



House of Commons  
CANADA

# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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FAAE • NUMBER 017 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, September 27, 2006**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson**

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## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, September 27, 2006

•(1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)):** Welcome.

This is the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, meeting number 17.

We are very pleased to have with us today the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This is not the first time that Minister MacKay has appeared before our committee. Indeed, each and every time we've invited him to come, he's been more than willing to appear before our committee. Today's committee is in regard to our study on democratic development.

Mr. Minister, Senator Prud'homme has also advised me that it's your birthday today. I can tell you that we are not going to sing happy birthday to you, but we do wish you a very good birthday, Mr. Minister, and we look forward to your comments.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs):** I wouldn't expect favourable treatment either, Mr. Chair, but thank you for that.

With me at the table is Michael Small, who is assistant deputy minister for global affairs.

Mr. Chair, let me thank you as well as members of this committee, individually and collectively, for taking on this important task and furthering Canada's long tradition of promoting democracy. I think the work you have before you will be extremely important and very valuable in this exercise of democracy promotion. I also believe it's very timely and will contribute greatly to identifying ways in which Canada can play a more active role on the world stage promoting democratic principles.

I don't want to prejudice the conclusions that you will reach, but I do hope they will reflect a consensus that the promotion of democracy is an eminently worthy and intrinsically Canadian endeavour. It is an expression of our values as a nation that transcends partisan interests. All of you around this table as elected members of Parliament know the importance of democracy at the grassroots level. And you know that there are important principles of democracy across the board that we can all embrace. Promoting democracy has been an integral part of Canada's history, and generations of Canadians contributed to building our own democracy. Each generation has stood ready to defend our way of life and to act for the sake of others when their freedoms have been threatened.

As far back as the First World War, Canada stood up for democracy. Indeed, many would say, and historians have said, that Canada became a nation at Vimy Ridge in the First World War. And notably, over 45,000 Canadians gave their lives defending democracy in the Second World War. Canada stood alongside other democracies, other nations, in opposition to totalitarian regimes for over 40 years of the Cold War. Since the Iron Curtain fell, we have extended a hand to dozens of new democracies around the world. The fight for universal suffrage and women's rights is very much a part of our history, as is the right to vote, to run for office, to serve in government.

•(1535)

[Translation]

Our current engagement in Afghanistan in no exception. Throughout our history Canadians have stood up to oppose ideologies that trample the rights of individuals to direct their own affairs. We have faced down threats to the freedom and stability of the world. Our own way of life depends on it. Our own values demand it.

This government's emphasis on freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law is intended to be both a reflection of Canada's own core principles—some of the key ingredients in our success as a nation—and a guide in our response to many of the challenges and threats in the world today.

[English]

Mr. Chair, Canada's tradition of upholding democracy and human rights informs our opposition to authoritarian regimes, like those of Burma and Belarus, and other countries in need of attention, North Korea and Iran, and yet it informs us of our unequivocal response to organizations that advocate violence and perpetrate terrorist acts.

In March Canada was the first country to suspend its assistance to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. Our position is firm: the Canadian government will not contact or provide funds to an organization that threatens the security of a sovereign nation like Israel, their people and their democracy, by using terrorist means. We hold out cautious optimism for development and efforts made by Mahmoud Abbas to alleviate the pressures that are currently holding the Palestinian people in such difficult circumstance.

In April the Canadian government listed the Tamil Tigers, LTTE, as a terrorist organization under the Criminal Code. This sends a clear signal that they must reject terrorism as a political tool.

Just as Canada's government has engaged in promoting democracy around the world, Canada's civil society is involved in the same undertaking and the time has come to expand our efforts in the face of a new generation of challenges. There is no one-size-fits-all, no perfect democracy, Mr. Chair, and the old saw about sausage making is true. It's not always an attractive process.

[*Translation*]

Before I speak about meeting today's challenges to democracy, let me step back for a moment and put democracy promotion in a global context.

When Nobel laureate Amartya Sen was asked to identify the single most important development of the past century, he didn't choose the end of colonialism. He didn't choose two devastating world wars. He didn't choose the rise of new economic centres of power. To Sen, the most striking feature of the 20th century was the rise of democracy as the pre-eminently acceptable form of governance. Democratic governance has been accepted as a universal norm.

What explains the universal appeal of democracy? Countries may differ on the forms their democracy may adopt, but the values at the very heart of democracy resonate in every region and with every culture. Those values are the dignity of individuals and the importance of freedom.

[*English*]

Colleagues, the advance of democracy didn't happen automatically or even easily. It happened because countries like Canada stood up for the values in which they believed and in some cases were prepared to fight and die for. This is an important principle. It's not to sound maudlin or melodramatic, but just as previous generations of Canadians stood up for democracy, this generation must do the same.

