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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): This is meeting number 21 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Wednesday, October 18. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study on democratic development.

This is the committee's major study on Canada's role in international support for democratic development around the world. Today we are very pleased to have appear before us the Hon. Josée Verner, the Minister of International Cooperation. This is the minister's second appearance before our committee. We appreciate her responding to our invitation again and sharing her time with us. Today she will provide us with considerable information about the work we are doing in our democratic development study.

We also appreciate the work of the Canadian International Development Agency witnesses in accompanying the minister, CIDA President Robert Greenhill, and Stephen Wallace, vice-president of the policy branch. I think there are a number of other people in the background helping.

We welcome you, Madame Minister. As you know, we have the opening statement by the minister, and then we will go into the first round, during which committee members will have ten minutes to question you.

We welcome you again, and the floor is yours. Madame.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation): Tthank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me begin by thanking the Committee for inviting me here today. Your study is especially relevant to the work we do at CIDA, because I think we all recognize that freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law are essential for development. Simply put, accountable states are more stable and more likely to deliver results to their citizens. As a recent book by US expert Morton Halperin has noted, “citizens living in democracies live a decade longer; 50 per cent fewer of their children die before their fifth birthday; and twice as many children attend secondary school...”

Democratic governance is about free and fair elections. But it is also much more. For an international development agency like CIDA, we see four essential elements. The first is the existence of freedom and democracy based upon strong electoral, legislative and party institutions that are rooted in a supportive democratic culture including an active civil society and vibrant, free media.

The second is the rule of law, with fair and effective laws, accessible and timely legal institutions, and an impartial judiciary.

The third is the presence of human rights practices and institutions within the State and held to account by an active civil society.

And finally, the fourth is public sector institutions that manage the economy and public funds and deliver key social services such as health and education effectively — and without corruption.

This is an enormous project. It matters to us because we know that democratic governance abroad contributes to our own security and prosperity at home. Our commitment and investment to it have been growing ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall. And progress is being made. You can see this in the handout information that CIDA officials have prepared for you. We can also see this in the Freedom House's Annual State of Freedom Index, which measured a 23 per cent gain in global democratic practices between 1975 and 2000.

● (1540)

We saw a wave across Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. What we need to learn more about is how, after difficult post-colonial transitions Africa is experiencing its own new wave of democratization. For example, Freedom House reports that 62 per cent of African countries demonstrated progress in freedom and democracy between 1990 and 2005. We have to continue with our resolve in this area because there is still more progress to be made. We must help to deepen the new democracies, to make them full democracies. And we must help them to survive by helping them deliver the economic and social goods that citizens demand.

What have we achieved? CIDA makes the largest investments in democratic governance abroad of any Canadian organization. These amounted last year to over $375 million. Our Handout offers many examples that illustrate the range of countries, projects and partners we have supported.

Let me highlight just a few of these. We have supported many elections, including key ones in Afghanistan, Haiti and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And through our support to Canada's Parliamentary Centre, we have followed elections up and helped build stronger parliaments in Africa and Asia. Our colleague John Williams has built upon this base in his work to engage parliamentarians in fighting corruption. Our work with court administrators in Ethiopia and judges in the Caribbean, the Philippines and China have all helped to strengthen the rule of law. Our support has strengthened official human rights institutions in Indonesia and Bolivia. In Columbia, it has helped build local civil society groups which protect the rights of children against violence and in Bolivia employment rights of women. Through Montreal-based Equitas, we have trained and networked human rights promoters in 75 countries.

Our support for public sector institutions has meant that India now has a more modern tax system, that Ghana is gaining a more coordinated public administration and that Mali has a strong and assertive auditor general.

In some countries we are strengthening our aid effectiveness by using multiple projects to achieve an overarching goal. For example, in Ukraine, CIDA contributed to governance reforms by helping strengthen the policy capacity of the public sector and foster democratic awareness among youth, public servants, the judiciary and law enforcement personnel.

CIDA helped Ukrainian civil society ensure fair media coverage and increase voter participation. And, as you know, we supported observers for the crucial rerun of the second round of the 2004 presidential elections and for the 2006 parliamentary elections.

We are now working with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in an effort to strengthen Ukraine's Central Election Commission. We see even greater challenges in fragile States like Haiti, where reconstruction efforts will fail without establishing the democratic institutions that can ensure security, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

With its international partners, Canada is helping the Haitian people and their institutions to meet those challenges. Recently, we helped secure credible elections. Millions of ballots were distributed — sometimes on horseback — to all corners of the country, a long-term international observer mission was organized, hundreds of local observers were trained and 106 Canadian observers were dispatched. As well, more than three million national identity cards were delivered to citizens, establishing the basis of a civil registry, a key ingredient for long-term stability.

Before and beyond the elections, high-level technical expertise was provided to the presidency and the Prime Minister's Office, ensuring a smooth transition and a strong beginning for the new government. Much remains to be done and our commitment to Haiti is long term. We will continue to invest in strong and stable public institutions that serve the Haitian people. These include the Parliament and key ministries such as planning, finance and justice.

What have we learned and how are we responding? I believe our investments are achieving results. And I want to share with you some of our key lessons learned on how we can work better. First, and because we have learned just how important democratic governance is to the overall development agenda, we will be doing more of it. In future, all of CIDA'S major country programs will assess and support democratic governance.

