the establishment of the Israeli state. It is an existence that must be defended and must be supported. Israel is a clear paragon as a democracy in the Middle East—something that, sadly, is more lacking than we would like to be the case.

But what's more, the creation of that state was the result of one of the greatest horrors mankind has witnessed, and that was the Holocaust: the death of six million Jews, the act of genocide, the effort by a brutal dictator to destroy an entire population. The world at that time recognized the importance of establishing an Israeli state, of standing with it, and of protecting its right to exist.

It's that very right to exist that Hezbollah refuses to acknowledge. Hezbollah is committed to eliminating Israel from the face of the earth. That's one of the reasons Hezbollah is listed as a terrorist group by Canada and recognized as such by many in the international community. That's why the United Nations resolution calls for its disbanding and disarmament, in part.

Canada has a long history. We contributed to and supported the creation of Israel and we have an obligation to continue that support and recognize their right to sovereignty and self-defence today.

In terms of the matter of the evacuation, I think we heard very good evidence, and I don't think too many members have disagreed that it was a success. Over 13,000 people were able to get out alive, were able to get out without mishap. There was some discomfort, some inconvenience, perhaps, but considering the remarkable numbers involved, the unprecedented nature of it—almost the same number the United States had to evacuate, for a country one-tenth the size and with a fraction of the resources, certainly a fraction of the resources in the region—we were able to do it in quick order. It's a happy story; it's a good story; it's something Canadians are proud of.

I think Canadians are proud of the role they've played on the world stage. They're proud of the principled position and they're proud of the efforts the Canadian government makes to defend and protect them around the world, even when doing it is very difficult. I think it's appropriate that we do this.

But also, considering the unprecedented nature of this.... This was an evacuation unlike any other before, and as such a lot of improvisation occurred on the go, from the Prime Minister, through the minister, through all the officials in the various departments, all the people—the front line workers, the people who took time off vacation.... A lot of innovation occurred. A lot of things were done differently than usual, and it worked. That's a remarkable testimony to the strength of Canada, the strength of our institutions, the strength of our officials in Foreign Affairs, of our consular staff of our embassies around the world, of the Department of National Defence staff who assisted, the Immigration officials who assisted, the Border Services officials who assisted.

Compared with other countries, we did a remarkable job of returning those folks to Canada, and for that we can be very proud. I think we should look at how that improvisation took place and what lessons can be drawn from its successes.

That's what this motion seeks to do in asking the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to conduct this kind of review, so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel the next time around. There are some good lessons to draw on and that we can build on, should—God forbid—a similar situation occur elsewhere in the world, and sadly these things happen all too often.

Further on, we discuss condolences and regrets for those who have died, Canadians and all others. Let's be perfectly clear. Canada, the Canadian government, deplores the loss of life and is saddened by it. We would like to see it come to an end, and that's why we have reference to the G8 summit declaration, which Canada was an early signatory to, calling for a ceasefire in this matter so that we can restore peace in that area.

But we also have to recognize that all parties do not come to this with equally clean hands. Hezbollah represents an aggressor. Hezbollah is a terrorist group. There is not moral equivalency between Hezbollah and Israel. Canada should not be neutral between the two. Canada will stand firmly and should stand firmly on the side of a free, democratic Israel. We should stand against a terrorist group whose tactics, as Mr. Alghabra just noted, result in the death of civilians. Their stated aim is to target civilian installations and harm civilians.

● (1420)

You raised a concern about civilians. We are on the side of innocent civilians—the innocent civilians who are the victims of Hezbollah rockets, and the innocent civilians who are used as human shields by Hezbollah. Those innocent civilians are the real victims in this war, and they are the victims, first and foremost, of Hezbollah. For that reason, we do condemn those actions by Hezbollah.

Obviously we want to see restraint in Israel's response, hence we urge that. We recognize their right to defend themselves, but it must be done in such a fashion that seeks to minimize the loss of human life and avoid undue harm to infrastructure wherever possible.

The United Nations has at least twice called for Hezbollah to be disarmed. Sadly, that has not happened. We want to see the Government of Lebanon supported. We hope that any kind of lasting force can be robust in terms of peace and can work towards the disarming and disbandment of Hezbollah. That is the only way you're going to get long-term stability and security for the Lebanese government, for the Lebanese country. That's what we want to see.

So in this motion I think we capture a position that represents Canada's proud humanitarian, multilateral, and peaceful orientation, but also recognizes that democracy, freedom, and human rights matter; that these are important values that we will defend, and we will assert ourselves in the international sphere to do that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to present this amendment and speak to it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I really feel that was not an amendment; it was probably a new motion, in a sense. But even if it's not in both official languages, we should keep it as it is right now.

Thank you.

• (1425)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I again want to state what my colleague just said, that when I came here, it was to hear about Canada's efforts in evacuation and humanitarian efforts, as well as the crisis in Lebanon, in the Middle East. That was the intent of the motion; that was the whole idea for which we came here.

Accordingly, we called in the witnesses, people who are engaged in humanitarian efforts, to understand what challenges they were facing, what they were going to do, and what would be the future intention of CIDA in Lebanon, where the majority of the devastation has taken effect. They had this opportunity.

Then we were going to listen to what I call a very strong party, and that is the Lebanese diaspora who are over here in Canada. If time permitted and if the opposition wasn't happy, we could have carried on. However, as my colleague said, we have stopped all these things here to pass a motion that actually deals with those things.

You know, if he had listened to all these witnesses who would have come, we would have put in a working solution, a working motion, taking what they said into account in this. But now that is not what is happening. What is happening is that the whole thing has turned into a football.

I know Madame Lalonde very well. I've worked with her in the past. She alluded to a report that dealt with the relationship of Canada with the Muslim world, and she and I were participants in that. We went around the world, we studied the report, and we made those recommendations alluding to this, to see how Canada can best strengthen relationships with the Muslim world. So we have all these things that we did. Nevertheless, we need to know what has taken place now in the crisis, on humanitarian issues out there.

At the time we did that report that you allude to, Madame Lalonde, one of the strongest recommendations from the report was that we engage with the Muslim community in here. Now, following the civil war in Lebanon and the devastation, we have a huge Lebanese community living in Canada—in Montreal, in Ottawa, and in my riding as well.

I can tell you that one of the largest ethnic groups that live in my riding is the Lebanese community. Therefore, when this crisis took place, they immediately contacted me and I contacted them for a dialogue. It is important that a dialogue take place with them, because they are the players. Their loved ones are there. So that is what I alluded to, the fact that Peter MacKay, the honourable minister, on my invitation, came to Calgary to listen to them, not to attend the Calgary Stampede.

You see, Mr. Chair, this is the problem with people who come from Toronto, MPs who sit over there and pass judgment as if to say Calgary does not exist and Calgary's people are not important.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, just speak to the motion.

Order.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I am speaking to the motion. These are important issues. It's part of the amendment. Over there, they're asking for the foreign policy and I'm alluding to that.

So it is important that the Lebanese diaspora of Canada also be involved, which is what we did—however, over there, that is not taken into account.

What is interesting is that the same diaspora—and I'm sure the Liberal members aren't interested in listening to that—the members of the Lebanese community, said they were also fed up with Hezbollah. They also wanted Hezbollah to be reined in. That was the message we got.

Of course, the biggest concern they had was the devastation that was taking place in Lebanon, the country that was rebuilding itself, with a fragile democracy. That was the concern they had, and they wanted to know what Canada was going to do. Therefore, the humanitarian assistance program and all those things that Canada and this government is committed to give are to address what they want. And I'm sure we will work with the diaspora community to ensure that Lebanon is quickly back on its feet.

• (1430)

As for the other issues, the motion we have put forward addresses the major concern of how to get a lasting peace in the Middle East. We need a sustainable peace.

Mr. McTeague, on the other side, and others have alluded to the resolutions that have come from the United Nations. How many resolutions have come from the United Nations? They keep coming, but have they ever achieved a long-term solution? They haven't. Why? There are players in there who do not want a solution to that crisis. There are players in there, and one of them is Hezbollah, who do not want this because it is not politically expedient for them. So it is natural that we condemn that and look for ways in which a sustainable ceasefire can be achieved. This motion talks about that and also calls on Israel to restrain itself and avoid hitting...

Our own soldiers have died, our own people have died, and this is a terrible tragedy. Canadians have lost lives out there.

The point of the matter is that it is important we all work together with all the international players to ensure a sustainable peace. Madame Lalonde's motion also talks about there being no peace in the region without a global and negotiated settlement on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. You yourself have said there won't be any ceasefire unless there is a negotiated settlement on that issue. Therefore, it's time to come and bring all the players down.

Unfortunately, this war has started, so let's seize this opportunity and look for a long-term solution. That is what the Lebanese community also wants. That is what most peaceful people in that region want. They're tired of the war. It's time for us to join that not-so-silent voice of people seeking peace. Let's get a lasting peace for that region.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Just before we continue, I remind you on this side that the official opposition has four members. Whether it's comments, heckling, or whatever, let's try to keep it down. I'll certainly recognize those people who are members of this committee.

Madam Guarnieri.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Madame Lalonde's motion has some constructive aims, specifically an immediate ceasefire and an end to bombing campaigns that put civilians at unnecessary risk, but I see three areas that need to change.

First, there is no call for an international force, so there is no plan for Canada to actively participate in peace. Second, it suggests that Canada's international reputation has been destroyed. Though I agree it is imperiled, that it has been destroyed is not believable or correct. Third, it condemns both sides in the conflict, and I don't see any constructive value in condemnation unless our goal is to inflame the situation and be ignored by all sides.

So I believe we should delete all condemnation language and weigh in constructively as a voice for a ceasefire from a nation that wants to actively participate in achieving peace. I wonder if the mover of the amendment would consider deleting all the self-congratulatory language and call for an immediate and permanent halt to attacks by either party where the primary victims are civilians.

• (1435)

The Chair: We're going to stay with the speaking order, but I would ask Mr. Van Loan, who is the mover of the amendment, to keep that question in order. You'll be up fairly soon.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I believe that this motion introduced by the opposition kind of highlights what some of the concerns were before. What it really does is put us in a position of having to vote on something without having the full information beforehand.

I agree that our amendment to this corrects some of the inaccuracies of the opposition's motion. For example, it talks about the apparent lack of preparation for evacuation, but I believe it would be impossible to prepare for an evacuation of 16,000 people. This is not something that can be foreseen.

So the motion we've put forward as an amendment clears up some of those characteristics and takes out some of the rhetoric. I believe it should be supported.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry): Thank you.

Now we'll go to Madame Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to say that I fully support Ms. Lalonde's motion to the committee. I'd like to come back to a point that was raised either by Mr. Obhrai or by Mr. Van Loan concerning the UN resolutions. In international law, it's important that everyone comply with resolutions of this nature. We could talk about resolutions that Israel has failed to respect. Therefore, there's no one here in a position to preach to anyone else.

Having said that, earlier I listened to the member say that Israel was attacking Hezbollah and that the latter had only itself to blame. I wish to point out that Lebanon is currently under attack, not Hezbollah. Lebanese roads, infrastructures and civilians are being attacked, not Hezbollah. Furthermore, the Lebanese economy is also under attack. The country's economy is driven mainly by tourism and, of course, by the banking industry, Lebanon being the Switzerland of the Middle East.

Moreover, it's shameful to hear people claim that Hezbollah is using civilians as human shields, to imply that this is the cause of the Qana attacks. Your government should be ashamed to make this kind of statement which should be factually based, Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Chairman, is anyone listening, or are they the only ones entitled to speak and to be heard? Could we possibly have some decorum here?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry): Order, please.

Ms. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Getting back to Hezbollah and the claim that this organization is using civilians as human shields, it's important to bring some facts to the table and produce some evidence when one makes statements of this nature. It's important to bring some facts to the table to justify the killing of 35 children. Rumours and empty words aren't enough.

Elsewhere, I don't know if you've read about this, but the press reported that Israel was launching illegal phosphorous bombs. This report does raise a number of questions.

Regardless of where these bombs were acquired or whether they were supplied by the United States, when smart bombs are dropped on Lebanon — can someone explain to me how bombs can be smart if they kill people — these are not Hezbollah bombs raining down on Lebanon, but rather Israeli bombs, even if they were paid for by the United States.

What disappoints me about this government is that it has taken sides and seems incapable of any political analysis of the situation. That's unfortunate because Ms. Lalonde's motion attempts to create some balance between the parties involved. It does not take sides. It recognizes that Israel has the right to defend itself and condemns Hezbollah for kidnapping two soldiers. At the same time, however, it condemns Israel for attacking civilians. This is the position that Canada must adopt as a nation with a peacekeeping mission.

Some have sought the comments of displaced persons. Let me explain something to you. No one individual speaks for the Lebanese community, whether in Quebec or in Canada. There are as many organizations as there as Lebanese in Canada and in Quebec. No one person can therefore claim to speak for the entire Lebanese community. Therefore, some caution is in order when people seek to speak to you and give you advice.

• (1440)

Since this government came to power, I've been asking myself questions about Hamas. I had questions even before the current outbreak of hostilities in Lebanon. Who is advising this government? That's what I'd really like to know.

If your advisers are dispensing this kind of advice that sanctions hate, killings and disregard for international law, then they are truly putting Canada in a shameful position.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Mourani.

Now we go to Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Thank you very much.

I will spend this intervention dealing with responses to some of the issues that have been raised elsewhere. I'll start with Madame Mourani's comments, going from the end, where she spoke about Hamas and asked who is advising this government on our response to Hamas.