Let me suggest three salient reasons why Canada should commit itself to the promotion of democracy. First, our values themselves demand it. Canadians believe in the dignity of individuals and popular consent. That is why this government reacted strongly to the flawed presidential elections in Belarus this last month. It was a question of principle for Canada to object to this flagrant abuse of power that denied the right of the peoples of Belarus to choose their government in a free and fair election and breached regional democratic standards.

Secondly, Mr. Chair, promoting democracy is a fundamental part of our efforts to build a more peaceful, stable, and prosperous world in which all can partake. Established democracies are more likely to enjoy peaceful relations between themselves and their neighbours. This confers other benefits: it stabilizes international affairs, it provides an environment in which economic opportunity and prosperity can grow and flourish, and it facilitates sustainable development.

In short, Mr. Chair, I believe that on all of those scores, democracy is like a stainless steel umbrella that allows all those other important developmental democratic principles—protection by rule of law and human rights—to flourish under this umbrella.

Finally, the spread of democracy contributes directly to the security of Canadians. While not a cure-all to prevent terrorism, the

appeal and resilience of democratic systems of governance are among the best allies we have in defeating terror.

There are many fragile states, Mr. Chair, to which we should turn our attention. As a point of reference, Haiti and the Ukraine are two fragile states, as far as democracy is concerned. At the same time, we commend them for the progress that was made.

The fact that terrorists despise democracy and will go to great lengths should tell us something. How can there be rampant oppression and state-sponsored human rights abuses that give way to the power to remove them from office?

Mr. Chair, it is the key to unshackling people to have them bestowed with the power to change their government. Democracies make stakeholders of those who are most directly affected by poverty, instability, and conflict. They empower citizens within their own political systems to focus attention on serious problems, to propose solutions, and to take responsibility for their own fate. By providing avenues for peaceful change, they reduce the appeal for more violent alternatives.

What can Canada's contribution be to this? To that end, I look very much forward to hearing from you, hearing your views and findings as to how Canada can best assist other countries in achieving their aspirations for democracy.

Let me offer a few thoughts on what I believe our country has to offer. With many of the contemporary challenges surrounding the promotion of democracy, Canada enjoys some unique credibility and with it some unique opportunities. There is an enormous well of goodwill in the broader global context, and having outsiders assist us with democratic reform can be very sensitive. Therefore, Canada's reputation as a fair player confers clear advantages: we were never a colonial power; we do not have great power ambitions; our motives are not suspect; our agenda is not hidden; and as I said, there is a tremendous depth of goodwill for Canadians. It's partly because of our advocacy, but more so because of our active support for democratic values.

Canada also has useful experiences to share with other countries. At home we may too easily take for granted what some others would like to emulate. So our institutions must be highlighted to always work effectively and fairly. Bribes are not required to receive public service in this country, our police forces are professional, judges are impartial, editors may criticize politicians, protests can take place peacefully in this country, elections are administered smoothly, and governing parties change and our political system remains intact.

● (1540)

But it is not just Canada's institutions that are of interest to emerging democracies, I would add. We also have a wealth of individual expertise to share. Canada's civil society is a deep reservoir of people with experience in wrestling with many of the issues confronting democracies around the world.

We have learned judges, journalists, a very dedicated and loyal public service that serves this country. And at this moment there are thousands of Canadians from all walks of life fanned out around the world. In some of the most difficult and dangerous places in the world, you will find Canadians serving selflessly for causes they believe in.

Again, I believe that helping people and generosity are intrinsic Canadian values. Many Canadians are able to engage in this problem-solving in multiple languages, with respect and tolerance for other religions and cultures. This also brings Canadians, who are particularly sensitive to difficult cultural and social contexts, into a position of great ability to offer assistance.

The vast majority of Canadians will agree that democracy should be a high priority for our foreign policy, and that is exactly where this government has placed it. Canada has something valuable to offer on this score. The more difficult question to address is how do we go about promoting democracy in the broader world?

We should start by acknowledging that democracy is not something that outsiders can impose; it is part of the logic of democracy that it needs to be chosen and pursued by citizens themselves. Citizens around the world aspire to democracy, and assistance provided by outsiders should be driven by its recipients.

In addition to development assistance, there is much that we can do in the political and diplomatic realm. The government of Brian Mulroney, for example, demonstrated its strong opposition to apartheid in South Africa. When we stand on a principle, Canadian leadership can make a huge difference. The great man himself, Nelson Mandela, credits Mr. Mulroney and Canada for their leadership in ending apartheid in South Africa.

Our membership in regional organizations also provides a platform for influence. Bodies like the Organization of American States have adopted democratic principles as conditions of membership, and this makes them a natural place to look to uphold advanced democratic standards. Similarly cross-regional organizations like the Commonwealth and la Francophonie can play an important role.