A second lesson is that achieving democratic governance is a complex, knowledge-based endeavour. It requires a comprehensive strategy and vision. It also requires a concerted and coordinated effort — nationally and globally.

As Minister McKay noted in his presentation, democratic governance is a foreign policy priority for the Government of Canada. I hope that your committee's efforts in the coming months will help us in confirming several other vital lessons. We must recognize that one size does not fit all and that change comes gradually, over the long term.

While democratic values are universal, the institutions that express them will be unique to each country context. Another important lesson is that the needs of fragile States will differ from those of stable or middle-income countries. Learning these lessons have helped our partner organizations shape a unique Canadian approach to democracy assistance that is recognized and welcomed for its adaptability to different contexts and stages of democratic governance. Your endorsement will strengthen their resolve to continue.

● (1545)

It will help us determine our areas of national strength that should guide our work in the future.

Democratic governance is essential for progress in developing countries and for ending poverty in the long run. I'm pleased to have had this opportunity to highlight the contributions that Canada, through CIDA and its partners, is making to this global challenge. I am also encouraged that you have undertaken this study. I welcome the careful consideration and fresh perspective that your study will bring to the work you do. I wish you the best in your remaining work and look forward to hearing your recommendations.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

We will go into the first round.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patry, you have ten minutes.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will be sharing my time with my colleague, Mr. Martin.

Thank you, Mr. Greenhill and Ms. Verner. Given that we have very little time, I will put my questions to you immediately.

Minister, you know that democracy can only happen if all the necessary ingredients for success are there. Our troops in Kandahar are perfectly capable of dealing with security. They do it admirably. However, the other essential ingredients for basic development, including access to drinking water, electricity, women's rights and human rights, education and health care, also have to be present. Practically speaking, what is your department doing to ensure that all these ingredients necessary for sustainable development in Afghanistan or Kandahar are in place?

Furthermore, last Monday, when he appeared before a Senate committee, General Howard stated that the amounts allocated for development in Kandahar had not been sent and that our armed forces had to use their own budget to help the people. Why is it that the funds allocated to development in Kandahar were not released? How do you measure success in a region like Kandahar?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Ms. Verner.

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for your question, Mr. Patry.

I will endeavour to provide you with an answer that covers both of your questions.

None of the funding earmarked for Kandahar is being withheld. I can assure you that each and every one dollar of the $100 million provided in the budget is being spent in Afghanistan. We expect to spend $15 million in Kandahar between now and the end of the year.

As you know, CIDA believes in working in partnership with the people of Afghanistan. This approach has meant that barely 1 per cent of our projects have been attacked and destroyed by the Taliban. We firmly believe that working with Afghanis is the best way to guarantee the security of our projects.

As you know, the situation in Kandahar is more difficult. In order to allow humanitarian workers in field to carry out their mission, it is imperative that we work closely with security and defence services. Allow me to give you some concrete examples of what we do: we build roads, bridges and wells; we have provided women with sewing machines so that they can set up small businesses; and, together with the Montreal-based organization called Rights and Democracy, with which I am sure you are familiar, we have provided training to various groups of women. In addition, I recently announced $5 million in funding to be used to vaccinate 7 million children — this will particularly benefit Kandahar. We have also built schools.

Microcredit is a useful and important tool. It allows women to take control of their future. One hundred and fifty thousand of the 193,000 Afghanis who were granted microcredit loans were women. These women opened small bakeries, craft shops, sewing work shops, etc. These are examples of the type of aid that we are providing all over Afghanistan; and, once again, I would reiterate that no money is withheld by CIDA.

It is important to understand that we develop projects in partnership with the local population in order to have their support and ensure sustainability. Our intent is not to impose our views and ideas, but to help the people of Afghanistan. Projects are developed in response to the wishes of the local population.

● (1550)

[*English*]

Mr. Bernard Patry: How is the time?

The Chair: You have five minutes remaining.

Mr. Martin is next.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): *Merci beaucoup, Madame Verner et Monsieur Greenhill*, for being here today.

I'm having a very difficult time, Madame Minister, with your line of interventions. You have said that funds for CIDA provided to the government are not earmarked for Kandahar. You've also said that the government cannot track aid to Afghanistan, yet in your testimony just now, you just said that all the money is spent in Kandahar.

How do you know that the money you have allocated through CIDA is getting to Kandahar, when you've also said repeatedly in public that you can't track the money that's going to Afghanistan, that you don't know where it is?

I think the real tragedy we're finding is that our troops are out there giving their lives—and you know, Minister, that our troops are out there putting their lives on the line in order for development to occur behind that—but from General Howard and others we learn the aid is not getting there. The Taliban strength is increasing, poppy growth is increasing, the Taliban's control over the country is increasing, and the aid is not getting on the ground.

How do you know that all of the money has been spent in Kandahar? Tell us how many schools CIDA has funded in the Kandahar province.