Our response on Hamas was very simple. Hamas again is a listed terrorist organization, committed to destroying the State of Israel, committed to seeing it wiped off the face of the Earth. When it was elected to be the government of the Palestinian Authority, Canada, the European Union, and most of the western civilized democratic world all came together with a common position: that this new government must recognize the right of Israel to exist, renounce the use of violence, and adhere to the existing agreements, including the roadmap to peace.

The only way we were going to get a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian question would be to have a two-state solution negotiated properly, and the roadmap to peace and the existing agreements were the way to get there. Asking a terrorist organization to renounce violence and recognize the right of Israel to exist was entirely consistent with that. In fact, that's why that position was adopted by, I think it's fair to say, just about the entire western democratic, free world.

I don't think it's an extreme position to stand against terrorism. I think it's a quite moderate, reasonable, and civilized position to stand against terrorism. That's what Canada is doing, as Canada has always done: stand for freedom and for democracies.

Now, Madame Mourani asked who speaks for Lebanon and said to be careful who speaks for Lebanon or the Lebanese community here. Well, guess what? I guess we'll never know, Ms. Mourani, because you didn't let them speak at this committee. You voted that we won't hear from any. You didn't vote to hear from the people who are already on the list. You didn't vote to add additional witnesses to the list to get a full spectrum, as Mr. Obhrai suggested. No, you voted instead to move to debate this question without hearing from any of them.

In a democracy, we hear from them. So when you caution that we should be careful who we hear from, apparently your caution is to hear from no one, to shut down the ability of people to express themselves. That is shameful. You should be ashamed of the position you took today, not to let anybody—not one member of the Lebanese community in Canada—speak today on this motion; yet we're being asked to make a decision on it.

That's shameful in a democracy. I am saddened by it. It's a sad day for Canada. It's a sad day for democracy. You have been a party to that today.

In terms of bias, there is a suggestion from Madame Mourani that this government has a bias, that we don't have a balanced position between Hezbollah and Israel. Well, I don't think seeking a balance between terrorists and democracies is Canada's foreign policy. This is a listed terrorist organization under Canadian law. The Liberal government, on December 11, 2002, listed Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

I've gone through the incidents. There are others I didn't go through: the efforts by Hezbollah to recruit people in Singapore to conduct terrorist acts—those were stopped. We've heard already about the hijackings, the bombings in Argentina, the other terrorist acts undertaken. Well, to me it's pretty simple; you aren't neutral between terrorism and democracy. Canada should not be neutral between terrorism and democracy. When it comes time to take a position, we will take a bias in favour of democracy and freedom. We will have a bias against terrorism. I don't call it a bias; I call it a principled, fair-minded position.

The problem of terrorism is one of the greatest problems facing the world today. We see it all over the world, repeatedly. We've seen it in Madrid; we've seen it in the bombings in London; we've seen it in India recently; we saw it on September 11 in New York. We've had terrorism going back as far as... In Canada, we've had assassinations, with D'Arcy McGee; we had the FLQ conducting terrorism on our own shores. Unfortunately, terrorism is becoming more widespread, better financed, and a more pernicious problem.

• (1445)

As for the concept of suicide bombers, I remember, when I was a kid growing up, the concept of the kamikaze bombers in World War II was considered bizarre. It was beyond comprehension how people could decide to kill themselves in a suicide-type bombing. Now suicide bombings are *de rigueur*. They're part of the terrorist menu virtually every day. They are so much in the news that people almost tune it out, until it arrives on our shores and harms us. The citizens of Israel and the citizens who have been the victims of Hezbollah around the world deserve the same kind of protection. The advent of terrorism is one of the biggest problems we have to wrestle with in security situations.

When we talk about the way Hezbollah has conducted itself in Lebanon and its use of civilian shields, Madame Mourani doubts this. Well, Jan Egeland, who is a top humanitarian official with the United Nations and who investigates the bombing locations, has made that finding. The Bloc Québécois may doubt that finding. They may decide that Hezbollah is actually a group of good guys, that they aren't using civilian shields and they don't make that part of their tactics. Jan Egeland has found otherwise. He has made it clear that he condemns their tactics. We should also.

We also recognize that this approach creates real challenges for countries trying to defend themselves from terrorism. As the minister said earlier today, you end up with two choices, and neither of them is good. One choice is to leave the terrorists to continue their attacks on civilians, and the other is to root out those terrorists and risk collateral damage. I don't think any of us would relish having to make those decisions.

But I can tell you, if it were Canada on the receiving end of the missiles, if it were Canadian civilians dying on Canada's shores from terrorist acts, I think we might feel more strongly than when we look at it clinically in another country like Israel.

For that reason, I believe what Jan Egeland said. I believe those tactics are happening. In fact, Hezbollah has been quite proud of its tactic of using civilian shields and how effectively it works in the public relations war. That's not surprising. The approach of that terrorist organization is primarily to take out and cause injury to innocent civilians. It's not a military type of operation, from the traditional perspective that we understand it.

I hope I have responded to the questions and issues you raised, Madam Mourani.

Madam Guarnieri asked a couple of questions that I think are valid. One is the question of an international force and why we haven't addressed that in our amendment that's on the table. The reality is that it's premature. We don't know what an international force would be. Would it be United Nations? Would it be NATO? Would it be a coalition of the willing? You can't tell me and I can't tell you, because none of us know.

There have already been peace talks. There have already been efforts to bring together some type of situation like that. Would it be a force that would go into a war zone between continually fighting combatants? Is that what we have in mind in terms of an international force? Do Canadians want to be part of that? Or would it be one that happened after there was a peace in place and we had a negotiated agreement? It's highly speculative whether we have the resources to do it and what kind of context it would be. I think that's very much a hypothetical question and that we'd be putting the cart before the horse on it. We certainly know that we have commitments and that Canada has a proud record of peacekeeping, though I must note that we haven't been part of the interim forces in Lebanon in the past.

That was the question. The reason the international force is not there is that it is simply premature. I'm certainly not expecting that Madam Guarnieri, or anybody else, would want Canada to move unilaterally by putting a force into Lebanon right now. I don't think anybody is arguing for that type of outcome. But in the absence of a multilateral force, it's hard for us to make a decision about signing up right now. Certainly, I don't think it's the government's position to move in unilaterally.

In terms of the condemnation language, I think there is such a thing as right and wrong. I think it's wrong to launch missiles at civilians. I think it's appropriate to condemn that. We can all hold hands and sing together and think good thoughts, but the reality is that some things are right and some things are wrong in human behaviour, and there's nothing wrong with condemning it. I know that Madam Lalonde has used the word "condemn" far more frequently than we have. Our resolution is a bit more toned down in that regard. But I do believe there is such a thing as right and wrong, and I can tell the difference most of the time.

• (1450)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Casey, then Madam McDonough and Madam Lalonde.

Mr. Bill Casey: Thank you very much.

I too am in favour of the amendment.

I want to acknowledge that I don't think there's a member of Parliament I admire more than Madam Lalonde, for her good work and endless energy and goodwill, but I disagree with some of the things she has in her motion, and I want to mention a couple of them.

In the second paragraph, it says the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs "Questions the government's delay in implementing an evacuation plan". To implement a plan you have to create one first. And I think the government did a great job in that. I don't know what organization you could call and say we want to transport 13,000 people from a war zone, halfway around the world, in two weeks and have it happen. And given the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, there were no casualties involved in any of that, in any of those 13,000 evacuees, and although I'm certain it was very uncomfortable and inconvenient to a lot of them, they all made it, and I think it's a tremendous success.

I also take exception to the comment that Canada has destroyed its reputation as a trusted third party. I don't believe that's true at all.

And just to make one other point here, her motion says that the committee "Strongly deploras that, by taking sides, the government has prevented Canada from playing a conciliatory role". All we've done is take sides against Hezbollah, and we did that in 2002 when we passed in Parliament a law that states that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization.

I'm supporting the amendment because of those, but I also want to say that my colleague said in his remarks that the State of Israel has a right to exist, and I agree with that. But I also believe that the State of Palestine has a right to exist. I believe that until there is a State of Israel and a State of Palestine with a safe, secure environment, there's not a hope of avoiding what's happened in Lebanon now.

Canada is not a superpower, but I've always felt we could do a lot more in the Middle East than we do. And I hope that maybe we can, going forward, and I hope we can help there to be a safe and secure State of Israel and a safe and secure State of Palestine.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chairman, I wanted to make several points quickly, but I have to respond to Mr. Van Loan's statement—which I think is shared by every committee member, although I don't presume to speak for anybody but myself—that it is lamentable in the extreme that Lebanese Canadians won't, it appears, today be heard before this committee.

But let's also be extremely clear that this has happened because this government is responsible for basically abandoning the kind of balanced position that would have allowed the government members, along with the chair, supported by the rest of us—the opposition members—to ensure that we conducted our business in the balanced way that has become customary. We're in this mess because, in a way, of this chairman and government members following the lead of the Conservative government, which has abandoned any real sense of balance and inclusiveness and diversity.

Having said that, I want to say that I think there are some elements of the amendment that's before us that are supportable. I think it is clear that at least some messages are finally getting through to some government members that the outrageous lack of balance and lack of real proactive commitment by this government is not acceptable to Canadians. So there are some hints here that there is the recognition that there needs to be some balance.

I could not support this motion for a number of reasons. I want to quickly cite three.

One is that, as has been pointed out by my other Nova Scotian colleague on this committee, who happens to sit on the Conservative but no longer Progressive Conservative side, it completely fails to recognize—as did the minister here before this committee today—the connection between the continuing occupation of Palestine and the refusal to deal with that as a contributing factor to the Middle East crisis that is escalating. It fails to acknowledge that.

Secondly, it strongly condemns the launching of Hezbollah rockets into Israel but refuses to condemn Israel's disproportionate military offensive—disproportionate in violation of international law. That's not the kind of even-handed approach that needs to be taken to recognize that there are violations on both sides and that what we need to do is acknowledge this if we're to be able to move to a resolution.

Finally, it completely refuses or fails to acknowledge that hiding behind the G8 summit declaration is not a sufficient position today for Canada. Practically every country in the world that was perhaps prepared to live with the G8 declaration at the time has subsequently appropriately responded to the horrendous events that have happened since and has therefore moved to demand an immediate ceasefire. It's as though this government is making its policy through a rear-view mirror, actually in some ways appearing only barely prepared to listen to recent polls that show how out of touch they are with Canadians.

The final reason I simply could not support this is that it does not call for the immediate ceasefire that is necessary to stop the killing and begin to create conditions that will make it possible to negotiate a lasting peace.

My hope would be that we move quickly. I think we've all been immersed in this, day in and day out, all day long, from the day this crisis started to heat up. I think we've heard a lot from each other. I would hope we'd move quickly to deal with this: move on to Madame Lalonde's motion to deal with it, and then hear from the witnesses who have been patiently waiting.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

•(1455)

The Chair: Madam Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chairman, I've been listening to members speak for a while now. When I heard Mr. Van Loan talk about this being a sad day for democracy, quite frankly, I didn't know whether to laugh, or cry. Indeed, if the democratic procedural rules of this committee had been respected, we wouldn't be in this situation.

I've served on this committee since 1999 and never has anyone up and ask to address the committee. Of course anyone is free to do so and certainly it's to our benefit to hear from individuals, but never has the chair invited someone to appear or authorized additional spending without first seeking assurances from the committee that it wished to meet with a certain person.

That's why we find ourselves in this situation which Mr. Van Loan has qualified as sad. As far as I'm concerned, this isn't a sad day for democracy. It's a sad day for the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. As you know, I'm a sovereigntist, but since becoming a member of this committee, I've always felt that in this forum, one could set allegiances and partisanship aside and discuss important issues.

Until such time as we achieve our independence, we want Canadian policy to be the best for Quebecers and Canadians and for all countries concerned. Indeed, we trust that this is what all parties want.

Today is a truly sad day for me. I'm speaking my mind. Earlier, I listened to some critics imply that we were flirting with terrorism. What's that all about? You may remember Quebec's experience with the FLQ. How did it deal with that organization? Well, it tried to understand what it was all about.

What about the IRA in Great Britain? How did that country deal with that threat? Even though the IRA murdered police officers and soldiers, the country did not resort to military action. Quite the contrary. It's important to try and understand the situation and to address problems and needs, among other things.

I have something here that I hope you have read. It was written by former ambassador Paul Heinbecker and I think I'll send it to every member. Ambassador Heinbecker is one of Canada's eminent international affairs experts. He notes the following in one of his papers.

I'll read it to you in English, which will be a first for me.

[*English*]

“Tilting toward Israel: By picking sides on Lebanon, says former ambassador Paul Heinbecker, Canada is set to embark on a failed foreign policy”.

[*Translation*]

Each sentence deserves to be read. He concludes with the following:

●(1500)

[English]

“The disproportionate Israeli response in Lebanon will, like the American invasion of Iraq, create more terrorists than it kills and make the prospect of liberal democracy in Lebanon and the Middle East ever more remote.”

[Translation]

This is an extremely difficult situation for western nations, and for Canada. I put a question to the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE concerning the war on terrorism. I'm not only concerned about terrorism, but also about the war on terrorism. I asked if by waging war on terrorism — and this is the question the ambassador raises — we were not promoting terrorism further in the process, instead of promoting an interest in democracy and economic development. It's important to understand what is actually going on, because if we fail to do that, we run the risk of making some monumental mistakes and really shooting ourselves in the foot.