But Canada is much more than its government, and Canada's commitment to democracy extends well beyond politicians, diplomats, and development experts. Democracy involves our whole society, all of Canada. From our universities to our faith-based organizations, from our professional associations to our political parties, we should mobilize Canadian society in promoting democratic values.

In every riding or constituency in Canada, we also have volunteer organizations that try to connect citizens with government by getting them out to vote and by canvassing their views for the next party platform to form a government. In every neighbourhood in this country—in every village, town, and in every rural community—we have people passionate about particular causes or issues who band together to advocate their point of view. In every community, there are women committed to overcoming obstacles to their equality and children who are committed to their learning.

Mr. Chair, I would suggest there is no particular organization that can take ownership of these issues. It is a collective community interest to address these issues of equality, child poverty, and poverty

alleviation, and this allows for the protection and promotion of human rights for all. So having a way to mobilize members of civil society to help their opposite numbers in other countries is an important goal—and an ambition, I would add. The obstacles to democracy in different countries are legion. Fortunately, Canada has legions of experts who can help people in those countries address these obstacles.

I believe we should make democracy promotion not just a priority for government, but for our entire society. Just like our forebears, the current generation of Canadians has its own mission to promote democracy in the face of modern challenges in the 21st century.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, the true test of strength—of belief, commitment, and courage—is your ability to stand for something when there is personal risk or discomfort and when there is some cost to the person, country, or organization, yet you do it anyway on principle. I believe that democracy is a principle worth fighting for and standing for. It's a collective exercise; it takes practical as well as complex issues into consideration.

● (1545)

I would end by encouraging all of you to consult broadly. I know you will have many witnesses and many organizations before you. As I said at the beginning, I very much look forward to the recommendations on how we can fulfill this task. I look forward to your questions here this afternoon.

Thank you.

● (1550)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I'm just going to instruct our committee that we adjourn at 4:30. There are other meetings that are happening, so we are going to be fairly strict with the clock. In the first round there are ten minutes.

Mr. Minister, you mentioned in your remarks a number of times “fragile states”, and in fact you drew reference to Haiti. I want you to be aware that this committee is working very diligently, very hard, on bringing together a report on Canada's efforts and responsibilities, humanitarian efforts, in Haiti. That report will be coming forward fairly soon. We have been involved in this through the spring. Democratic development is the second part of our overall study.

We are going to go to the opposition first, for ten minutes. We have the minister here. You may want to split the ten minutes up among your members.

Mr. Wilfert.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Minister, for coming. I appreciated your remarks.

The issue is how to promote democracy, and I think that one of the best ways is obviously at the grassroots level. In the past, for example, the commune elections in Cambodia were an excellent example of that. Past support by the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in terms of exchanges, which I hope will continue under your watch, I think is important.

Engagement.... I believe parliamentarians play a very important role, Minister, and that is one I would like to ask you about. We know that parliaments in Asia have executive-dominated societies, very weak legislatures. My many years in working in Asia tell me that my colleagues in that part of the world are very interested in having the proper tools and instruments to promote democracy, to be a real check and balance. For example, in Vietnam the foreign affairs committee is actually now acting in an oversight role at the national assembly level for government.

Minister, what role do you see specifically Canadian parliamentarians playing in multilateral organizations to help promote democracy? What effective tools do you think we need to have in place or do you believe we have in place in terms of measuring the effectiveness, both in terms of the overall assistance through CIDA or through engagement by parliamentarians, government, or bureaucracy?

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** First of all, I acknowledge your great interest and ongoing efforts in this regard. I know you've travelled extensively, particularly in Asia.

I think one of the most basic democratic measures or standards we can set—and it's certainly not the only one—is participation in elections. One of the most important roles that I've seen Canada play in recent years is just that—election oversight. I think Elections Canada, Jean-Pierre Kingsley and others, have done yeoman service in representing our country. They have gone to places like Haiti and some of the African countries and done their level best to promote participatory democracy and fair elections.

There are telltale signs when elections have gone awry. We've seen examples in which ballots were stuffed or went missing. While elections are not the be-all and end-all, they are the surest sign that a country is in essence moving towards democratic principles and empowerment of people to change their government, as opposed to some of the coups we've seen, most recently in Thailand. I think this is an area where we are already seeing tangible contributions by Canadians.

On your reference to other forums or organizations, I would encourage you to make that part of the essence of your study—to look at other countries that embrace these arm's-length bodies set up to promote democracy. The National Endowment for Democracy is one example of an international body that has reached far beyond its own country's boundaries. Transparency and accountability within those organizations demonstrates that they are following democratic principles in the governance of themselves. Nothing can set democracy back more than having an organization promoting these principles fall victim to its own autocratic and undemocratic ways. I would encourage you to include some of these models. There are quite a few in Great Britain and France that promote participation, promote the type of full, fair, and free democratic elections that are the landmark of countries taking control of their own destiny.