The Chair: Madam Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: You certainly covered a lot of ground in your comments! I would remind you that in 2004, if I am not mistaken, you argued that Canada should be 110 per cent behind the mission in Afghanistan. Now is not the time to change tack.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin: Excuse me, if I may interrupt you, I asked very specific questions.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, let her finish her answer.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Martin, I would have liked to make certain remarks myself, but I did not want to interrupt you. I would therefore ask that you extend me the same courtesy.

During a recent interview, one of the French directors of the World Bank congratulated CIDA on its effective management and tracking of the money spent in Afghanistan. We were not the ones to make such a claim. This is what was said by a senior official at the World Bank, and I believe it is worth underscoring.

Furthermore, I never said that we were unable to track the money being spent in Afghanistan. Our whole approach is based precisely on being able to assure our government that taxpayers' dollars are well managed and spent where they were intended to be spent.

As announced, $100 million will be spent in Afghanistan between now and 2011. Projects will be launched as and when they are chosen by the people of Afghanistan. We estimate that we will spend $15 million in the Kandahar region alone between now and the end of the year. I would reiterate that it is very important to understand...

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin: How do you know that's happening? The problem is, Minister, we don't know.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, just let her finish.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: We are not imposing our way of thinking on the Afghanis. We let them decide for themselves which projects they want to undertake. I would point out, for example, that there are women sitting on district councils. This allows them to have their say as to which projects should be given priority in their district.

This approach has proven so successful that, last week, we announced an additional $2 million so that it can be extended to two other districts in Kandahar.

● (1555)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Martin, you have about thirty seconds.

Hon. Keith Martin: Minister, I'll quote you in a letter to the defence committee.

> The funds that CIDA provides to national-level programs are not earmarked for Kandahar province, as we support the aid principle...making it difficult for CIDA to track its funds to the provincial level....

The reality is that you don't know, and the general on the ground doesn't know, that the funds are getting there. In fact, they know that the funds are not getting on the ground, and this is the central problem we have. Our government's funding for aid projects in CIDA is a failure, and our troops need that changed now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Madame Verner, do you want to reply?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Yes, I do.

It is utterly unacceptable for the member to say that CIDA's program in Afghanistan is a failure. I would remind him that his government only approved $50 million in funding, and that it was supposed to end. His government voted for an initial budget of $100 million, which was to be reduced over time. That was his government's way of supporting Afghanistan. The member spoke eloquently about supporting the mission in Afghanistan, but the funding was supposed to decrease.

The Conservatives, on the other hand, have maintained funding levels and have extended funding until 2011.

I am going to ask my deputy minister to answer the more technical aspects of your question.

[*English*]

The Chair: Very quickly. We're over time right now.

Mr. Robert Greenhill (President, Canadian International Development Agency): I'll make two quick points.

There are a number of specific projects dedicated exclusively to Kandahar, such as $18 million for alternate livelihoods; $2 million for the national solidarity program, the confidence in government program; and $5 million for polio.

In addition, there are a number of national programs on which we have now worked with the Afghan government to be able to disaggregate them by province. Members will be happy to know that in the national solidarity program, for example, we've been able to identify seven out of seventeen districts that benefit from it in Kandahar. So we're now able to disaggregate the national programs down to the provincial level through close cooperation with the Afghan government.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Greenhill.

[*Translation*]

You have 10 minutes, Ms. Barbot.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you, Minister.

As you are aware, many reports show that the international community faces many challenges in Afghanistan, particularly as regards development, poverty relief and governance. Given that we are studying democratic development, I feel I must ask you some questions on Canada's reconstruction and aid strategy for Afghanistan.

Firstly, we are having a little difficulty coming to grips with the figures. How much money is CIDA planning to spend on development aid for Afghanistan for 2001-2002?

Hon. Josée Verner: Did you say 2001-2002?

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: For the period from 2001 to 2009, in other words, from the beginning to the end of Canada's commitment, given that we voted...

Hon. Josée Verner: We will have to look at the figures...

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I would prefer to finish my question, if that is all right with you.

Hon. Josée Verner: Certainly.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Official departmental press releases indicate aid will total some $800 million. However, if you add up the budgets for CIDA-financed projects in Afghanistan, you get a total of around $255 million.

We would therefore like to know how much CIDA grants to projects in Southern Afghanistan, and, more specifically, to projects in the Kandahar region.

Hon. Josée Verner: Okay. The budget for Afghanistan, from 2001 to 2011, is $1 billion or $100 million per year.

It is estimated that, of the $100 million, $15 million will have been spent in the province of Kandahar by the end of the year.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: That is how much has been sent since the beginning, since 2001?

Hon. Josée Verner: No, that is only for this year, for the reasons that I set out earlier in response to another question. The projects have to be selected. The money is available, and as soon as the Afghanis decide which projects should have priority, we go ahead and release the requisite funding.

● (1600)

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Could you explain to us why the majority of Canadian aid to Afghanistan is not managed and distributed directly by the Afghan government?

Hon. Josée Verner: As I said earlier in my presentation, when it comes to development aid, one size does not necessarily fit all. We had to consider the government's capacity to manage money from the institutions. We support the various programs that the government has implemented, but in the interests of accountability, when it comes to providing funding, we work extensively with partners such as the World Bank, the institution that congratulated CIDA on the way that it spends its aid dollars in Afghanistan.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Fine.