All parties have to realize that the international community is trying to be fair, to understand the various positions and to not allow the bin Ladens of the world to influence young people who, over and over, are seeing images of the events taking place in Lebanon. They've seen bloody images broadcast 24 hours a day over the airwaves by networks like Aljazeera and many others.

What goes through their minds after seeing these images? We need to advocate positions that rather than promote polarization, seek to attain peace. We won't achieve this objective by turning a blind eye to the situation.

In my motion, I could have called for a peace implementation force. However, there are two such forces. Kofi Anna canceled a meeting so as not to eliminate any chance of constituting one. What's the difference between the two? Some would like countries to volunteer to comprise a critical mass encircling Lebanon to protect the country from sophisticated equipment and all military forces. Others believe that Hezbollah will never be disarmed without some kind of political negotiations, especially not now that it has made some inroads on a psychological level. I'm certain that this poses quite a dilemma for Israel.

What should the next phase entail? Negotiations and disarmament are vitally important. Lebanon must once again become a fully independent country. Hezbollah, however, has been allowed to call the shots and to pass itself off as Lebanon's protector. I'm sure that's what the Lebanese believe, even though some are angry because they feel that they've been duped or have given Israel the opportunity to bomb their country.

Therefore, we're in favour of a peace implementation force. However, we'll respect whatever decision is reached by the United Nations. Should Canada be a part of this implementation force? I'm not so sure, given the stand it has adopted. We have to realize that the positions taken by Canada since this new government assumed power — and some may argue otherwise — have undercut our ability to intervene as an influential middle power sought out for its assistance, support and mediation efforts.

●(1505)

Foreign affairs is serious business and that's why I'm disappointed with this morning's meeting. At least I take this matter seriously. I'm not saying that you don't, but these are not just empty words. We have made a number of commitments and these do have an impact on people's lives.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Lalonde.

Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I did want to start off by responding to Madam Lalonde's comments, first on the question of why we're proceeding now without hearing all the witnesses.

On that side, everybody seems to have conveniently pretended that it was because the witness list was not balanced, for whatever reason. I can't conceive of why members of the opposition didn't send in a list of witnesses. But Mr. Obhrai kindly said that we're quite happy to hear more witnesses later. To hide behind the fact that you still hadn't taken advantage of that invitation to say you weren't happy because you didn't have your witnesses is not a reason to hear from anybody.

Well, I'm sorry, the fault clearly lies with the opposition for failing to identify witnesses first and failing to take up the invitation, in front of this government at this committee, to expand that witness list — an invitation Mr. Obhrai made as we were discussing these matters. For whatever reason, you chose to proceed and debate these issues without having evidence first. So that's the boat we're in, and I think this has to be remembered.

Madam Lalonde poses a very difficult question of how to deal with terrorists. She suggests that Israel's response is, according to Paul Heinbecker, going to breed more terrorism, and therefore you should stand back, stay away, and leave them alone. That's a legitimate perspective.

It happens to be a perspective with which I disagree. It is a legitimate tactic and approach. What do you do? How do you respond to an evil like that, to a list of terrorist organizations that commit attacks against civilians? When we deal with evil forces in the world, the question of how we respond always comes up.

If you think back to World War II, as Hitler rose—and he was an evil—there was a great debate: how do you respond to that evil? For a while, the folks who said that leaving him alone was the best thing to do were in the ascendancy. As they remained dominant, that evil became stronger and stronger. Some in Israel today will say that's exactly what's happened with Hezbollah. They were left alone for years to amass thousands of rockets that now are being unleashed on civilians. The fact that they were left alone is the problem they're responding to.

After dealing with Hitler for a while in World War II, it became evident that ignoring the evil, leaving it alone, wishing it would go away, hoping we would do better if we just ignored and accommodated it a little and tried to understand it—if I may use the phraseology from others—this wasn't the case.

Ultimately, Britain and Canada and, a couple of years later, the United States and others came together and recognized that evil had to be fought. I think and hope everybody agrees in retrospect that this decision to confront the evil was a right one. As I said, it's a legitimate debate to have: whether you ignore the evil and pretend it goes away or respond to it.

Similarly, in World War II we had Stalin and the Soviet Union, and the tyranny and horrors he was unleashing on his population. Essentially there was a decision by the west to leave that alone at the end of World War II. I know Mr. Wrzesnewskyj is here and, being Ukrainian, has lots of relations with people in the Ukraine. Millions died as a consequence of that decision by the west to leave Stalin alone. There were hundreds of millions more who essentially lost their freedom and lived under tyranny for half a century. Was that a right decision or not? It certainly minimized Canadian casualties. Do we say that those millions of lives elsewhere in communist countries under Stalin's tyranny were a worthwhile cost to save our own? I don't know, but once again it's a legitimate debate.

That's the debate we have to deal with right now in talking about terrorist organizations. Do we confront the evil or leave it alone? I know where I sit. I say you confront the evil, as we did with Hitler as that rose too strongly. I think you try to find ways to deal with the terrorist threat. History has shown us that the longer it's ignored, the longer it's left alone, the stronger it becomes, and the greater the threats and the missions that get carried out.

• (1510)

I'd also ask this question. As Canadians, if we were faced with an armed group on our borders that was committed to destroying our country and its population and eliminating them from the face of the Earth, what would our response be, faced with that kind of evil or that kind of threat?

I ask that question and put it in those terms because that's where Israel is. They are facing, in Hezbollah, a terrorist group that is committed to eliminating them from the face of the Earth. You can encourage people to try to understand that and can say that what we should do is try to understand the desire to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth. I don't know that I can understand that. I think it's beyond my comprehension.

So I don't think understanding that from Hezbollah is the answer. But it is a legitimate debate: leave them alone and try to understand that, or confront the evil. That's the difficulty Israel faces right now.

Canada has committed, and the United Nations Security Council has persistently said on this issue, that the best thing is for Hezbollah to be disbanded and disarmed. That would be the best, not just for Israel but also for Lebanon. That's essential for the weak State of Lebanon to be able to strengthen, to grow—for that government to strengthen. It's the best way for Lebanon's sovereignty to be respected, and that's certainly what we would like to see happen.

It's a hard question, a legitimate question: what to do when confronted with evil. Do you want to leave the terrorists alone—do you want to leave Hezbollah alone and try to understand them—or do you decide to confront the evil? I'm sympathetic to the position of a country facing an enemy that wants to wipe it off the face of the Earth, that when it's under assault from that enemy, it might want to do something about that evil threat.

As for Canada playing its mediator role, Canada has always had a strong mediator role in the international sphere because we stand for principles and for values. People understand where we're coming from. They understand that we believe in democracy; they understand that we believe in the rule of law; they understand that we believe in human rights; they understand that we believe in freedom and that we stand up for those things uncompromisingly. Those are what Canada's values are, what Canada's values should be, and they do not compromise us. Standing for those values doesn't compromise us from taking on a leadership position.

Everyone looks to the United States to be able to resolve and bring about peace—in fact, they seem to broker most of the agreements in the Middle East on peace—but nobody has any illusions about whether the United States is neutral on these matters. I think they have a very clear stand. Because they have a clear stand, they are the ones consistently turned to to broker peace, through the Camp David agreements, the roadmap to peace, and so on.

There's nothing inconsistent with believing in and standing for something and being a fair, honest broker on the world stage. Those things come hand in hand.

It's what happened in 1956. Let's review it, Canada's role at the birth of United Nations peacekeeping. It arose out of the Suez crisis, and Canada took sides, unequivocally. We took a side: we strongly opposed the military action that had been taking place. We opposed the invasion. We said which side we were on. After saying which side we were on, we were able to take a leadership role and create peacekeeping.

It doesn't matter what the colour of the government is, and it shouldn't matter what the colour of the government is. That was a Liberal government in 1956, a Liberal government following in lockstep with a Republican U.S. President. I don't think anybody said that was a question of Canada simply being a puppet; I don't think we'd say today that Canada was just being a puppet of those Americans. I think Canada was standing for principles it believed in, but because it stood for something, it could also be a fair, honest broker.

I don't think the way to be a fair, honest broker is to cease to have values, to stop believing in things, to stop standing for freedom, democracy and human rights, and the rule of law. I think the surest way not to be taken seriously on the world stage is for Canada to abandon those values.

•(1515)

The Chair: Madam Guarnieri, very quickly, and then we'll go to Mr. Obhrai.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When Mr. Van Loan gave us a dissertation of right and wrong earlier, I think he misconstrued some of my comments. My comments were in reference to the Bloc motion, which condemns Israel as well as Hezbollah. Hezbollah is already, as you know, a banned terrorist organization, but condemnation of Israel is not constructive and takes away from our point. That was the point of my intervention.

I think the polls would like to see a balanced foreign policy, and certainly they'd like to see us even-handed on these issues.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Guarnieri.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The NDP member is accusing the government of not being balanced. Everybody talks about not being balanced. She takes the position that the Government of Canada has gone away from its traditional positions on everything, and she comes out attacking us for taking a stand.

We are talking in this motion about permanent, lasting peace in that region, and Canada today is home to a large minority from the Middle East. We are home to Iraqis, Palestinians, Lebanese, Israelis, and everybody, and they all have points of view. The fundamental thing I have seen in my riding this time is anger in the Lebanese community because of the devastation of the infrastructure and everything that has taken place.

Lebanon went through a very serious civil war, and they've tried to rebuild Lebanon. Many of the people went back because they hoped for peace, and the country was being built. They finally managed to get rid of Syria and control the destiny of their home, and many constituents in my riding decided they could safely go back and rebuild the country.

We seem to have forgotten one fact when we talk about it. We talk about Hezbollah, which in its charter wants to destroy Israel—and so does Hamas—but we seem to have overlooked the fact that in the last two or three years we have a new player in the President of Iran, who is coming out bluntly and saying, "I want to destroy Israel". I wonder, if the shoe were on the other foot, how he would feel if somebody talked like that. Here is an elected president who is supported, a guerilla who is dedicated to killing people. Yet today we sit here and talk about a ceasefire with a government and a movement that is dedicated to destroying that. How do you achieve a ceasefire?

Yesterday one of the Canadian Lebanese said he went home with the idea that peace had returned. Well, peace has not returned. We are back, as we see from pictures, to devastation taking place. We are calling for an immediate ceasefire. We are telling the Israelis to exercise restraint. Who's telling Hezbollah to exercise restraint? Who's telling the Iranians, who are their supporters, to exercise

restraint? Nobody. Why? That is where the problem originated. Of course, the opposition won't like to hear that because it doesn't fit into their political agenda of attacking the government.

The fact remains that you want peace and everybody wants peace. My constituents call in every day, and they're scared because their loved ones are in danger. So we want a very quick peace. The question is, how do we do that?

As the foreign minister said when he went to Rome and engaged with the players over there, how do we achieve this everlasting peace? We are going to put in an international force. What international force? Who's willing to commit players to that region? How are we going to get the Government of Iran, the President of Iran, to say he is not going to destroy Israel? How are you going to do that? How are we going to tell the Hezbollah leader to stop it?

•(1520)

So yes, that is why the international community has asked Israel, because Israel is a democratic country, to exercise restraint. And we condemn it. But I have not seen anybody come out and say to the bigger guys, like the President of Iran or those who support Hezbollah, that they should come to the table to talk peace.

Why not? Why are they not coming to the table to talk peace? Why are they not coming to the table to talk about a ceasefire? They should come to the table. Iranians should come to the table and Syrians should come to the table and say, yes, since they are the ones who have instigated Hezbollah and are financially supporting it, they should be out there. But they're not. That is what is facing the international community.

My Lebanese constituents are saying they want peace so they can rebuild. So do the Palestinians. So does everybody in that region. Nobody wants the war. Saudi Arabia and Egypt came very quickly, telling Hezbollah they did it wrong. Why? Because they don't want the region to go up in flames. And that is the crucial factor today facing us, not getting up and saying the Government of Canada... playing the blame game. That is why we are saying, yes, let's go and talk about everlasting peace quickly. And I agree—quickly. As the foreign minister said, it is devastating to see so many people dying, devastating to see the devastation in Lebanon.

Yesterday I talked to a constituent who came out through the Bīqāʾ Valley, drove right through the south into Damascus and out from there. I asked him what worked, and he said let's not talk about it, because he was traumatized by bombs falling.

The point is, yes, we want a solution, but not a solution of the kind where we say yes, and then six months later we are back into the whole thing again. Canada has committed, and this government has committed, to giving humanitarian assistance. The Prime Minister said that we will be there to provide humanitarian assistance to rebuild Lebanon. We believe that ultimately, as the Prime Minister said when he was asked about foreign troops, those who are in the region are the best architects for peace—not those who are outside the region, but those who are inside the region. And that should be the priority.

That being said, I want to say, on behalf of my constituents—Lebanese and everybody—yes, we understand the pain and the suffering. To the Israelis, yes, we understand the pain and the suffering. But let's sit down and come to a lasting solution. Let's get all the regional players. You will never achieve a lasting peace solution if you do not get all the players, when a president of a nation like Iran stands up and says, I am going to blow Israel out of the water. That will not happen, and that's where our pressure should fall.

Thank you.

• (1525)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

We will go to Mr. Alghabra.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm glad to have the opportunity to participate in this debate.

First, I want to comment on the motion submitted by my colleague Ms. Lalonde. While I like the comprehensiveness of it, I just think we need to make it shorter so that we give the Conservatives no excuse whatsoever to vote against it.