To that end, the Department of Foreign Affairs as well as CIDA have to continue to fund these organizations sufficiently to make their mark. I would suggest we have to gauge, with the greatest information available, the progress being made and target countries in which we feel we can make the greatest difference. I think if we have a completely uninformed, scatter-gun approach, and we try to be everywhere at the same time, we're not going to accomplish as much as we would by taking a focused, principled attack.

The Ukraine was an area where members of this committee went and made a significant contribution, as did Elections Canada. I would defer to you for some good advice on where those efforts should be focused.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Cullen.

**Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Thank you, Minister, for the presentation, which I think was more philosophical in nature. I'm not sure if the expectation was that you would come here today with some proposals. I guess not, but you put the challenge back to the committee.

I have three ideas for you that I'll throw out. It picks up on the theme we just touched on, the role of parliamentarians. I just came back from Arusha, Tanzania, where our colleague John Williams heads up the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption. The reality is that you cannot build democratic institutions if you have corrupt countries, corrupt leaders, and money being laundered in offshore banking centres. I know that the department, through the human security program, has been somewhat supportive of GOPAC. I hope you can do more, because I think there is a big role for legislators.

Secondly, you touched on fragile states. I would recommend that we also pay a little more attention to failed states. Somalia is a case in point and something I have been working on for years. I think we missed a bit of the envelope. It's never too late, but these failed states become breeding grounds for extremism and end up being a bigger problem than if we dealt with them proactively at the beginning.

Finally, let's look at the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg. I think it's time the government looked at this more seriously in terms of our having some modest mission. Right now Strasbourg is served by Brussels; it was Bern. With the huge volume of work that's going on with parliamentarians in the parliamentary assembly, the Council of Europe is the preeminent body in Europe for democracy and human rights. Goodness knows we have challenges in Europe in that regard. I think it's time to look at having a modest mission in Strasbourg to serve those needs.

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** I thank you for the input, Mr. Cullen.

I did come here very much with the intent of just putting forward some broad themes, as opposed to suggesting where we are. I wanted to very much invite you to give us input as to where you think we should be going as a government, particularly in the area of promotion of democracy.

There are some other bodies that I neglected to mention in response to Mr. Wilfert, including GOPAC, which Mr. Williams has shown a great deal of leadership on. They had a recent conference, I believe, in Tanzania, which was quite successful. The Department of Foreign Affairs supported that to a large degree. There's the international rights and democracy work that's being done within the department as well as other civil society bodies and organs. There's the Democracy Council, the Forum of Federations, and the Parliamentary Centre, which also very much promotes just what you've said, the participation of parliamentarians themselves, and legislators who go abroad bring to bear their expertise and interest in areas of promotion.

So I know your intent is very much to expand our reach into areas, including failed states that you've suggested, which I would be quick to add also includes Afghanistan. Afghanistan is another country where, sadly, if years ago we had not abandoned Afghanistan, we might not find ourselves in the position we're in today. Somalia, you point out, is another very salient country; and Sudan and Darfur, the same. Haiti is another example where they were making progress and fell back. To a somewhat lesser degree, we have to embrace those shortcomings, but also not make the same mistakes.

Georgia comes to mind as a country that is, again, making great strides, but we can't abandon them or simply say our work there is done because they've been able to achieve democratic elections and are well on their way. We have to continue to support them into the future. But I take your comments to heart.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

You have ten minutes, Mrs. Barbot.

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. MacKay, for meeting with us today.

You stated, and rightfully so, that Canada has some useful experiences to share with other countries and that we take too easily for granted at home what others abroad would like to emulate. Specifically, you spoke of the context in which our democracy is exercised, noting that bribes are not required, that our police forces are professional and that criticism can be levelled at our politicians. We agree with you on that score.

Yet, at times, our institutions, however sound, do not quite act as we would hope they would in a democracy.

Recently, the findings in the Maher Arar case bear this out. Under the circumstances, we felt that the government's first duty was to take responsibility for what happened to Mr. Arar. This Canadian citizen suffered terribly when he was deported to another country and tortured. To our way of thinking, the Canadian government should step up and, as any citizen would expect of his government, apologize for the suffering he endured.

I realize that the other issues will be examined by the lawyers and that further legal action is pending. However, we find it odd, to say the least, that to this day, the government has yet to acknowledge the suffering inflicted on Mr. Arar or to apologize to him and his family.

What are your feelings about this situation?

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Thank you for your question.

First of all, I want to clarify that there was a response from all members of the House of Commons last week. I'll continue in English, for clarity's sake.