We know that it is difficult to get humanitarian aid to its intended recipients. It seems that CIDA is doing well on this front. You made reference to comments of an international organization to let us know that CIDA is performing well. I am glad to hear it.

Obviously, Canada cannot rebuild Afghanistan alone. That is why I would like to know exactly what the government is doing to help ensure that humanitarian aid reaches its intended recipients.

Hon. Josée Verner: Of course, we work with Canadian NGOs and with NGOs on the ground. However, you have to understand that what we basically do is development aid. The government of Afghanistan was elected democratically. It asked for our help, we agreed to provide that help, and now we are there along with 35 other countries.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Did you say that the greatest part of Canadian aid goes towards development?

Hon. Josée Verner: Yes.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: You often hear that there is no integrity within the Afghan government and that there are huge corruption problems.

Is Canada doing anything about that, since you are a partner of the Afghan government?

Hon. Josée Verner: As I said previously, our government has been congratulated on its approach by one of the World Bank's administrators; he said that CIDA should be congratulated for the way it has ensured that the money is spent properly.

There are different approaches. I believe the World Bank hired an outside auditing firm to make sure that the money was being well spent properly. Of course, before we provide money there, we make sure that projects are advancing at a reasonable pace. We keep a close eye on the situation. I repeat, one of the leaders of the World Bank congratulated us on the work we have done.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Barbot, you have four minutes left.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: As far as Canadian aid and the provincial reconstruction teams are concerned, on Monday, October 16, Brigadier General Howard said before the Senate Committee on Natural Security and Defence that several provincial reconstruction teams were waiting for CIDA to come through with funding before they could go ahead with several projects.

Why is CIDA slow in funding the provincial reconstruction teams and their projects? Does Canada fear that this funding will go towards military and political objectives rather than development objectives?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Barbot.

Madame Verner.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: If you want to do development work in Kandahar, you need security, and we are working in partnership with officers from National Defence. I would like to categorically restate that CIDA is not withholding funding. A series of rapid action projects have already been put in place to improve things for the people there. I repeat, the situation is more difficult in Kandahar. We have to have security, but we nevertheless have some projects in the area. I have recently announced some of them. CIDA is not withholding funding for those projects.

● (1605)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Barbot.

Mr. Obhrai.

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

And thank you, Minister, for coming.

Madam Minister, I would like to say it's just amazing how this member opposite came on the attack and said that the Afghanistan aid policy was a failure, when we remember that it was his government that sent people over there and committed money. Not only that, but standing up in the House of Commons last time, he doesn't want to help the people of Afghanistan—the poor, the women—and support the reconstruction that has been done over there. He even stood up in the House of Commons and said he wants to invade Sudan. Can you imagine that? He wants to invade Sudan in the 21st century. Colonialism is gone, I say to my honourable colleague out there.

What I want to say, Minister, is I came back from the Great Lakes region of Africa. In August I was there. You just mentioned the Democratic Republic of Congo. I met over thirty NGOs out there who came out and said that Canada, CIDA, was doing an excellent job in bringing peace and stability there. I just came back with the foreign affairs committee, which was meeting in Europe, and over there, every country—the Scandinavian countries—had a high degree of respect for CIDA, for Canada, doing its humanitarian work out there. CIDA is well regarded. In the recipient countries they look to us for security and for providing what they really need. And yet these gentlemen over there, across—

An hon. member: We have good people in CIDA.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Because it is not the flavour of the day, he's attacking Afghanistan. I want to tell this honourable member that in Afghanistan we are there for reconstruction. It still remains number one, if we're going to fight for security.

What I want to say, Minister, is CIDA has done a good job and we have a very high degree of respect wherever we go.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai, for that great question.

Madame Verner, maybe you would want to respond to that glowing testimonial by Mr. Obhrai.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: I would like to respond to the extremely enlightened and constructive comment my colleague made. He is right, it is fairly difficult to monitor the situation. Two Liberal colleagues shared their time a little earlier, and one of them asked me in a very interested manner what we are doing specifically to help Afghan women. The other member suggested that we should withdraw from the area, since the heat is on, and that we should tell Afghan women to go back to the Dark Ages, and tell young girls to stop going to school and to submit to the Taliban regime.

However, I agree with my colleague, this position is a difficult one. Those were two very different five-minute periods. I agree that my colleague can raise the issue which I am here to speak about today, namely democracy. CIDA's approach is recognized everywhere. The countries where we work have congratulated us on our projects. We are getting good results.

I had an opportunity to visit Mali this summer. I met the auditor general of the only francophone African country which has an office of the auditor general. He told me that he was working closely with Ms. Sheila Fraser. I think that's a good sign. We have excellent methods. Canadians know just how good their Auditor General, Ms. Sheila Fraser, is. She agreed to help Mali's auditor general. He has already produced a first report and is about to come out with a second one. To be frank, we can be very proud of our work in developing countries.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Verner.

Mr. Van Loan, you have five minutes.

● (1610)

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

I want to talk to you about the core of what we're doing in our study, which is democracy promotion.