What I'm hearing from the Conservatives today is quite interesting. They're mischaracterizing the conflict right now as if it's between Hezbollah and Israel, as if they have picked an empty corner on this planet and started bombing each other, neglecting the hundreds and thousands of civilians who are killed, maimed, or displaced.

The government claims to have the moral courage to condemn targeting civilians. Well, the opposition parties have agreed with them in condemning the acts of Hezbollah that target civilians. But we also have the moral courage to condemn any acts of violence committed by Israel against civilians, and we expect the government, which claims to have moral courage, to speak up on behalf of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Mr. Van Loan has said he knows what is right and what is wrong when he sees it. They talk about how sympathetic they are to the civilians who are being killed and displaced, but they're reluctant to call for a ceasefire. What does that mean? They're condoning the ongoing conflict. They're condoning the ongoing violence, and that is reprehensible and regrettable.

Canadians expect their government not to be neutral, as you said, Mr. Van Loan, but to be fair and to condemn violence against civilians by all parties. The best way to do it is by calling for an immediate ceasefire, not talk about it as an abstraction. It's not an abstraction to the civilians, including Canadians who are caught up in the crossfire over there. It's not a philosophical debate; it's a real tragedy, where Canadians and other civilians are being subjected to ongoing violence on both sides, in Israel and in Lebanon, and also we can't forget the Palestinian territories.

We must have the moral courage to ask for a ceasefire immediately and then bring all the sides to which you're referring to the negotiating table. We can set the conditions that are needed to make a sustainable ceasefire. But for anybody who has an ounce of heart, you cannot watch the civilian devastation and destruction and

say you're reluctant to ask for a ceasefire right now. I don't care how much difference that call can make; it is imperative to send a message, a signal, that Canada unconditionally always stands on the side of the protection of civilians on all sides.

We want to condemn the acts of Hezbollah that target civilians—we'll all agree with you—but we also must protect the civilians in Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories by standing up for their rights and human rights. I don't know how anybody can hide behind human rights and international law by saying let the fire continue.

So I call upon the government...and this is the Conservative Party, by the way, that is raising funds on the back of this tragedy, that is raising funds on the back of a tragedy that civilians on all sides are suffering from. Nobody is benefiting from this except the Conservatives who want to raise money from it. I urge the government to reconsider and call for an immediate ceasefire and work with all responsible parties. We're not just the friend of Israel, we're not just the friend of Lebanon; we're the friend of peace and prosperity and human rights.

Thank you.

• (1530)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Alghabra.

I think when we talk about civilians it becomes increasingly difficult. I put myself in the position of "what if".

What if I were in Lebanon? What if I were a civilian? What if I were the Minister of Defence in Israel? I don't know if I would ever drop leaflets from the sky telling people that there was impending danger. I don't know if I would make phone calls that there was an attack coming.

So I agree with you. On those kinds of civilian deaths, hopefully all sides are working hard. What if I were a civilian living in Israel, and at any moment rockets might come in?

So thank you for your comments.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

As we've sat here through this afternoon, through this Conservative filibuster, the dismemberment of Lebanon has continued. Civilians continue to suffer and die in both Lebanon and Israel, and proceeding in this manner to me suggests the moral equivalent of appeasement.

When the minister was here earlier today, he stated a couple of things. He said a ceasefire cannot be negotiated with only one side. That's quite correct. Later on, he stated, "We are not sure who speaks for Hezbollah...". He spoke of a multi-faceted Gordian knot.

It's a very complex situation. We've seen a tendency this afternoon for people, although they try to be careful, to lean towards one side or another.

Unfortunately, there are no innocents among the combatants. The innocents are the ones who are dying, in large part. We heard a horrific statistic earlier this afternoon: 40% of the casualties in Lebanon have been children and infants. That's about 300 people. If we don't ask for an immediate ceasefire, what in fact rationally, logically, are we condoning? It's the continuation of what has already taken place. The gates of hell have opened up in the Middle East, and to stand aside and not take a clear moral position on this...and the only clear moral position is to call for an immediate ceasefire....

Consequently, I'll be voting against this, with all due respect, because the motion is so complex it will entail a great deal of debate. What's required isn't complicated: it's a cessation of hostilities, an immediate ceasefire.

Thank you.

• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Mourani.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to come back to one of Mr. Obhrai's earlier comments. He talked about voters and political objectives. To my mind, we lose sight of what's really important when we refer to such matters. Political objectives aren't vitally important. What is important is respect for human life and peace with all nations. When one talks about political aims, one loses sight of the women and children in the path of the bombs. I don't know what the government's political aims might be in this particular instance, but we on this side do not have any political objectives. We're concerned about only one thing, namely the moral obligation to protect women, children and the elderly who are dying and who are being murdered in their homes and in their own country. That is the reality here.

Furthermore, if I understood Mr. Obhrai correctly, he believes war is necessary in some respects and that civilian casualties are nothing more than collateral damage. I'd like to send Mr. Obhrai the names of all those who have died so that he can analyse the collateral damage. People between the ages of 7 months and 80 years are the collateral damage of which he speaks. They go by the name of Zena, Haley, Zain, Marie, Anne and many others.

If I understand this government clearly — and it's sad, because that was not the image I had of Canada — it's choosing to send a message of war to the international community. Unfortunately, I don't believe war is the answer. I'm a pacifist and proud of it. I'm proud to believe that dialogue is possible and that conflicts can be resolved without resorting to violence.

You teach your children, as I do, to resolve problems through dialogue. Schools throughout Quebec and Canada teach children never to resort to violence to settle disputes. What kind of example are you setting for your children? Do you sleep soundly at night? If you do, then the situation is even worse than I first imagined.

A nation is like a family. You counsel your children. The same goes for the nation. A nation represents its people and people stand for values. Mr. Van Loan, you used words like “freedom”, “democracy” and “human rights”. You said you believed in right and wrong. I once heard someone speak of an axis of good and an

axis of evil and believe me, these words did not conjure up a very pleasant image. The man who spoke these words invaded Iraq. I hope with all of my heart that you will understand that the path you have chosen is yours alone and that Quebec and Canada will judge your actions in due time.

I hope that when you look at your children this evening, you will not forget that some mothers have not yet had time to bury their own offspring, that fathers were not able to see their children's faces because they were blown apart. That's the reality of what you call collateral damage.

• (1540)

I'm speaking to you as a mother, not as an MP. Like all Quebec mothers, I understand that each time a child dies in this world, the heart of every mother aches. And I'll tell you why. A great man once said: “All humans are of my race.” I'm proud to believe that as well.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Mourani.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just have a quick comment.

I am a member of Parliament for Langley, but I'm also a father and a grandfather, and I think every one of us here is deeply disturbed by the war that we see taking place and the loss of life. I came here today to listen to the witnesses, so I'm deeply disappointed that there was political mischief at work here and we were not able to listen to the witnesses—people who have left Lebanon—share with this committee some of the positive things, and provide suggestions on how we can deal with the situation in Lebanon. Instead, political games are being played here, and I find it deeply disturbing.

Mr. Alghabra said it's reprehensible to not call for a ceasefire. He was here when the foreign affairs minister shared that on July 16 and 26 Canada called for a ceasefire. We were signatory to that. So why would a member of this committee share with this committee things that are not accurate? Why would somebody do that?

It's also been said that there's reluctance to ask for a ceasefire right now. Well, who is reluctant to ask for a ceasefire right now? You heard that the foreign affairs minister twice, on July 16 and 26, asked for a ceasefire, and that Canada was a signatory to a ceasefire. You continue to say, let the fire continue. Who is saying that? Surely he's not.

So we have to make sure, as we provide debate around this table, that it's accurate, truthful, and not misleading, that we get down to the facts that will provide solutions to the huge problem we see in the Middle East.

On July 12, Hezbollah attacked Israel and kidnapped two soldiers in a cross-border raid. Israel responded by launching air, ground, and naval offences. As we heard from the minister, four days later Canada signed a ceasefire request—and then again ten days later. The member is shaking his head no, but I'm not quite sure what his motives are.

We have a motion from Madame Lalonde, and now we're speaking to an amendment to that. I think the amendment is in order and strongly shares Canada's commitment. We're strongly condemning the launching of Hezbollah's rockets into Israel—that's what started this. It calls on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint. We need to be part of the solution, stop playing games, and hear from the witnesses as soon as possible.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Thank you very much again.

I'll respond to a couple of the items raised by members of the opposition in the committee.

Firstly, Madam Mourani asked what is our political objective with regard to Lebanon. It's very simple. We want to see a stable, long-term peace in the region. Secondly, we want to see a strong Lebanese government that's sovereign over its entire territory. Thirdly, related to that—and the fact that these events have unfolded underlines why it is so important—we want to see the United Nations resolution calling for the disarming and disbandment of Hezbollah within southern Lebanon implemented. Fourthly, we want to see that a sovereign, democratic Israel is recognized and permitted to exist, which right now Hezbollah is committed to eliminating from the face of the Earth, as we heard.

So if you want to know what our objectives are, those are what they are. You will see that if these had been carried out—if there was a recognition of Israel's right to exist, if Hezbollah disbanded, and if you had a strong Lebanese government in place—none of what has unfolded today would be occurring. If those two resolutions from the United Nations Security Council had been implemented, we wouldn't have this conflict, and we wouldn't have this meeting.

So if you ask what our political objective is, it's to do the same thing as the international community has called for: to achieve that stable peace in Lebanon, to have Hezbollah disarmed, to have Israel's right to exist recognized. To me, that is not an unreasonable objective; it's practical and consistent. We're talking about a Security Council resolution that any one of the five major powers, the veto-wielding powers, could have vetoed, but they didn't. It's a broadly held objective recognized by all. So our objectives are not isolated, they're not narrow, they're objectives shared by most in the international realm.

In discussing it further, Madam Mourani said that we can't resolve conflict without dialogue. The way you resolve conflict is through dialogue. That's just dripped with irony from someone who voted to shut down dialogue today. We're supposed to be an example of how to resolve conflict, and she voted... She says we do it through dialogue, but God forbid we have dialogue here. God forbid we actually hear from witnesses who have something to offer.

So I found it ironic and inconsistent. You won't see us being inconsistent on this side. Had we heard from witnesses, I think it would have enriched the quality of the debate we would have had. It

would have been less partisan. It would have been a more reasoned debate, and one not aimed at scoring political points.

Again we see the desire for political points in this discussion of ceasefire. I think Mr. Warawa from Langley put it very well. We had a call for a ceasefire in this motion, Mr. Alghabra, but I guess you didn't read it. We referenced the G8 declaration. Similarly, the declaration of the parties at the peace talks in Rome called for a ceasefire.

Canada's been clear about that. I don't think there's any ambiguity there. Those two calls have been made, and guess what? There's no ceasefire. That's unfortunate, but it points out the difference between words and real power, the ability to influence things. It takes more than words, and it takes more than grandstanding; it takes a lot of hard work. We hope that hard work and dialogue will happen, and we will work towards that peace. But the hard work has to move towards the political objective I refer to: a stable, long-lasting peace in the area.

The Lebanese government didn't want an armed Hezbollah. They want them out; they want to be able assert sovereignty over their own country. Obviously if that had happened, you wouldn't have the ruins that exist there right now.

I don't think that's funny, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj; I think that's the truth. If Hezbollah were not in place to commit incursions into, and invade, Israel, would there be a conflict right now in Lebanon?

Israel had withdrawn—

• (1550)

The Chair: One moment, please. There is a point of order.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Those sorts of gratuitous comments are totally out of place. I find nothing humorous about this.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Well, you were laughing, so I took your laughing—

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I was not, Mr. Van Loan. That was totally uncalled for.

The Chair: Mr. Van Loan, he may have been smiling or laughing, but to determine what he was laughing at is a tough point.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I saw him laughing at it, but I'll take his word that he was not.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: First of all, there was no laughter on this side.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: The reality is that if you didn't have Hezbollah, a listed terrorist group, in defiance of United Nations Security Council resolutions, they wouldn't have been able to carry out the incursions that launched this very unfortunate conflict. It has led to such loss of life, such bloodshed, and such damage to the infrastructure that has so harmed Lebanon.

Remember, Israel had withdrawn from south Lebanon. Nobody has made reference to that so far today. No one has given them credit for having done that. Withdrawing from south Lebanon did not achieve the kind of security that we were hoping for. If the answer is to get along and get out of the way, history has now demonstrated that's not good enough. You actually have to deal with it sometimes. And sometimes it takes leadership to deal with hard questions. Hard questions involve being willing to stand up and say that terrorists and democracies are not the same thing; they are two qualitatively different things and they are not morally equivalent.

I think a stable peace has to be conditional on the elimination of the terrorist threat from that area. We would like to see efforts in that regard. If the international community can work to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559, that will be a major step towards a long-lasting peace in that area.

I hope that all of you around the table agree with that proposition. I don't think it's an outrageous one. And I hope that everyone around the table will encourage all other countries to do what they can to advance that proposition.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

I have two more speakers on the list.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: As was said a few minutes ago, I believe the government is being very clear about the issue of a ceasefire. It was stated publicly twice before, and then once again now in this addendum to the motion. I think it's very clear how the government feels and how the minister feels about the future.

I want to talk a little about having a balanced approach. The real question is, why should we have a balanced approach? We have troops committed in Afghanistan to a war on terrorism. There's little difference between being a terrorist and hiding amongst the civilian population and shooting rockets into another country. I believe we have an obligation to face international terrorism head-on and not to consider it on a balanced approach basis with other types of conflicts and concerns.