[*English*]

I believe you're right. Democracy goes far beyond our elections, our political system. It has to extend to our judiciary. It has to extend to all levels of society. In fairness, the previous government went to the extent of having a public inquiry into this matter because there is very much a need for self-examination and preservation of your own country's democratic integrity. To that end, we have now in possession a very complex report with numerous salient recommendations that will provide some serious lessons learned and enhance our ability to avoid the type of extradition as we've seen that led to the circumstances Mr. Arar faced in Syria.

So, on taking responsibility, lessons learned, I absolutely agree with you. I would suggest, though, that to simply respond quickly without taking into account all of the important information that was gathered during that inquiry, the important recommendations of Mr. O'Connor, which I think it's fair to say take some time to digest, to discern how best to proceed vis-à-vis future practices... We have the Monterrey protocol now, as you know, in place to avoid that type of misinformation being extended or arbitrary acts being taken by other countries when it comes to deportation and extradition. I think we're well on our way to improving upon the current practices, but there is more to be done. That report itself is the basis to improve upon an important element of Canada's own democratic system, and that is public accountability for actions the government takes.

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Madame Barbot or Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** I'd like to wrap up, with your permission. My question concerned more directly Mr. Maher Arar and his family.

I can appreciate that there will be other issues to consider later, but when a Canadian citizen is treated this way, why is the government taking so long to act in a humanitarian, compassionate way and to acknowledge that from a humanitarian standpoint, Mr. Arar was mistreated by this country's authorities?

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Mrs. Barbot, ten days is not that long a period of time to respond. We now have a response from all parliamentarians, but it's important to clearly understand all of the recommendations to appreciate what the next step will be.

[English]

And let me add this. There is also another important aspect to the Arar case that we can't overlook, and that is the fact that Mr. Arar himself has launched a lawsuit against the governments of Canada, the United States, and Syria. We could make impromptu or improper remarks about this and we do not want to jeopardize his legal case, quite frankly. So respect for the rule of law and the ongoing process he has begun is also part of the government's responsibility, and that is very much a factor as far as what the government will say.

**The Chair:** *Merci.*

Madame Bourgeois.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good day, Minister.

To allow democracy to take root is to give people an opportunity to take charge of their destiny and establish institutions. Canada, through CIDA, is actively providing aid to a number of countries, whether by advising them on legal matters or on good governance. A number of countries, China in particular, benefit from CIDA's assistance. Canada has poured more than \$265 million into China to aid democracy's cause. Has a report been produced on the aid supplied? Is CIDA accountable for the way in which these millions in aid dollars are spent?

Secondly, neither Canada nor CIDA has a policy statement on democratic development. Are there plans to formulate such a policy statement?

Lastly, with respect to Afghanistan, the government is assuming that at some point in time, the Afghans will take responsibility for security within their country's border. Has Canada planned for the transfer of this responsibility to the Afghan forces? How will the transfer be carried out?

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Minister.

[Translation]

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you also to my colleague for her question.

Your last question pertained to the future mission in Afghanistan. Of course, plans are to hand control of the country back to the Afghan government and to the people. However, the transfer cannot be carried out right now, because of the conflicts raging on the ground, particularly in the southern region of the country. Building capacity and achieving democracy and development is a considerable task for Canada and for the other mission participants.

[English]

All of the work that's being done by the 37 countries involved in the NATO mission and the 60 other countries that are doing development work there has not achieved the necessary results.

In the London compact they go through a number of very important signposts that will tell us when that exit can occur, and quite frankly, I would suggest to you that in just five years, the results that have been achieved already are extraordinary when one

compares to where Afghanistan was just a few short years ago: five million more kids in school; micro credit available to women; women voting, participating in democracy. How's this for a country making progress?

Women make up 27% of their elected parliamentarians. That's more than in Canada. And they're having great efforts towards infrastructure building—roads, highways, schools, hospitals—that will allow their economy to start that slow recovery.

One of the big issues that remains to be dealt with, as you know, is the poppy and heroin problem. We haven't been able to eradicate or completely deal with that issue just yet. So I would suggest it would be nothing short of negligent for us to pull back at this critical time.

We just spoke about fragile states or failed states. You can't leave before the work is done. You can't leave until the security will sustain all of the important development and governance and infrastructure building that is under way in that country.

• (1610)

[Translation]

It's difficult for me to speak about CIDA's priorities. I believe the Minister of International Cooperation, Ms. Josée Verner, will be appearing shortly before the committee. I think it would be best if she answered that question.

[English]

As far as China is concerned, clearly there are human rights priorities in China that Canada can make a contribution to. I met with the Chinese foreign minister in New York last week, and we raised a number of issues, including our concern for a Canadian citizen, Mr. Celil, who is in jail in China. We have concerns about their justice system. We have concerns about the way in which their democracy functions, if we can call it that.