Right now there is a backlash against democracy promotion in a bunch of countries around the world. In Russia earlier this year they brought into effect a law against civil society organizations, basically restricting them severely and preventing them from doing their work. They've effectively shut down independent media, certainly in the electronic realm, in Russia. In Belarus you have a total clampdown on civil society. It's virtually non-operable, except in clandestine ways. Similarly, the media is virtually all state-controlled. In China you have the situation, with their getting Internet companies, of agreeing to freeze the word "democracy", and so on. In Cuba and North Korea they don't even have a backlash; they never even started down that path. Some of these groups are now even meeting together in a Shanghai cooperation group to try to shut down democracy.

I look at this as something that as a government we find difficult to do. Another thing we find difficult to do as a government is to support political parties and political party development abroad. We've had submissions from Tom Axworthy, respected former chief of staff to Pierre Trudeau from the Liberal side—and we've heard from others—that the way one can do this best is by creating an arm's-length kind of organization, whether it be on the model of the British Westminster Foundation for Democracy or the National Endowment for Democracy.

I look at the summary you have presented and I see, for example, that under the sample programs, the word "Russia" never appears, the word "Belarus" never appears, the word "Cuba" never appears. That illustrates part of what I was saying about the limitations of being able to do aggressive work promoting the freedom part of the agenda.

We've done some "rule of law" work, for example, in China, trying to train judges and so on. Some people might be critical and say that actually helps support regimes. We're hoping that some of our rule-of-law approach rubs off, but one can be afraid of the opposite.

My question to you is this. Is there value in looking to a more arm's-length approach to some of this kind of work, on the model we've seen in the Netherlands, in Great Britain, in the United States, of creating an arm's-length form of funding that political parties can still be involved in and parliamentarians can still be involved in, but that gets into some of those more challenging things the government has trouble doing?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

Minister Verner.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you. You seem to be alluding to organizations whose mission is to strengthen political parties abroad. Providing effective support to political parties is compatible with our general approach to promote democracy and freedom.

The issue is whether Canada should set up an institution such as the NDI, the National Democratic Institute, or the IMD, the Institute for Multiparty Democracy, which is a Dutch body, or whether it should copy, another model. Since democratic values in politics are being increasingly recognized, it is becoming easier for organizations working in the area of development to promote every aspect of democracy, including the vital role played by political parties as instruments of political competition.

We believe it is useful to assess the best way of doing this work, including the possibility of assigning it to existing organizations. But we will be very sensitive to the committee's views on this issue and we will be pleased to take your recommendations into account.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Van Loan, you have two minutes.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: You talked about political parties, but the first part of it that I addressed, what I call the difficult countries, the ones that are downright resistant and that are aggressively moving to prevent support for democratic development...there are very good reasons diplomatically why, when we have other issues as a government to worry about, with Russia, for example, we might not want to have a government agency directly involved in that type of activity, and the same might go for Cuba or China or elsewhere. That doesn't mean we want to abandon our values and commitments to freedom, to democracy, and to seeing those values spread and promoted. I think the whole world becomes a more secure place, we all agree, if that happens.

The reason I point to some of those countries in particular—Russia, Belarus, and others in there—is they're ones that experience has told us.... You talked in your speech about how Freedom House measures an increase in democracy. The places that have been most successful have been in eastern Europe, the countries immediately abutting Belarus and Russia that have taken democracy to heart quite well. So logically you'd think the next wave might be similar countries—culturally, historically, and so on—with similar kinds of relationships with people. I see a role there as well for the type of arm's-length activity you wouldn't want to see a government agency doing directly.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

Madam Verner, you have about ten seconds.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Take Russia, for example. We are doing development work in the area of civil law reform. We are also working closely with the Canadian Parliamentary Centre. Obviously, by investing—which is the direction we want to take—and by promoting democratic governance, we hope to obtain results. There still are challenges to meet, but there's no doubt that there are good examples of where it has worked. Take Ghana, which just put an end to a long undemocratic history and which today is an excellent example.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Madam McDonough, for ten minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, for being here before the committee today.

Madam Minister, you've indicated that CIDA works in a partnership with defence officials in Afghanistan. Based on the information available, the attempts of my party to make a calculation of what the complexion of that really is led us to the conclusion that for every $9 being expended on defence in Afghanistan, there is a mere $1 being expended on international development, diplomacy, and peacekeeping. Could you indicate whether our calculations, based on the information available to us, are in fact accurate in that regard?

Second, in the House yesterday, in response to my colleague Dawn Black, the NDP defence critic, you asserted that the work in Kandahar was being conducted with the greatest transparency, and you referred to technical briefings done by officials in the department. I'm wondering if you can supply to this committee the documentation, the detailed papers, on the basis of which that transparent technical briefing has been provided. In other words, can you share that with us?

Third, I'm sure you will be aware of growing concerns about the increasing militarization of aid. We understand that the previous government had begun to express the position at the OECD that they were in favour of changing the definition of what is considered to be official development assistance to include military expenditures. Could you indicate the position of your government on this issue in general? In particular, can you indicate to us how many PRT members are actually employed in Kandahar and, of those, how many are CIDA employees and how many are defence employees?

The Chair: Thank you, Madam McDonough.

Minister Verner.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: As far as military expenditures are concerned, you would have to ask that question of my colleague the Minister of National Defence. Development aid expenditures total $100 million, including $15 million which will be spent in the Kandahar region by the end of the year according to our estimates.