We have a situation with the Hezbollah. From earlier comments, it is considered a cancer from within. It has some 12,000 rockets that are hidden throughout Lebanon. They say they're activated or stored in garages. They're small, portable, and they can move in and around the civilian population. How do you deal with something like that? Hiding within the civilian population itself and shooting rockets will draw fire to that rocket location. Somebody said earlier that there are technologies that can track where the rockets are coming from. That's where they're sending their smart weapons.

The other issue that was mentioned is where these Israeli smart weapons are coming from. Well, where are these Hezbollah rockets coming from? It's certainly not the Hezbollah community itself making them. So you have another international extent to the situation that makes it hugely complicated. The circumstances where you've actively called for a ceasefire, but you have one side that does not want it or has not responded to it, is another complication to the overall affect.

First and foremost, I would ask why we should have a balanced decision on terrorism. We have acknowledged that we are in a war on terrorism. I think we have a responsibility to face that head-on. If the two parties do come together and a ceasefire is arranged, of course we want the killing to stop and of course we want this issue to end.

This is a tragedy of immense proportions. I can only think back to your comment about your family and discussions I have had with some Lebanese who had family and friends over there. My wife said it's only by the grace of God that our two daughters aren't travelling in Europe someplace. I know what we would think. We would fear for their safety too.

Of course we're concerned, and of course we have compassion for this situation. But I believe we have to approach this on the basis that we have an unusual circumstance here. You have a terrorist organization fully embedded within a country, and it's very difficult to delineate the boundaries. It is an unusual circumstance that is not using the rules of traditional warfare. It has to be approached from that aspect.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you, Chair.

This is just for clarification. Perhaps Mr. Van Loan didn't do this purposely, but he misrepresented a shaking of the head, and perhaps.... There's a certain amount of disbelief, because Mr. Warawa talked about political mischief, and to misconstrue it in the way he did, that it was laughing.... Absolutely no one would laugh, when you look at the situation.

I think my statement and discussion earlier clearly illustrate.... Just as you seem to be laughing and smiling, I don't believe you're laughing or smiling about what has taken place and continues to take place there, but it's that sort of political mischief.

I think the record will be quite clear on a number of things. There's no room for that sort of political mischief here. The record will clearly show there's been a filibuster going on here. Peter, if we check, I believe we'll see that this afternoon a good hour and a half, perhaps more, has been taken up by your very capable filibustering, and it's really unfortunate.

We're talking about a ceasefire. What we're quite clear about on this side is that we talk about an immediate ceasefire. Saying yes, we'd like to see a ceasefire, but we want a whole set of preconditions.... That could be a month from now, it could be a year from now, it could be ten years from now, or the conditions may never exist.

Someone asked, does Canada have the capacity to force a ceasefire? Of course we don't. But Canada has the ability to take a moral position. We have moral suasion. We've had an international role in the past that allowed us to have influence beyond the size and capacity of our resources. And following in lockstep with the sole country besides Canada that's not calling for an immediate ceasefire—following in lockstep with the Bush administration on this—does us a tremendous disservice in the future and undermines the moral position we've had in the past that's allowed us to punch above our weight internationally and diplomatically.

All we're asking for is this. You've agreed a ceasefire is necessary, and we agree that Canada on its own does not have the capacity to impose an immediate ceasefire. We're calling on this government to take a moral position to call for an immediate ceasefire. The Prime Minister obviously has very good and tight relations with the U.S. President. This is a time to place the call, to try to convince the U.S. President that what he's in fact doing, besides being a party to the destruction of a nascent democracy, is in fact building the capacity and strength of Hezbollah in the long term.

Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

A number of times you've mentioned the filibuster. I'll just say that so far the opposition has had ten speakers and the government has had eight or nine speakers, so it's fairly balanced.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

Just for clarification, I think it's not the number of speakers, but the amount of time each speaker has taken. I think the record will be clear on that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I've attended filibusters in the past where one side has gone on forever. We're trying to be fairly balanced here today.

We have one more point of order.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Telegdi is not a member of the committee. He has been subbed in. He was there in the region in 1956. For him to speak requires unanimous consent, and I'd like to seek the unanimous consent of the committee to allow Mr. Telegdi to speak for a few minutes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin. I know you've been here for many years and know that your motion is obviously out of order. You can't move a motion on a point of order, nor can you move a motion when another motion is under debate.

Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Perhaps I could pick up on a couple of points that were raised by Mr. Wrzesnewskyj. In terms of a filibuster, I guess the opposition's definition of a filibuster is actually getting to hear the witnesses you were supposed to hear before you make a decision. So I think trying to allow the witnesses to speak and present to us is hardly a filibuster. I have a very different definition from that of Mr. Wrzesnewskyj. Hearing from the people is the normal way you should proceed in a committee in any matter where you're trying to make judicious decisions. That's how I thought we operated, and the government thinks that resisting shutting that down is a filibuster. The opposition thinks that...but I have a different view.

Let's talk about leadership. I think it's important to recognize that as Mr. Wrzesnewskyj said, Canada has lost its traditional leadership role that allowed it to punch above its weight.

Let's look at the facts. The fact is that Canada had lost its leadership role. We weren't invited to tables anymore because we didn't have any credibility. The meeting that took place in Rome was of the Lebanon Core Group. It had been established for a number of years I believe when the Liberal government was in power. Canada wasn't at the table then. Canada wasn't invited to the table then, because under the previous government, we had lost credibility. We didn't have any weight. Nobody cared what we said or did. Under this government, having reasserted authority and leadership, having taken responsibility on the world stage, Canada is once again being invited—as we were to the Rome meeting on the peace talks on Lebanon. We were invited by the Lebanon Core Group to participate in a way we hadn't before. And I think this is the strongest evidence that Canada is once again resuming a leadership position on the world stage, which is something we can be proud of.

It goes to show that not having a position and not standing for anything doesn't get you anywhere on the world stage, while actually showing leadership and having positions gives you credibility. And that's why Canada is once again invited to an important table that's seeking to address this great conflict and bring about peace. That's why Canada has been able to play a leadership role again, because we're at that table.

A couple of years ago when the Liberals were in government, we weren't at that table, and we weren't even invited. Canada was nothing but the most outside spectator. So to that extent, I think we can be proud that Canada is once again punching, perhaps not yet above its weight, but once again we're gaining credibility and getting a place at the world's important international multilateral tables that are addressing these issues and making these decisions.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

We welcome Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

You made a comment earlier in the debate: what if we were there? Mr. Van Loan made comments about the Soviets and the Germans. Fifty years ago this year, Mr. Chair, I was in Hungary when the revolution started on October 23. There was a possibility for the revolution to succeed, but any possibility was stopped when there was an invasion that took place in Suez. At that time—because you made reference to Suez—what we had were three countries, Israel, France, and England, that undertook an adventure that shocked the world. The overwhelming majority of the nations were against that. Canada played an incredibly proud role in establishing peacekeeping for which our former Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson, received the Nobel Peace Prize.

The situations then and now are totally different. Now, we stand with a small minority of nations on letting the fighting continue, not calling for an immediate ceasefire, and we're standing in an alliance, if you will, just like the coalition of the willing, contrary to what the nations of this world are calling for.

Civilian deaths are horrific. Women and children dying is horrific. Men dying is horrific. Soldiers dying is horrific. There's no question that there's universal condemnation around this table of the actions taken by the Hezbollah. There's no question that commentary by Iran about Israel not having the right to exist makes it virtually a pariah nation. The world community is united on it. But what is at question as we are here is, is Lebanon going to survive as a state or is it going to turn into a failed state? Are we going to blame Lebanon for not having the capacity to stop Hezbollah?

Mr. Chair, we had commentary that this is a complex issue for which it's going to take all our resources as an international community to find a lasting peace. But you don't find a lasting peace when you're creating innocent victims on both sides.

This is a committee of Parliament. If you look at what's in front of us, essentially everybody in the opposition mentioned it. We want to call for an unconditional ceasefire and we want to call it now. We want to put in place a capacity in the international community—and it's going to be tough, particularly with the death of some UN soldiers. They're going to have to put in some capacity to stop the Hezbollah. We know that, and it's going to be a difficult situation, but it is not helped when there is just such an incredible devastation in a country that we all say we haven't got any grievances against, such as Lebanon. We want Lebanon to succeed. The international community wants Lebanon to succeed.

• (1610)

Mr. Chair, we should not play politics on this issue, because we're not going to achieve what needs to be achieved. Laying blame at this point in time isn't going to stop the killing. What we need are the conditions for a ceasefire and having the international community on board.

Fifty-six years ago in November, the Prime Minister of Hungary made a plea to the world, as the Soviet armour was rolling in, and essentially the plea was, help, we want to be a neutral country. The Prime Minister of Lebanon made a plea to the world because he knows what the devastation is, and they said they will not negotiate unless there is a ceasefire.

In 1956, the world didn't listen. I'm hoping we do not make that same mistake now, because the lives that are being lost are irreplaceable. I think there's a real union of opinion in this country and around the world that the present course of action and the status and style of the coalition of the willing can't continue, and it's not going to bring us peace in the Middle East.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Telegdi.

Madam McDonough.

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

I want to speak very briefly. I want to thank the member, Mr. Telegdi, who just spoke. I think it's sobering that he's reminded us of the experience of 50 years ago in Hungary, which he lived through. I would hope it is an appropriate note on which we could actually move forward with the business of this committee.

We've had a full discussion about a proposed alternate motion. It really is that. It's not really an amendment; it's an alternate motion. I think that on all sides, it would be tiny display of leadership on our part to say, let's move forward from there to hear from the International Red Cross.

I don't know whether Madam Lalonde would agree—if we deal with this motion, dispense with it—to have her motion tabled, so we can hear from the International Red Cross witnesses at this point.

I know that I pleaded with the chairman last Friday to agree to extend the hours late into the night and into a second day, if necessary, in order to hear from some witnesses—if we were going to hear from witnesses at all, which is not a decision the committee ever made. But I would hope that we could act in the spirit of the position put forward by Andrew Telegdi, in order to be reminded of the severity of the situation. I don't think any of us want to be here just debating. I think we want to show that we are responding to what is a very deadly, dangerous, and deteriorating situation in the Middle East.

I know that procedurally there isn't a provision whereby we call for the question. But of course, the way to go to the question is for all members to recognize that we can cease debating it endlessly, dispense with it, and move forward.

Can I ask—I know it's a point of order—the question about whether the International Red Cross witnesses are still with us?

• (1615)

The Chair: As far as I know, they are not. Perhaps they are? I was just told they aren't.

Anyway, back to Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, when we started this debate this afternoon, we made it very clear: let's listen to the witnesses who have come all this way—the witness from CIDA, the Red Cross, the Lebanese community, and so on.

However, the opposition refused to listen to them because they had a political agenda in this committee business, which they wanted to talk about. Now that they've already talked about it, now that they have their political point of view out, all of a sudden it's convenient to call back the witnesses, Mr. Chair.

Our question here is not the issue. You played politics, you changed the agenda, you hijacked the agenda, contrary to the spirit of what was written in that letter, which was to listen to the witnesses, and that did not happen. Now, Mr. Chair, to try to portray what they're saying is a horrendous situation, and so on.... Where were they when it was time to listen to the witnesses?

If I look out there, they have gone; almost every witness is gone. It's only the witness who are convenient to them....

Mr. Chair, I don't think that is an appropriate way to go.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

I see the witnesses have gone. There are others who are here who may not be acceptable, and I am not going to go down that road of picking and choosing the witnesses.

We do have an amendment to a motion. Is this to the amendment?

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Very quickly, it's to the suggestion of Madame McDonough, which I find bizarre in the extreme. It's exactly Madame Folco's suggestion, which we supported several hours ago as the best way of proceeding, which Madame McDonough resisted and voted to shut down. So I'm baffled as to how, in the space of three hours, she has changed her opinion. Mind you, she did the same thing on Afghanistan in a few hours, but to me it's bizarre.

We put forward that proposition, we wanted to proceed in that way, and you voted against it. You voted to shut down the witnesses, and now you've changed your mind.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Are you asking me a question you want me to answer?

The Chair: No, that's not to—

Mr. Peter Van Loan: You know, if we could proceed in that fashion, it's not a bad thing. I just find it bizarre that we went down this course to get there.

The Chair: All right. Madam Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chairman, I haven't hogged the microphone.

Needless to say, I'm disappointed with the discussion. If we want to wrap up, we need to deal with the Conservative amendment. Then we can dispose with each separate paragraph of my motion, if you wish. In particular, one part of my motion reads as follows:

Urges the government to support the calls of almost all other countries for an immediate ceasefire on both sides.

The motion could read as follows: The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development urges the government to support the calls of almost all other countries for an immediate ceasefire on both sides.

Obviously, I won't be voting against my own motion, but if other committee members wish to do so, that's their business. At least we would have, from a procedural standpoint, a resolution urging the government to support the calls of most other countries for an immediate ceasefire on both sides.

I haven't changed a single word. This is exactly the same as one part of my motion. It's your choice whether to vote on this motion or not. Then we could move on to witnesses.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are we ready to hear Mr. Van Loan?

• (1620)

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I'm not sure I followed what Madame Lalonde—

The Chair: What I was calling for was the question on the amendment to Madame Lalonde's motion—the amendment. We vote on the amendment to your motion.