As far as the investment of actual resources in Canada to that end is concerned, that is something we're re-examining. But I would suggest there is still a contribution that Canada can make on that front.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mr. Minister.

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

Mr. Obhrai.

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

I welcome the minister to the committee. While the minister alluded to our promotion and strengthening of democratic institutions, which I'm sure the committee will study, we just talked about Afghanistan, but I want you to talk about another success story that Canada has been doing.

Under your authority, I went to east and central Africa to look at the peace initiative, of which Canada is a co-chair, that is taking place in the Congo area, in the Great Lakes region, to bring promotion of peace to Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and the surrounding areas. What was amazing was to see how the Canadian co-chair was helping democracy come to Congo, after 40 years of rule.

I want to say to my colleague, just imagine a ballot box with 843 names. There were 843 names on each ballot box out there, and these were illiterate Africans who went out there and participated in these elections. Canada has been playing a very strong role in that, and this is, one can say, a forgotten area of Africa where people are not seeing Canada's contribution. This is a great success story, which you'll probably want to allude to.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Minister.

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

And to Mr. Obhrai, we very much appreciate the work that you did there and the report that you provided upon your return. It underscores the important contribution that can be made, particularly in the electoral process.

I believe Canada contributed somewhere in the range of \$12 million for that particular election process. It was a resounding success, as you said, just as we've seen successful elections in Haiti. As much as it demonstrates the value of democracy to those countries, what that does, in my view, is to also inspire surrounding countries to see the benefits that flow from having free elections. It also very much changes an attitude and empowers people to participate, to see that the power of change does exist where they have been living under a totalitarian regime. It gives them back the type of human dignity they need to make decisions for themselves. So having been there yourself and having seen it firsthand, I think that should be similarly inspirational for those who witnessed it.

As you know, there's an upcoming conference in the Great Lakes region, which Canada will co-chair. I think it's fair to say that while there are further elections to come, this is exactly the type of thing that prevents the violence, the coups, and the type of corruption that has sadly existed in the leadership and the upper echelons of many African countries.

This type of process is something we have to continue to support. I believe that the transition process in Congo is one example of many countries in Africa where Canada can make a substantial contribution. In the broader picture in the region, as you know, we also have to continue—and I know that Mr. Martin and others around this table have been speaking publicly about raised awareness of the need for the United Nations mission, the transition that has to take place between the African Union forces, the United Nations forces.... Again, in the global picture, in my view, that is really the only way we're going to be able to stop the incredible violence, loss of life, slaughter of innocents, and to move down the road to more democratic practices such as Congo. Congo has been one of a number of notable examples on the continent.

• (1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Van Loan.

**Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC):** Yes. I'm going to take the easy way out and read one of the questions actually prepared by our researchers for us.

Some analysts have argued that a better funded and more high profile institution is needed to advance Canadian foreign policy goals in the area of democracy promotion. Current activities are seen as too small and dispersed to have much cumulative effect. As well, unlike in the United States and a number of European countries, in Canada political parties have not been directly involved in international democracy assistance. Thomas Axworthy, who was of course Pierre Trudeau's chief of staff, and Leslie Campbell—he's a New Democrat, I understand—have recently proposed creating a "Democracy Canada Institute," which would see parties become involved in its activities.

I gather that Tom Axworthy is coming before us as a witness, and I believe Les Campbell is hopefully on the list at some point too. This may be the one specific proposal that people make to us. I gather it has some similarities to the National Endowment for Democracy that was referred to, the Westminster Foundation, which the British have, or the Dutch Institute for Multiparty Democracy.

If we as a committee were to recommend to the government to pursue that suggestion, what would be your response to that kind of approach?

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Well, my initial response, subject to advice from this committee, is that we would embrace that type of approach. I think we can do more in fact to go about promoting some of these democratic institutions within our own country that do a lot of work in partnering with the private sector. I think in some cases they provide more independent advice.

Mr. Axworthy is obviously a very scholarly person on this subject. And there are others; there are many in the country who I think have a lot to offer. Having those types of foundations, which in some cases do require some resources, in my view allows us to have the necessary reach, the necessary factual base upon which to work.

All governments, even vibrant democracies like our own, can sometimes become too insular in their thinking. That's why I think that partnering with universities and promoting these types of democratic institutes has a lot of merit. That would be something that I think we would support.

We would obviously want to hear more of the detail about how they would function and the costs associated with that type of foundation. As well, I think we would want to know more about how they would govern themselves, what their purpose would be, what their membership would look like, and what their founding principles would be in terms of how that would fit with the promotion of democracy abroad.