As for the technical details, we would be pleased to send you the information which was provided during last week's meeting. That makes me smile. You mean to say that your colleague asked me about some technical details he was unfamiliar with. He will have read them and will see for himself that we are acting with full transparency in this matter.

We are not militarizing our development aid. I know that your party does not support our mission in Afghanistan. I know that your party held its convention in the Quebec City area. As you know, thousands of military personnel live in the Quebec City area with their families and their friends. The NDP, at its convention, said that it truly does not believe in what our people are accomplishing over there.

Not only do I live in that area, but I took the time to listen to what the people had to say on this issue. I was given very specific examples of how we need to gain the trust of the Afghans. However, the results are there. Reconstruction is happening. The situation is difficult. It is not easy to work in that type of situation. Humanitarian aid can only happen when there is security. Everyone is saying this. I don't understand why you still don't see that.

If our humanitarian workers, especially local ones, because that is our approach—

We didn't go there to impose our views. We went there and we made sure that everyone, including communities, village councils composed of elders and women, who now have rights, participated in establishing the priority of the projects. The country now has a constitution. When the people tell us what they want, we work at making it happen. But to do so, we need security. We need the security provided to us by Canadian soldiers.

● (1620)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Verner.

Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, I have to say honestly that I've rarely ever been more patronized by a witness before this committee, particularly by a minister.

I had a very specific question: whether $9 in military expenditures to $1 in international development, diplomacy, and peacekeeping was in fact an accurate ratio. I got no response whatsoever, so I want to ask the question again.

I know that you have stated we can get the details on defence spending from the defence department, but I can't believe for a moment that when you have been aware that this question has been raised again and again you're not in a position to give an answer to it. If you're not today, I would ask you to provide an answer to the committee following this meeting.

Secondly, I had asked very specifically for numbers on our PRTs in Kandahar. How many CIDA employees are there? How many defence employees are there? Let me add to that: are there other personnel from any other sources in those PRTs?

The Chair: Madam McDonough, just for information's sake, next week Defence Minister O'Connor will be here, and we would encourage you to ask those questions on military spending of him.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: You can be sure I'll ask those questions again.

The Chair: I think Madame Verner has fairly clearly shown the dollars that have been delivered into Kandahar and into Afghanistan.

But if you want to, expand on that a bit, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Certainly.

When my colleague the Minister of National Defence appears before this committee he will address the matter of his budget. I, however, will stick to CIDA's budget. And, regardless of whether your party supports the initiative, funding will reach $100 million by 2011.

We plan on helping the people of Afghanistan to take control of their future, and we are doing so at their request. We estimate that, by the end of the year, $15 million will have been spent on various projects in Kandahar. Four CIDA employees are working there. They are working with the local population to ensure that Afghan voices are heard when it comes to prioritizing projects and undertaking the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I have a final brief question.

There are four CIDA officials, and you aren't able to tell me how many defence officials there are in the PRTs, so I'll ask the defence minister that next week.

Secondly, you referred to working with on-site NGOs in a partnership in Kandahar. Can you tell us which NGOs and how many international development workers there are working in the partnerships with CIDA who are on-site in Kandahar?

I've been there, I've tried to get answers to these questions, and except for these kinds of generalities, I'm still unable to have the slightest idea of what you are referring to when you talk about all of these CIDA officials and NGOs working in international development work in Kandahar.

I wonder if you could address that, please.

● (1625)

The Chair: Madame Verner.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: We are working with various groups in Afghanistan, such as CARE Canada.

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough: “In Kandahar”, was the question.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: I am going to ask Mr. Greenhill to provide you with information about Kandahar.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Greenhill: In fact, with the PRT system, with the four employees we have at the PRT at Kandahar—which is more than the average in the PRTs, in which we have one to three development officials—we are working closely with the local communities, the local development committees. Then we will work through them and through either NGOs or multilateral organizations.

In the case of Kandahar presently, UN-HABITAT is one of the key partners we're working with. As for the $5 million polio announcement that was recently made, to vaccinate seven million children in that region, that's being done with the WHO. The national programs will work with multilateral organizations or with NGOs, depending upon the best fit within a specific district.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Don't the only two NGOs with which you're working in a partnership in Kandahar—

The Chair: Madam McDonough.

Mr. Greenhill, just finish off, please.

Mr. Robert Greenhill: In terms of the organizations with which we're working, in Kandahar province, if we take, for example, one program, the national solidarity program, there are several hundred projects going on right now through the UNDP and UN-HABITAT, working with the Afghan government.

In this case it's actually the local development committees themselves, it's the villagers, who choose their own projects. They determine their priorities, and then local organizations are engaged to deliver them. In some cases, CARE and other NGOs are also involved, but in fact if the project can be delivered directly by the locals themselves, that is considered to be a superior approach, and it's the approach that's in seven out of seventeen districts in Kandahar. With the recent announcement of $2 million, there will be two more districts. This will cover more than half of the entire province of Kandahar.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Greenhill.

For the second round, basically we're out of time. We have about three minutes left.