As the mover of the amendment, you have the right to be the last speaker to that amendment.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I would conclude by stating that I think this motion has a very fair approach that addresses the issues and respects Canada's proud tradition. It addresses the issue of a ceasefire and seeks to have a lasting peace in the region. It's a motion that recognizes that we want to see a strengthened sovereign government in Lebanon and that we want to see Hezbollah removed from there. That's the kind of long-term peace we want, the kind that is reflected in the United Nations Security Council resolutions. It makes it clear that we want to see Israel exercise restraint and that it should exercise the utmost restraint to ensure that civilian lives and infrastructure are protected. I think that's something we can all support.

I think it's also something that we can all support in terms of recognizing that the Hezbollah attack was unprovoked. That unprovoked attack by Hezbollah opened what Mr. Wrzesnewskyj calls the gates of hell.

It speaks to our sadness and condolences at the loss of life that has occurred in the Middle East. We feel it deeply.

It also speaks to those important aspects of the evacuation. It seems to me that the primary reasons this committee was called together have been forgotten in the discussions today. As I said earlier, I guess it was such a success that the opposition decided to change the subject rather than stick to the subject for which they called this meeting. But the fact is that we did successfully evacuate over 13,000 Canadians, without mishap, as far as I know. That is a tremendous, unprecedented effort. We should not only recognize and commend the officials in the government who did that, but we should also try to use it as a learning example.

This motion calls for the Department of Foreign Affairs to pull out the principles from this successful innovation and apply them elsewhere. I think it's a motion that effectively addresses the problems and challenges that we face today; respects Canada's position that we've played in the past as a leader, the position as a leader that we are playing today, the role that we've played at the peacemaking table in Rome, and our commitments under the G8 signature, which Prime Minister Harper laid down, to see a movement towards long-term peace. That's what we need: a long-term peace; a strong Lebanon; Israel, peaceful and allowed to exist; a list of terrorist organizations that are no longer allowed to operate, that are disarmed and disbanded.

That's what that calls for. That's what we want to see in place, and I think that's something all of us can support today. I expect that all members will support this motion as I've heard very little criticism of the content.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

We are now prepared for the question. I will not read through the amendment, unless you want to hear it.

All those in favour of the amendment brought forward by Mr. Van Loan to Madam Lalonde's motion?

A recorded vote has been asked for, so we will do the roll call.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: If you're going to have a roll call, I would ask that the motion be read back.

The Chair: I'll have the clerk read the amendment to the motion.

The Clerk: It reads as follows:

Move that the motion be amended by removing all the words after "given", in line one, and substituting the following:

Given the strong bonds of friendship that unite Canada with Lebanon and given that it is committed to its security;

Given that of all Western countries Canada had the largest number of nationals in Lebanon at the outbreak of hostilities;

Given that Canada is a long-standing friend of Israel, that it actively supported its creation, and that it is also committed to its security;

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs:

Congratulates the Government of Canada for the successful evacuation of over 13,000 Canadians from Lebanon;

Calls on the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to conduct a review of the procedures utilized to carry out the evacuation so that the successful principles can be applied to planning for future similar emergency contingencies that may arise;

Offers its sincere condolences to the families of Canadians and all others who have died during the recent crisis in the Middle East;

Recognizes that Israel was attacked on its territory by Hezbollah unprovoked, and that Israel, as a sovereign democracy, has a right to defend itself;

Strongly condemns the launching of Hezbollah rockets into Israel;

Calls upon Israel to exercise the utmost restraint in its military actions and take all possible measures to protect civilian lives and infrastructure;

Calls on the Government of Canada to continue to support the Government of Lebanon and to support its efforts to peacefully disarm the militia;

Supports the G8 summit declaration, which emphasizes the importance of a ceasefire that is sustainable and emphasizes the importance of working towards a permanent solution.

(Amendment negated: nays 7; yeas 4)

● (1625)

Hon. Keith Martin: On a point of order, I'd like to introduce an amendment to the motion that all the words after and including "Given" be deleted and substituted with:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Canadian government to urge an immediate ceasefire by all parties across the Lebanese-Israeli border.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I don't think that's acceptable because, following the condemnations, my motion says:

Urges the government to support the calls of almost all other countries for an immediate ceasefire on both sides;

We can't strike this here, and re-introduce it elsewhere. That goes against procedure.

I suggested earlier that we vote on the motion one paragraph at a time. Obviously, I'll be voting in favour of the overall motion. If others wish to oppose it, then so be it. However, the following sentence must not be deleted:

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development:

Urges the government to support the calls of almost all other countries for an immediate ceasefire on both sides;

● (1630)

[*English*]

The Chair: Procedurally, I am told, we have an amendment here, and we would then go into a debate on the amendment again.

We have a motion that has been submitted. It was not submitted on time. A lot of what was in that motion, which will be coming later, is close to what is being amended here today.

I would ask Madam Lalonde... First, this is not a friendly amendment—you're not accepting this amendment—so we would go into debate on the amendment.

To go through your motion point by point—and there are perhaps 20 points—is not procedurally correct. This is not a bill. We have to pass or defeat the motion as a whole. As for going through it point by point, this is not legislation; this is not a bill that's being brought forward. That's how we would deal with a bill. A motion is a motion. Unless there is a friendly amendment, or an amendment, that is the only way we would proceed.

Madame Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I've been a member of this committee since 1999. We've said repeatedly that with respect to motions, it's possible to vote on specific parts of them. Really! We do that on a regular basis, at least here in the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, because we deal with complex issues. One day, a committee member tables a motion and the next day, someone requests an amendment of some kind. The committee then proceeds to vote on part or all of the motion.

We need to proceed carefully because we'll have to live with the consequences for a long time.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Lalonde, I refer to the clerk for advice. She tells me that I'm correct. If this was a report, we would go through it point by point and say, yes, I agree with this; yes, I'd like this scratched; yes, we can wordsmith this; perhaps this would be better here. But this is a motion. When a motion is brought forward, it's either amended and voted on or it's not amended and voted on. Those are the only ways we can proceed with the motion.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I'm sorry, but the last sentence reads as follows:

Decides to report this resolution to the House, including its preamble.

We've agreed to that.

[English]

The Chair: That's part of the motion. The last point, including its preamble, that we report this resolution to the House, is part of the motion.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: This has been a very unusual afternoon indeed.

[English]

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, do I understand that we have an amended motion on the floor that we need to debate?

The Chair: He has brought forward an amendment. That is correct.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: So now we debate the amended motion. The process is to debate the motion. Is that correct? Is that the next procedure?

The Chair: That's correct.

An hon. member: I would like to speak to it.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chairman, I request a recorded division.

[English]

The Chair: Are you calling for the amendment?

Ms. Francine Lalonde: You are amending the motion, saying that you can do whatever you want with it. Before this is voted on, we have to have a registered vote.

[Translation]

We must proceed to vote.

Now you have me speaking English!

[English]

The Chair: No, before it's voted on, Madam Lalonde, we have to have a debate.

I have the amendment. We will debate the amendment, vote on the amendment, and then vote on the main motion.

Dr. Martin wrote this. I'll either need the clerk to read it or a pharmacist.

Okay, I'm going to ask our clerk to read the amendment to the motion.

Could I have order?

•(1635)

The Clerk: The amendment is that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after "Given" and replacing them with:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Canadian government to urge an immediate ceasefire by all parties across the Lebanese-Israeli border.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, to speak to his amendment, and then Mr. Van Loan.

Hon. Keith Martin: First, Ms. Crandall, you could be a pharmacist if you weren't a clerk. Thank you.

Madam Lalonde has a motion here with many fine points. It's a very extensive motion that requires a great deal of thought because it involves many items in a complicated area of the world. We just received this a couple of days ago. To do it justice requires a great deal of thought and debate, and a lot of our input into this particular motion.

I think there is an area of agreement, regardless of what party you're involved in, to understand that we've heard here today of the humanitarian catastrophe taking place in south Lebanon and the broader implications, regarding where this leads for the security of Israel, Lebanon, the region, and beyond.

The essence of the motion calls for an immediate ceasefire, which the government has not called for. No matter what we've heard of Mr. Van Loan's amendment, if you read it very carefully, it did not involve a call by the Government of Canada for an immediate ceasefire, which is absolutely essential in order for civilians who want to leave, to leave; in order for humanitarian aid to get into the area now; and in order for there to be a cessation of hostilities, so that lives will be saved. If this does not happen, there will be a further series of casualties, primarily on the part of civilians, and a large part of those will be children.

Secondly, the security of all countries in the region will be compromised if this ceasefire does not go through. That includes the security of Lebanon, Israel, and all the countries in the region. This particular motion is essential as a first step to being able to put some element of calmness into the region, which desperately needs it now.

Notwithstanding the other points in Madam Lalonde's motion—many of which are very good—we believe passing this motion by our committee now would give very clear guidance to the Government of Canada to do the one thing that is essential for saving lives on the ground now. That is the reason and essence of the amendment, and why it was put forth, because it is in the area of agreement that regardless of where one falls on this particular issue, it is something we should support as an act of basic humanity.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Van Loan.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: No, I cannot chair the proceedings because I don't want to give up my right to speak.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think the amendment is progress in terms of simplifying, and there are many points in the larger motion that are problematic and that we object to. Certainly we all want to see efforts towards peace succeed, and we want to see a ceasefire and cessation of violence.

What's also important is that the ceasefire be sustainable, so that we can rely on it and it will be enduring, so that it's a ceasefire that brings real stability—not something that actually encourages parties to take advantage of the opportunity to rearm, reposition, and so on. I think it's very important that any peace, any ceasefire that's arrived at, be sustainable.

For that reason, while I think the motion is a step forward, positive, and the sentiment is good, I would like to propose an amendment to the amendment by inserting, after the word “ceasefire”, the words “that is sustainable”. I think that captures the sentiment, but also ensures that we are dealing with a call for an immediate ceasefire that is sustainable—one we can be certain will bring lasting peace to the area, one on which civilians can rely, and one on which the parties can rely to help all.

That's the motion I move, an amendment to the amendment, to insert, after the word “ceasefire”, the words “that is sustainable”.

I believe Mr. Obhrai is seconding that.

• (1640)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Yes, I am.

The Acting Chair (Hon. Albina Guarnieri): Thank you.

We will proceed to debate on the subamendment.

Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I wonder if I could just indulge the committee and you, as chair, for a moment.

I think the single most important thing that needs to come out of this committee today is a call for immediate ceasefire. What has been put forward in an amendment is intended to convey exactly the opposite message of what is intended in the motion itself. Therefore, I'm asking how that could even be sustained by the chair as an allowable amendment.

It seems clear to me that it's intended to have exactly the opposite intent. In other words, no, there wouldn't be an immediate ceasefire, because all the talk we've heard from government members has argued against an immediate ceasefire, in contravention of most of the world, including the United Nations. Even Tony Blair was out there clearly indicating that the circumstances, which have happened since the G8, have been so severe, so unacceptable, and so horrendous for innocent civilians and unarmed UN observers that we have to go to an immediate ceasefire.

At the very least, we need clarification of the intention behind this, whether it is in fact to prevent the call to our government to demand an immediate ceasefire.

The Acting Chair (Hon. Albina Guarnieri): Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: On the contrary, if my desire was to oppose it, I would move that we amend it by taking out the word “immediate”. Instead, what I've done is insert qualities as to the type of ceasefire we want: one that's meaningful, one that is sustainable.

The notion is that you want a ceasefire that actually is a ceasefire, one that parties can rely on. We've already had a 48-hour ceasefire of aerial bombardment. There already was a partial ceasefire. But that's the problem with saying “an immediate ceasefire”. If we've already had one that was of no effect, we need to have an immediate ceasefire that is sustainable. I don't think anybody wants a ceasefire that isn't. So for that reason, I think it's entirely consistent. It simply states that we want the ceasefire to be sustainable, and I don't see how that is inconsistent in any way.

I think all of us would like to see that happen immediately, and I'm happy to call for it. Perhaps the opposition doesn't want the ceasefire to be sustainable, but I think it's fairly reasonable that you would want it to be sustainable. So I would hope you'd support the subamendment.

The Chair: I'm going to break from the speaking order, because we have a proposed subamendment to that amendment.

I have one question for you, Mr. Martin. Is that acceptable to you?

Hon. Keith Martin: No, it's not.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go to Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, as I said before—and I don't want to engage in repetition—what Canadians are looking to us to do here as parliamentarians is to speak as clearly as possible in support of an immediate ceasefire. I also think what the rest of the world hopes they can hear from Canada is leadership around calling for an immediate ceasefire. Even if one accepts only the narrow terms in which earlier today we heard the foreign affairs minister address the question of whose interests we bear major responsibility for—those of Canadians who want to evacuate Lebanon—then we would have to agree to an immediate ceasefire if we were serious about creating safe passage.

I think Canadians want us to go beyond that, and the world hopes that Canada would want to go beyond that, and recognize that the UN Charter provides that the life of every citizen on Earth is equivalent and of equal importance to the life of every other citizen on Earth. Therefore, a ceasefire is necessary, not just to evacuate Canadians but to ensure that other civilians who are being killed in Israel, Lebanon, and Palestine will be protected as well. That's only going to happen with a ceasefire. We know that; we see that. Everyday the evidence mounts that this is the case.

So yesterday I submitted a motion that basically spoke directly to the need to do this. I absolutely respect the decision the clerk made to say that the full 24-hour notice was necessary before it could come forward to the committee today. But it's clear that we have to come out of this committee meeting today with a ceasefire.