**The Chair:** You have three minutes left.

**Mr. Peter Van Loan:** I welcome that openness. The one observation that I think others have made is that the Americans do a lot of this, but Canadians, in terms of political parties, are actually better equipped, because American elections tend to be focused on spending a lot of money. Canadians have a much more volunteer-reliant base and a lot of skilled expertise, and being able to mobilize them would be a good way of doing that. I'll simply make that observation in passing.

I also make the observation that there are various different models for where we're trying to promote democracy. There are some countries that are eager recipients—if we look at a lot of the former communist ones that were very easy to work with. There are some countries that are, I might call them, democracy challenged. We saw what happened in Ukraine. I think Georgia and Moldova are places where progress is happening but there are also threats of it being rolled back.

There are some that are clearly hostile or moving in the wrong direction. Cuba, for example, would be hostile. Then you get into the failed and fragile states, where it's a question of what do you do in a difficult situation?

If Canada were to look at its democracy promotion from a big-picture level, do you think any of those areas are better worth our focus? Do you think we should focus in a regional way? Do you think we should focus, or should we try to do everything everywhere?

• (1620)

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Harkening back to what I said a moment ago to an earlier question, first of all, I don't think there's one size fits all or any perfect democracy or model that we have to point to as being the only way it can work. Very importantly, democratic models can be consistent, for example, with other cultural beliefs and other institutional practices. There's no imposing of one style of democracy. It depends very much on the specifics of how the country itself has evolved. Historical context is very important when you're looking at ways to promote democracy.

As well, regional interests are one thing, but the country itself has to be willing to embrace what Canada might have to offer. So the basic principles that we believe in, that we're prepared to defend, have to be shared, to a large degree, I would suggest, before we're going to be able to provide any meaningful assistance. Efforts to promote regional reform around democratic principles require a delicate and thoughtful approach. I think it involves being consultative, open, and transparent about what you're trying to achieve. In years past, I think many democratic countries did this in a very quiet and almost nefarious way. If they were seen to be promoting democracy in other countries, this was seen to be undermining other countries' forms of government. I don't believe that. I think if you're very upfront about what you're hoping to accomplish and what basic good can flow from democratic practices, you learn very quickly whether the country you may be interested in is ready to embrace that.

So I think our efforts to promote democracy are predicated very much on the willingness of the country itself, and what is uniquely Canadian about the way we would do it and the way we have done it successfully is that we do it less intrusively and more inclusively,

where we offer assistance, as opposed to taking an approach that says we have all the answers for you and here's what you should do.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

It looks like all we will be able to get to, colleagues, is one round today.

Madam McDonough, for ten minutes, please.

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

There's not nearly enough time, but I appreciate the minister coming before the committee and I want to pursue three subjects that have been raised.

The first subject is concerning Maher Arar. I think the discussion about democracy is an easy one in terms of agreeing as a committee from all sides about the importance of democracy, but I think the test is what do we really mean by that. I think people from not just within the country but across the world look on with some horror at the Arar injustices, at the unbelievable events that occurred to his life.

I would ask you to address further the continuing refusal, in fact in your own comments again today, to simply acknowledge the apology owing, the formal governmental apology owing, and secondly, to give a clear statement of commitment to just compensation. To hide behind lawyers because there could be some battles around this down the road does not serve as an acceptable excuse for not making a clear, unequivocal statement about fair compensation owing and a clear formal apology. I want to ask if you would comment on that briefly.

Secondly, you referred, I think with some justification, to the fact that Canada has an advantage among the nations advancing democracy because of our positive reputation in the world. But you will know, I'm sure, that before this committee, again and again and again over the last several years, we've had testimony from many respected international NGO representatives, diplomats, academics, and so on—including, by the way, the current president of CIDA—that in fact Canada's reputation has dwindled, declined, deteriorated significantly, because, among other things, of Canada's failure to deliver in any significant way on our overseas official development assistance obligations with timetables and targets, with serious steady progress towards the long overdue 0.7%.

Very specifically, in view of the fact that democracy is really an empty concept, an abstraction, unless in fact people can see the conditions of life improving, and those are indeed the positive conditions in which democracy is likely to flourish, I want to ask about your government's commitment to finally bringing in the legislation your leader committed to and that this committee unanimously proposed to government should be supported—in fact Parliament unanimously endorsed—a year and a half ago. What is your government's commitment to follow through on that?

Thirdly, with respect to Afghanistan, which you evoked several times as an example of good progress, and you specifically referred to the improved status of women, citing 27% women in the parliament, I know that you must know that in fact the conditions for women are utterly horrifying in many parts of Afghanistan.