Mr. Goldring, you have five minutes coming, but I'm going to give you one minute, if you want to make a statement.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Madam Minister, from your comments, it is obvious in one area there has been a gain in the electoral reform in Haiti, and having been there during the last election and having seen that, to have the very first election to be very, very peacefully conducted.... But one of the concerns was the 30% turnout, and the other end of the issue would be that the 30% turnout indicates there is a lack of understanding on the part of the citizenry towards what their members of Parliament can do and what their role is.

With regard to the Parliamentary Centre itself and the work they have been doing there, what will they be doing to address some of those concerns, and will they be able to address those concerns without engaging the political party process and maybe other MPs?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring. In fact, I'd like to thank you for that question.

Let's remember to keep our focus on the democratic development. That is the main reason for this study today and for this meeting.

Madame Verner.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you, Mr. Goldring. I know that you went to Haiti. We have had an opportunity to discuss your visit.

If I am not mistaken, voter turnout on the second round was far higher, was it not?

Mr. Robert Greenhill: Yes.

Hon. Josée Verner: How much higher?

Mr. Robert Greenhill: On the first round, it was...

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Goldring: Members of Parliament.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Legislative election, not presidential.

Mr. Robert Greenhill: For the legislative election it was considerably lower than for the presidential election, partly because of the perceived relative importance, which one assumes will change over time as the role of Parliament becomes clear and receives greater support from the people. But it's a legitimate issue in terms of the second-round participation rate.

Mr. Peter Goldring: And the Parliamentary Centre?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We want to thank—

● (1630)

Mr. Bernard Patry: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, Mr. Greenhill just mentioned—thank you for coming, first of all, both of you—during the debate that there are many specific projects. I would like you, if it's possible, to table the projects.

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

Mr. Bernard Patry: I just want you to table all the projects through the clerk so that we can learn about this, the $15 million. I fully agree with the $5 million with WHO for vaccination, but we would like to know about all the projects, all the development communities, all the organizations—

The Chair: Mr. Patry, we want to—

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, please, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: You can submit any of those—

Mr. Bernard Patry: Permit me to ask this through you. We started five minutes late, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have two other guests.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I know we have some other guests, but I'm not asking him to give it now, but just to table it before this committee, and it's his—

The Chair: We'll ask that. Mr. Patry's concern was that we have some of those figures brought forward to our committee. I think that's fair and we can do that. It's not really a point of order; it's a request. We can do that.

We want to thank you, Minister, for appearing today. We want to keep our committee focused on democratic development, and I think you've attempted to do that today, so we applaud you for coming. Thank you.

We're going to suspend for about two minutes and allow the new witnesses to take their seats.

● (1631)

(Pause)

● (1636)

The Chair: We'll call this meeting back to order.

We are continuing on, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the study on democratic development. This is meeting 21.

We are again pleased to have appear before us as an individual, the Hon. Ed Broadbent. Mr. Broadbent has a long history with democratic development groups. He has served as the first president to the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development and is also a co-chair of the Canadian Democracy and Corporate Accountability Commission.

It's always a pleasure to see him stalking the halls of Parliament, and we appreciate very much his appearing before us today to share his information.

Also in this hour we have Gerry Barr, president and CEO of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation. The Canadian Council for International Co-operation is a coalition of Canadian voluntary sector organizations working globally to achieve sustainable human development. CCIC seeks to end global poverty and to promote social justice and human dignity. We thank you for making the time to appear.

It's not your first time here. We welcome you both back.

Mr. Broadbent, we'll begin with you. Welcome back. We look forward to what you have to say.

Hon. Ed Broadbent (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to be back here with former colleagues from, as one says, all sides of the House of Commons.

I want in my brief opening comments to deal with some observations about democratic development—if you like, a framework for a modern democratic state: what we should be doing as one of those modern democratic states who help facilitate the development of democracy.

I'll begin with a series, more or less, of assertions, for which I apologize, as opposed to developed arguments, in a sense. But then I hope we can discuss these points.

For me, in the last fifty years there have been two transformational developments in the democratic world and indeed in the globe. One is the post-1945 period in which the wartime leaders—Churchill, Roosevelt, and Attlee— launched a framework for global development to take place after Second World War, made the key decisions during the war, and set up the key institutional structure that held for many decades. This included the creation of the UN itself, the Bretton Woods agreements that in part were to deal with financial equity on a global basis, and third, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted in 1948. These were all considered to be part of a package, in a post-war period after the Second World War, that would hopefully avoid the tragedy of the 1930s and put in place, if you like, a framework for what we would now call global democratic development.

The other transformational period, I would say, began really at the end of the Cold War, and we're living with it. I want to pick up my specific suggestions, as a matter of fact, based on experience since the beginning of the end of the Cold War; that is to say, beginning with the 1990s.

I vividly remember the years immediately following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the coming to an end of the Cold War. The heads of almost all democratic governments proclaimed at the time that the subsequent decade would see the global spread of democracy and of market-based economies.

Unlike the World War II democratic leaders, however, they put virtually exclusive emphasis on creating a global market. They didn't trouble themselves with these other major institutions I've already talked about that the wartime leaders put in place—that is, the major political dimension. In fact, many of the democratic leaders early in the 1990s who should have known better, and some who did, blithely asserted that human rights, the core values of a democratic civil society, could be relied upon to emerge willy-nilly on their own after the core institutions of a market-based economy were put in place.