I have to say I'm very reluctant to accept the suggestion that was made here that, no, this is not the opposite of the intention in which we called for an immediate ceasefire. But I think that if members on the government side are speaking honestly, fairly, and directly, and it is their intention to ensure not just that a motion goes through here calling for an immediate ceasefire, but that the call to the government will be followed up with a report from this committee to demand that the government agree to make the call for an immediate ceasefire.... If they won't do so, what needs to follow is that Parliament be recalled to address this crisis of inaction, equivocation, and qualification around calling for an immediate ceasefire.

I've heard from one member that the additional suggested words are not intended to be an equivocation or a qualification, but it is an immediate ceasefire that is called for. The intent of this is for the government to act on that. I would further advocate that we express ourselves on the issue of whether, in the event of the government not responding to the urging of this committee to call for an immediate ceasefire, Parliament be recalled to express its opinion on this issue and to consider what action should follow.

• (1645)

The Chair: All right, next in the lineup is Madam Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make two points and I'm speaking here to our clerks.

Earlier, when this motion was rejected out of hand, I responded by saying that I wanted a vote to determine whether or not the amendment was in order. I won't vote against a ceasefire, since my motion called for one. However, I haven't had an opportunity — and neither has the committee - to debate whether or not the amendment, which strikes down the substance of my motion and reintroduces it as an amendment, is in fact in order. I have considerable experience chairing meetings and I find that we're proceeding here in a highly irregular manner.

As for the substance of the question, we cannot say, Ms. McDonough, that a sustainable ceasefire is not a condition. When the two groups of countries confronted one another, they did so on the basis of certain conditions and in response to the immediate nature of the situation. When we say that a ceasefire will be declared on condition that it's a lasting ceasefire, we're agreeing to do what has to be done to achieve a lasting ceasefire. Upon further reflection, a lasting ceasefire really boils down to a treaty. However, even treaties have been violated. Lebanon has been invaded six times between 1982 and 2006. Yet, each time, I assume that a lasting ceasefire had been declared.

My motion, which you have dispensed with and which Keith Martin also wants to retain, calls for an immediate ceasefire without any conditions that might alter the picture in six months' time. A lasting ceasefire implies that certain conditions have been stated. Either we have conditions, or we do not.

As far as I'm concerned, the sub-amendment to an amendment to which I'm opposed makes an immediate ceasefire nonsensical and should therefore be soundly defeated.

• (1650)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Lalonde.

We're going to continue.

I won't give commentary on it, but when we do have amendments on these longer motions, if you get one little line that someone disagrees with, they have the opportunity to bring forward an amendment, and that's what we're seeing here.

Mr. Martin, you were up next.

Hon. Keith Martin: That's fine. Ms. McDonough made the same points as I was going to make.

The Chair: Mr. Casey.

Mr. Bill Casey: It's hard to believe what I'm hearing here today when people make an argument for or against the word “sustainable”. My colleague Ms. McDonough said that we don't want a ceasefire that is just there for evacuation purposes and so on; we want a sustainable, enduring ceasefire. Yet she said she's reluctant to support this. Just to assure her, from my point of view, that there is no ulterior motive here, this is what it is: an immediate sustainable ceasefire, as far as I'm concerned.

I say to the opposition that there's the chance we could have a unanimous motion and a unanimous vote that would carry more weight than one that was divided. If the word “sustainable” is approved, it could be a unanimous vote that could carry some weight. I'll be voting in favour of the amendment to make it a “sustainable ceasefire”.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

Madam Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like Mr. Van Loan to explain what the term “sustainable” means to him? The word can be interpreted in a number of ways. What does the term mean to him?

[*English*]

The Chair: We're trying to work together here, so if Mr. Van Loan wants to respond to that, he may.

We do have a speakers order, but because it's a very sincere question, Mr. Van Loan, can you answer what your definition of the term “sustainable” would be?

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I think Madam McDonough was heading in the right direction when she spoke about the notion of a ceasefire that just lets Canadians find a safe passage as not enough. You need something better than that. As I said, we already had a ceasefire on the Israeli side that may or may not have been sustainable. What we want is something that is real, sustainable, and has the ability to last with certainty.

Madam McDonough said it well when she said we want to have Canada speak with a clear voice. You've got a tremendous opportunity, as Mr. Casey pointed out here. The government has come some distance here, in an effort to achieve consensus, by indicating a willingness to support the amendment from the official opposition, provided that we insert the words "that is sustainable" to apply the immediate ceasefire.

I find it inconceivable that anybody would oppose the notion of a sustainable ceasefire. I think that's exactly what we want to work for, and we have an opportunity for Canada to speak with one voice, to go beyond something fragile that's not going to last, and to call for an immediate ceasefire that's sustainable.

This would be positive coming forward as a unanimous motion, would reflect our desire to see peace in the area, would reflect our desire to see an end to the bloodshed, and would be something positive that we could all endorse.

So I think it's quite simple; the words are there: "that is sustainable". We can all be professors of English. Sure, treaties can be broken, and United Nations resolutions cannot be adhered to, and even a sustainable ceasefire may break down one day. But asking that the ceasefire be sustainable, rather than asking that we just have a gesture that's meaningless, which ends the next day, I don't think that's asking too much. It's a positive thing to ask for, and Canada would stand well to ask for a ceasefire that was seen as sustainable.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you for answering that question.

Mr. Obhrai.

No, I'm sorry, back to Madam Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, but I didn't catch his definition of the word "sustainable". He used the word repeatedly, but failed to give a definition. What is your government's definition of the word "sustainable"? What does the term imply? What are the different stages of sustainability, as far as your government is concerned? I'd like to understand.

[*English*]

The Chair: Able to sustain.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: It means a country that will be sustained, a peace that will last, a ceasefire that will last. I don't think we want a ceasefire that's not going to last. I don't think we want a ceasefire that's going to be one day or a few hours long. We want one that's going to be sustainable, that will work.

Sustainable means it will work. I think we want a workable, lasting, and yes, immediate ceasefire. Where you've got the word "sustainable," it means lasting. It's clear to me, and I think we can all support it. It reflects our position and what I thought you wanted. I thought the opposition wanted a sustainable ceasefire—perhaps you don't—but I think it's pretty simple.

The Chair: Madam Mourani, would you prefer the term—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I don't wish to belabour the point. I'll wrap things up quickly.

I don't understand the government's definition of "sustainable". I think that what people want — and what hopefully this government wants too — is an immediate ceasefire, right this very minute. That is our wish and clearly we want this ceasefire to last as long as possible. I have to wonder about the word "sustainability" that I've come across in several releases issued by Mr. Harper or Mr. MacKay. However, I could be wrong. I have nothing further.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Mourani.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The notion that you want an immediate ceasefire is very simplistic. It says, okay, you want a ceasefire, then what? You just can't get up one day and say, I want a ceasefire, and then what? Shut up, and don't do anything beyond that? You can't do that sort of thing.

A lot of people have died. Canadians, Lebanese, and Israelis have died. For their sake, that should not be in vain. We should come up with a plan to say we need long-term solutions, a long-term ceasefire. An immediate ceasefire would give the terrorist group Hezbollah the ammunition they need to say they have won, and give people like the Iranian president ammunition to say they have won. So this is very simplistic.

Yes, I understand the need to say, stop the killing. So we can tell the Israeli government to exercise extreme restraint, which is what we did in the motion we presented. But this will not work at the end of the day. We are making a mockery of the whole situation in the Middle East. People have died. It's a serious matter. So to just say we want an immediate ceasefire, and then make a full stop, is like....

That is why I think, when we say "sustainable ceasefire", that's great. After that, the committee itself can sit down and come up with what the sustainable recommendation is. Then we can discuss the issue as well—and of course, within a very short period of time. But we really need to have a ceasefire that can last, not a ceasefire just for the sake of having a ceasefire.

That's all.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

May I say that I really think we're making some headway here, and I appreciate the spirit of the way we're approaching this, both on the opposition side and on the government side. The government side has said there is no hidden reason for wanting "lasting" or "sustainable" brought in. I believe the opposition is starting to say, can we have something that we can be unanimous on, and show that we all recognize the severity of what's happening?

To that, I appreciate the advances we're making here.

Madam Lalonde.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Are we still on the sub-amendment? That's not what I'm about to discuss. I want to talk about whether or not the amendment is in order.

[*English*]

The Chair: As to whether the amendment or the subamendment is in order?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I've been very clear about the fact that I am totally opposed to this sub-amendment. The word "sustainable" implies that some conditions exist, which means that the ceasefire hinges on those who have set the conditions. Consequently, it means nothing or means that the ceasefire is not immediate. I think we all understand the importance of this distinction. It means the ceasefire is not immediate.

[*English*]

The Chair: No, it may lead to a consensus, to actually achieving something, and that's why I think it was brought forward in good spirit.

Now I have Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I was prepared to speak as the last one, to wind up, but let others—

The Chair: Madam McDonough, then. She was on the list first, anyway.

Madam McDonough.

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

I'm not challenging the ruling that it's not out of order, but I have to say that it seems to me it shows a fundamental misunderstanding about the point of calling for an immediate ceasefire, period. Nobody in their right mind would suggest—and even the most cynical, differing politicians could pretend—that those who would vote unconditionally for an immediate ceasefire favour a ceasefire that's not sustainable. That's patently ridiculous.

The whole point of an immediate ceasefire is twofold. One is to stop the killing on both sides now. That's why more and more voices in the international community have joined the call for the ceasefire now. Secondly, the point of the ceasefire now is to create the conditions in which the ceasefire will either be made sustainable or not, depending upon how robust, skilful, and inclusive the comprehensive the peace process is.

That means you have to recognize that in that process you have to respect and include both state and non-state parties. You have to recognize that what you're doing is bringing together parties that are either openly at war with each other, or have very different intentions about where this should end up.

As has been pointed out to us again and again as we've done our homework on what kind of comprehensive peace process is necessary to build genuine lasting peace in the Middle East, you cannot constantly demonize one party while you tolerate the most incredible violations from another party. You can't say that we so despise what we think are the intentions of Syria, Iran, and others in

the region, we won't recognize that they have to be brought into a comprehensive peace process.

There is no other way to arrive at a sustainable peace in the Middle East. In order to arrive at that, the first condition required is to stop the killing—an immediate ceasefire. Then the international community will be tested. All of the parties contributing to this serious problem and all who are trying to contribute to a solution will either do their work in a way that creates the sustainability of that immediate ceasefire or fail to do so.

Let's demand the unconditional immediate ceasefire, and then let's all get to work and understand what it's going to require of us to put an end to the killing—not just immediately but in the medium and long terms.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1705)

The Chair: Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: As the last speaker to wind up on the subamendment, our intention is quite clear. If we wanted to undermine the motion, we would have proposed taking out the word "immediate". We have not done that; we're trying to build to a consensus that everybody can work with.

Madam McDonough, I'll remind you of what you said. You want something that goes beyond a fragile ceasefire that lets Canadians escape. You want something more than that. That's what this motion seeks to do by inserting the words "that is sustainable". We are talking about a ceasefire that is sustainable.

You may find it uncomfortable to call for an immediate ceasefire that's sustainable. I don't know why anybody would find that uncomfortable. I think that's pretty easy to call for. I think that's something we can all be proud to call for. If we can do it unanimously, so much the better. To vote against this motion is to vote against the notion of an immediate ceasefire that's sustainable. Why you would vote against a call for an immediate ceasefire that's sustainable, I don't understand.

Remember, we're sitting here as a committee issuing a public declaration to sign that has some value. We aren't at the table right now with all the parties; we're trying to add something to the environment, to the atmosphere. Calling for an immediate ceasefire that's sustainable, which is what this amendment would have the effect of doing, would be a positive thing that all could support. Why you would be against a sustainable ceasefire is beyond me. Why anybody in the opposition would be against this sustainable ceasefire, which, if you're voting against the motion, is what you're doing, is beyond me.

The Chair: All right. We will call the question on the subamendment to the amendment. Basically the subamendment inserts, after the word "ceasefire", the words "that is sustainable".

Hon. Keith Martin: A recorded vote, please.

(Subamendment negated: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: We will go then to the amendment to the motion, which is back to Mr. Martin's amendment. Again, we go to—

A point of order, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I wanted to know if the original mover of the motion, Madame Lalonde, is accepting the amendment.

The Chair: I believe she indicated at one point in time that she was not accepting that as a friendly amendment to the motion.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Are you accepting it?

The Chair: She doesn't have to, as a friendly amendment; it was an amendment.

Madam Lalonde is up first to speak.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I've spoken to the clerk as well as to the gentlemen, whose name I've forgotten, and I was right. I could have requested a vote on the chair's decision to allow Keith Martin's motion to stand as an amendment to my motion, when in fact my motion contained the exact same wording. Quite frankly, I've never seen this before.

However, since we have just had a debate, I regret that I didn't have the chance to state my position and that the Chair's decision was not put to a vote. Under the circumstances, I don't think his decision was a fair one.

Moreover, since my motion did call, among other things, for an immediate ceasefire, I won't oppose this motion. However, I have to say that I am deeply disappointed to have been prevented from voting on my own motion.

• (1710)

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Lalonde, don't be torn. We don't want anyone torn or disappointed for not, at that point in time, having the opportunity to vote on your motion.