Just to cite briefly a really appalling example of something that happened right here under this roof, we had President Karzai address us. I and several of my colleagues had an opportunity to talk with a number of Afghani Canadian women following the address to ask, "If you had an opportunity to make a statement, to raise questions in the House, what would they be, given your commitment to advancing the status of women and democracy", and they said to ask about the incredible amount of violence, brutalization, raping, bribing, and killing in some cases, by drug lords, by the Northern Alliance, and an acknowledgement that the Taliban are not the only threat to the safety and security and the status of women in Afghanistan. What we heard was jeering. What we heard was heckling from the government benches from one end to the other at such a question.

I want to ask if you could address that question in an honest and forthright way, because it remains a very serious concern that is raised again and again and again by women and on behalf of women in Afghanistan today in many parts of the country.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam McDonough.

Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Ms. McDonough, I thank you for the question.

You and I were in Afghanistan together, and we saw, I would suggest, the significant progress that is being made, particularly in Kabul. Is there more work to do? Unquestionably.

Are there still atrocities taking place? Are women still being exploited? Do they have an equal footing, an equal place in society inside that country? No, they don't.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough:** At the hands of somebody other than just the Taliban. I think that's what people are desperate to hear this government acknowledge, because it seems as though it's an unmentionable truth.

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** The truth that I know is out there is that the Taliban were one of the most vicious, repressive regimes that have ever darkened the door of any country, and what we have seen is significant change in the circumstances and progress of women's rights inside the country. That's undeniable. Is it enough? Is it sufficient? Is there still work to be done? Absolutely, there is, but I don't think somehow overlooking the fact that women are in a better place today in Afghanistan than they were five years ago.... It betrays the reality, and it also supports the contention that we should somehow pull back; that we should abandon our mission in Afghanistan; and that we should stop providing the defence and the security and the protection, keeping in mind Canada's longstanding promotion of the responsibility to protect. If we were to leave, then the Taliban are going to come back just as quickly and begin those oppressive practices again.

Is there work, particularly in the south, where the struggles remain very fierce? Yes, and we're committed to continuing our presence there to do all of the good things that you and I both want to see happen for women and children and human life.

• (1630)

**Ms. Alexa McDonough:** Minister, what makes it unmentionable that there are serious abuses towards women by the Northern Alliance, the warlords, and the drug lords?

**The Chair:** Madam McDonough, just let the minister finish.

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** It's not unmentionable. You've mentioned it, and that's one of the great things about this country.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough:** I'm hoping the government might be following me.

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** One of the great things about this country is that you and I can both have opinions, and we can express them freely. We can have disagreements publicly. We can debate them on the floor of the House of Commons and here at committee.

People inside Afghanistan didn't have that right five years ago. To suggest that there are warlords, that there are people still involved in some of the bodies that are still functioning inside Afghanistan who are committing atrocities—nobody denies that. But what we're there to do, obviously, along with a UN-backed NATO mission, is to bring about the type of stability that will allow democracy to flourish; that will allow further development; that will allow the important work of the provincial reconstruction teams to take hold; that will allow the provision of aid, micro credit, infrastructure spending, the building of institutions, including a judiciary, a police force, and an Afghan army; and—back to Madam Barbot's question—that will eventually allow the people of Afghanistan and their democratically elected government to walk on their own. Then, and only then, can we talk about an exit strategy. I would suggest that to do that prematurely is to abandon the very things we believe in, in terms of promoting democracy and everything that flows from it.

On CIDA, our commitment remains very real. In fact, we've increased CIDA's budget by 8% a year, and it will double by the year 2012. We are still very much moving toward the 0.7% commitment. It's clear to me that CIDA's programs are making a difference in many corners of the world, just as, I would suggest, a lot of Canadians are who work in NGOs and in other organizations, even those that are not necessarily originating in our own country. The International Red Cross has a lot of Canadians working abroad. Many youth organizations are the beneficiaries of Canadian participation.

Do we have an obligation to do more? Is there progress being made? Yes, absolutely there is. It's not perfect. It's not fine-tuned perhaps to the extent that everyone would want it to be, but it's done with the best intent. I would suggest that the talented and very committed people in CIDA are always looking for ways to do more with the resources they have at their availability.

On your last question, about Mr. Arar, let me just say that it was horrible. It was absolutely deplorable what happened to him, what they did to him in Syria, and we communicated that very clearly. How that came about was a subject of another democratic principle that we embrace in this country, which is to have judicial and public inquiries when there have been instances when our system breaks down and fails Canadian citizens like Maher Arar, and we have to improve upon that based on lessons learned.

There is another principle here, and that's the rule of law. Mr. Arar has a \$400 million lawsuit against the Government of Canada. I'm not going to say anything today that's going to jeopardize that lawsuit.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We're going to adjourn now.

Again, just to underscore, Mr. Minister, we appreciate your coming to this committee. I want to remind you that this fall we look forward to having you back again. We will be discussing the estimates and the supplementary estimates, and we look forward to your being there for that.

The meeting is adjourned.

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**Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes**

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