When someone brings forward an amendment, we listen to the amendment. If the chair rules that the amendment is in order, we proceed with debate, and you rightfully have the opportunity to question the chair's decision about whether or not his amendment was in order. If that is what you're calling for now—

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I would have done it before the whole debate and the subamendment, but now I'm telling you that if I don't do it, it is because I could not. Of course, I cannot vote against the very proposition that I put forward.

The Chair: All right. Madam Lalonde, certainly—

Ms. Francine Lalonde: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Lalonde. It sounded really good.

Madam Lalonde, because you did not challenge the decision, I accepted the Liberal amendment as in order, and we proceeded with debate on that. Now, if you are not challenging the chair's decision on whether or not the amendment was in order, then as I understand it, we still continue with debate on the amendment.

The subamendment has failed, so we go back to debate on the amendment. Again, we are open to debate.

Mr. Van Loan, and then—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Could someone please read the amendment?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, we will read the amendment to Madam Lalonde's motion.

I'll try it this time. Mr. Martin moves that the motion be amended by replacing all the words after the word “Given” with the following:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Canadian government to urge an immediate ceasefire by all parties across the Lebanese-Israeli border.

That is the motion, and that is the amendment to your motion.

Madam Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I have a question concerning the wording. If the word “given ” is retained, then this is not a resolution as such. The wording would need to be changed.

[*English*]

You keep the word “Given”, so it makes—

The Chair: Unless it's different on the interpretation, it's not a preamble. It's just all the words after the word “Given”, so—

Ms. Francine Lalonde: So it starts with “given”?

Hon. Keith Martin: It says “including and after”.

The Chair: Because it's written in Dr. Martin's handwriting, we're going to get him to come. Even the translators or interpreters wouldn't be able to figure this one out.

• (1715)

The Chair: Obviously the motion has to be grammatically correct, so I'll ask our clerk to.... The interpreters will have to translate it from the verbal. We're doing a translation of it as we go, here.

Madam Lalonde, we will now read you the amendment in English, and then we will read it again in French. It may require some wordsmithing, as it's just been done here at the table. First of all, let us read, and you can listen to the interpretation. The interpreters may pick up some different ways in which it's been changed here.

Our clerk will now read the amendment.

The Clerk: The amendment is this:

That all the words be deleted after and including the word “Given” and be replaced with the following: That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Canadian government to urge an immediate ceasefire by all parties across the Lebanese-Israeli border.

[*Translation*]

It would read as follows in French:

Que tous les mots après et incluant le mot “Attendu” soient remplacés par ce qui suit: Que le Comité permanent des affaires étrangères demande au gouvernement canadien de presser un cessez-le-feu immédiat par toutes les parties à travers la frontière libanaise-israélienne.

• (1720)

Ms. Francine Lalonde: The word “presser” is used incorrectly in French. It would be more appropriate to say “Presse le gouvernement...”.

The Clerk: “Presse le gouvernement”...

[English]

The Chair: Does that change the English?

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: May I ask a question? At present, there is no officially recognized border between Lebanon and Israel. What word could we use instead of “border”? Could we use the expression “blue line” and write in parentheses after the word “border”, since this reflects the currently reality? Then we'd know what we're dealing with.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I'd like to make a totally friendly suggestion, to be helpful. I suggest that it remain as it's worded, “across the Israeli-Lebanese border”, but that “as expressed by the Blue line” be added, in brackets.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, are you still all right with this as a friendly amendment to your amendment?

Hon. Keith Martin: That's fine.

The Chair: All right.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: The French version says “tel que défini”.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Van Loan, did you want to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I did, but if somebody else wants to go one step ahead of me, that's okay.

The Chair: Were you on the list, Mr. Casey?

The Clerk: We haven't started a new list yet.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Again, I'm very concerned about what we're doing here. We are trying to achieve something more constructive and more in step with the international sphere, that would give our statement greater weight. In the spirit of trying to work towards that, what I'd like to do is suggest that we consider, as an alternative, the wording adopted today by the European Union—that's 25 countries.

I know that Madame Lalonde, Madame McDonough, and members of the official opposition have all talked about the importance of working together with the international community and not having Canada isolated. Perhaps the best way for us to do that is to go with the wording that came out of the European Union today.

The Chair: But Mr. Van Loan, is this a major change to the amendment we're dealing with?

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Right now, I'm offering this up in the spirit of consensus, in the hope that everybody can embrace this. I may have to introduce the wording as a formal amendment, if it comes to

that, but I would hope that in the spirit of consensus, everyone could rally around it. It would be: “The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls for”—and this is the wording the European Union used—“an immediate end to hostilities to be followed by a sustainable ceasefire”. That wording is out there right now and has been endorsed by the European Union, which represents 25 countries.

I think Canada's adoption of that wording would achieve what you are looking for in terms of an immediate end to hostilities and in terms of immediate action to protect lives. It would also achieve the long-term sustainability we're looking for.

I'll read it again. In this case, it would be: “The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls for an immediate end to hostilities to be followed by a sustainable ceasefire”. So if there is an appetite among the opposition to lend our voice to that of the European Union, that might be a way to go on this.

• (1725)

The Chair: Mr. Martin, go ahead, please.

Hon. Keith Martin: As the person who introduced this amendment to Madame Lalonde's motion, I would say no. We have a good amendment—an amendment that's constructive and that can make a difference—and we should really get on with the business of voting on it so that we can move forward.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, were you signalling?

Mr. Van Loan, were you prepared to move a subamendment?

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I will now move it as a subamendment. What is the first word in that? The way the subamendment would work is that with regard to the current conflict—

The Chair: A point of order.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Chairman, I understood you to say earlier that we were discussing the member's proposed amendment. Why all of a sudden is there a sub-amendment on the table? We could be here until midnight debating sub-amendments. As far as I'm concerned, Mr. Chairman, something isn't right here. We were discussing the proposed amendment to the motion. We've already discussed and rejected a Conservative Party sub-amendment. Now we're on to the proposed amendment. We could continue for some time dealing with sub-amendments. I think this is highly irregular, even though I'm not a procedural expert.

[English]

The Chair: I'll tell you what, I don't have any degrees in procedure, but I'm sitting next to someone who does. Basically, what we are told is that once the subamendment fails and you go back to the amendment, you can bring forward another subamendment and debate it. So if Mr. Van Loan decides to move another subamendment, Mr. Van Loan can bring it forward.

Yes, Madame Lalonde.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Can I get these learned individuals to understand that this is a major change. We're going from a ceasefire to a cessation of hostilities, not to mention everything else. This is more than a mere sub-amendment. It's a complete rewrite of the amendment.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Precisely! It's not a sub-amendment. It's a complete rewrite.

[English]

The Chair: It is an amendment to the amendment. It's not a full-frontal change. It's bringing forward the wording that the European Union adopted today and putting it into the motion we have here.

Mr. Martin, go ahead, please.

Hon. Keith Martin: With all due respect, Mr. Chair, this particular subamendment does change the amendment quite significantly, and it should be submitted by Mr. Van Loan as a motion if he wants to do that. But his so-called subamendment is not a subamendment at all; it is an entirely different motion, and if he wishes to exercise his rights to do that, then he's free to do that and give this committee 48 hours' notice.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Chair, there is no doubt that the subamendment I'm proposing is far closer to the amendment under debate than that amendment is to the motion it seeks to amend. So if we're talking about proximity, there's no contest there. If this is out of order, then Mr. Martin's motion is out of order. So if this amendment's out of order, then your amendment is out of order, because this is far closer to yours than to what you're seeking to replace, in terms of Madame Lalonde's motion, by way of amendment. So from that perspective, it's quite clear.

I would like to take this opportunity now to formally move that we adopt the wording similar to that of the European Union, "With regard to the current conflict in Lebanon, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls for an immediate end to hostilities to be followed by sustainable ceasefire". I think this is an opportunity for consensus, an opportunity to stand together multilaterally, which so many have said today is what they want to do.

The Chair: All right. Procedurally speaking, I must allow debate on the subamendment. Do you wish to have debate on this subamendment, or can we move to the question?

Mr. Van Loan, do you wish to have debate on this subamendment again, or can we move to the question and, whether this passes or fails, go the next step?

• (1730)

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I would like the opportunity to speak to it at least once.

The Chair: It's your turn, and then mine.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: What we're trying to do here, and what we've heard about many times today, is to establish the importance of Canada's working together with other countries, multilaterally, to achieve peace. That's the sentiment I heard from just about everybody on the opposition side. There was a suggestion that Canada was standing alone, not standing with others, and that it was

isolated, that Canada was the only country in the world with its position.

What we are putting on the table is a proposition that puts us together with the largest other bloc of countries that is taking a position on that issue: the European Union. Doing so assures that we're moving towards an immediate end to hostilities. I think that's what people want to see happen. But besides that, the proposition adds the concept of sustainability.

If having weight is the desire of the members of the opposition, which is what has been so often expressed today, we should be standing together with the European Union. I'm surprised that they aren't embracing it after having talked all day long about the importance of not being isolated. Instead, they want to barge ahead with a motion that would isolate Canada, that would have us staking out a position that is, however minimally, different from that of the European Union.

I thought it was a good effort at consensus. I think that's why it came out of the European Union—because it was that kind of effort, a consensus—and I think adopting it would add our voice to theirs. It would give Canada greater weight.

This is a great opportunity for us to take. Again, why would we be against the concept of an immediate end to hostilities and of working towards a sustainable ceasefire? It is inconceivable to me why we would be against adopting that, especially when doing so would put us together with so many other countries in the European Union.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, go ahead, please.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, in defence of the last motion, the NDP's Alexa McDonough said, let's do that, and she gave the rationale: stop the killing. She wants to immediately stop the killing and then move forward to look at how we can have something sustainable.

This European Union motion that we are adopting over here does precisely that: it calls for an end to the hostilities so that we can stop the killing, but then it goes along to suggest that we work towards a sustainable peace. Without working towards a sustainable peace, as this motion proposes to do, we are doing only half the work. We are stopping midway, and we are not completing the work.

This motion allows us to stop the killing immediately, which is what everybody wants, and then proceed ahead for a long-term, lasting peace.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Casey, go ahead, please.

Mr. Bill Casey: Thank you very much.

I just think this is a great opportunity to add our voice to that of the European Union. Imagine—all the countries in the European Union have agreed to this wording, and if we add our voice to that, it will make that even more effective as opposed to having the European Union going one way and Canada going another. I think it would be much more effective and much more significant if we adopted the same words, and I will support this subamendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Goldring, go ahead, please.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Yes, I too believe that this is an opportunity to work together and work in concert with the European Union. I think it sends a terrific message to be able to have this approved. But I also have difficulty with the other motion that focuses on the Israeli-Lebanon border, and there is some discussion as to how definable that is. Also, is there any possibility that another border might be involved in this as this grows throughout the region? In other words, I think it complicates the issue by putting specifics of borders into a motion, whereas the motion from the European Union itself is very clear, very concise: end the hostilities, and then follow by working on a sustainable ceasefire.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Is there any other debate on that? If not, we will call the question on the subamendment. A recorded vote on the subamendment has been called for. I'll ask the clerk to again read the wording that was adopted today by the European Union, and we will have the opportunity to accept or reject it.

● (1735)

The Clerk: Moved by Mr. Van Loan, a subamendment:

That the amendment be amended by replacing all the words after "the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs" by the following: "calls for an immediate end to hostilities to be followed by a sustainable ceasefire".

The Chair: All right, we have the question, and we will proceed.

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Martin's amendment. Is there debate on the amendment?

Yes, Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Very quickly, I think after we have failed to endorse the concept of sustainability, after the committee has implicitly chosen to stand separate from the EU, I have difficulty supporting a motion that is so empty and so tentative when we could have had something much more robust and stronger.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Obhrai, go ahead, please.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Rejecting the motion that we put forward, which called for the end of hostilities and sought an immediate ceasefire, clearly shows that the opposition is playing politics with this issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Casey, go ahead, please.

Mr. Bill Casey: I'm ready.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

Can I call the question?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I'm going to have our clerk read the question one more time. It is a recorded vote as well. This is the amendment to Madame Lalonde's motion.

The Clerk: The amendment reads as follows:

That the motion be amended by replacing all the words after and including the word "Given" with the following: That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Canadian government to urge an immediate ceasefire by all parties across the Lebanese-Israeli border as expressed by the Blue Line.

The Chair: We'll have a polled vote.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 7 ; nays 4)

The Chair: Now we will vote on Madame Lalonde's motion as amended. We can again have debate on the amended motion.

This will be a recorded vote.

Is there any debate on the amended motion? If not, then we will go to a recorded vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

● (1740)

The Chair: We'll have it read back one more time. I think that's in order.

The Clerk: The motion as agreed to and amended is as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Canadian government to urge an immediate ceasefire by all parties across the Lebanese-Israeli border as expressed by the Blue line.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, I'd like to give my notice of motion very briefly. I tried to give it, but didn't have quite sufficient time yesterday, although 26 hours ago I passed it on to the clerk.

My notice of motion is as follows:

That the committee condemns the government for failing to call for an immediate ceasefire in the Middle East, in light of the deaths of civilians in Lebanon, most recently in Qana, in Israel and the Gaza Strip, as well as Canadians, including a UN Canadian Peacekeeper. If the government fails to call for an immediate ceasefire, the House of Commons should be recalled to consider the government's response to the situation and to express its opinion.

The Chair: Thank you. We have been served notice, and I think that concludes.

I'll accept a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I move to adjourn.

The Chair: So moved.

We are adjourned.

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