Based on my six years of experience as head of Rights and Democracy, and a long time—some would say too long—in federal politics, I would like now to offer some suggestions on what can and should be done to further democratic development in a world in which the majority still live in authoritarian societies.

First, in addition to protecting narrowly defined national interests, our foreign policy must help foster the development of democracy, and this should be done by persuasion, trade, and aid, and by the development of globally enforceable international human rights law.

Second, this can best be achieved by a combination of bilateral and multilateral state-to-state democratic institution-building, and in particular through assistance to human rights-oriented NGOs in countries where they are allowed to exist. In 1970 there were only 55 international NGOs at a UN-organized conference in Tehran. There are now more than 2,000 such organizations. Preferably assistance to NGOs within a developing country should be funded by other international NGOs working at arm's length from any government.

Third, assistance in the peaceful development of democracy within any state by outsiders can only be provided when the government of that state allows it. This has happened in recent years in a number of quite diverse nations. I'm only going to give you some examples that as president of Rights and Democracy I happen to have been—not as a politician, but as the head of that institute—directly involved in: South Korea, Thailand, Tanzania, Pakistan, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Fourth, at no time should the priority of agendas for any category of rights implementation by a developing country be determined by outsiders, whether these outsiders be other NGOs or established democratic governments.

● (1640)

In the 1990s, we at Rights and Democracy, with, I want to emphasize, money provided by the Government of Canada and with the support of all parties then in the House of Commons, worked in developing countries with other NGOs from Sweden, Germany, Norway, and the U.S. and helped to implement the rights of women, indigenous peoples, workers, and human rights organizations themselves in Thailand, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Tanzania, Pakistan, Egypt, and Indonesia. At all times, specific rights, priorities, and agendas for these countries were set by the indigenous NGOs or the governments themselves, not by us.

For example, in supporting women's rights in Pakistan, we and our international partners did not propose an agenda appropriate for women either here in Canada or in Europe. Rather, we supported the priorities established by that country's leading women reformers, such as Asma Jahangir. By the way, that courageous woman describes herself as a Muslim, woman, lawyer, and human rights activist.

Similarly, work in recent years with Mexican NGOs—and the government, eventually—on election-related rights proceeded according to their priorities again, not ours. It helped to produce free and fair elections a few years ago and the legitimate transition of power earlier this year.

We worked for years in Tanzania and finally in partnership, in this case, with the Canadian high commissioner. Our high commissioner at that time was a remarkable woman, very imaginative. We cooperated with the then one-party government, other NGOs, other newly emerging parties, and a newly independent media to shape a practical agenda that led peacefully to a transition to a multi-party democracy in Tanzania.

The fifth point relates to how not to do it.

There is only one country I wanted to talk about in terms of how not to do these things.

Mr. Chrétien was right about Iraq. The imperial hubris of the present administrations in Washington and London may well have included a deeply believed in agenda for democratic reform. Even if this were the case, military invasion, whether here or elsewhere, to make it happen is a deeply mistaken court of action. As a consequence of this western violation of international law, thousands of lives have been lost, a nation's infrastructure has been ruined, terrorism has increased, and international and regional religious conflicts have worsened. Ironically, the major national beneficiary of this has been Iran.

If there is an emergent so-called parliamentary democracy in Iraq in the months ahead, it will be characterized by profound mistrust and deep religious and regional tensions. When it comes to tolerance and stability, Germany's Weimar Republic, in retrospect, would be seen as a model of civility and goodwill by comparison. There can be little doubt that the war in Iraq, waged predominantly by white Christians in the name of democracy and human rights, has besmirched the good name of each in the eyes of millions of Muslims and others throughout the world.

I'll go on to my sixth point.

We in the developed democracies need to remind ourselves of the multi-faceted and multi-partisan roots of our own rights. As I have noted, as a follow-up to one of Churchill's coalition cabinet decisions in the 1940s, following the war, he and Roosevelt ensured that a wide range of rights were to find their place as part of a new postwar order. These rights ultimately became an integral part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. First drafted by a Canadian, John Humphrey, they ultimately became the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

The crucial point here is that when added to the political and civil rights, the new social and economic rights became the core of the modern welfare states that flourished in the North Atlantic democracies for decades after the war. As Tony Judt, one of the world's leading historians, has recently and brilliantly argued in his book *Postwar*, such welfare states, with a mix of political and social rights, were largely responsible for the disappearance of parties on the extreme left and right and for the increasing degree of a sense of social justice and stability that came to characterize most of the advanced democracies.

● (1645)

It's then our own modern history that should guide us in understanding why economic globalization is a mixed blessing for democracy. As the World Bank has recently noted, amidst growing prosperity for many, there are also millions in abject poverty in Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Large numbers of them believe that established democracies no longer care about social justice. They see our governments and elites as acting too often in collusion with their own elites, being more interested in their natural resources and property rights than in the civil and social rights of the vast majority.

The fact that the President of Venezuela could be applauded by many in the UN's General Assembly in September for calling President Bush the devil should be seen in part as symptomatic of a widespread sense of injustice and not merely as a rejection of Mr. Bush's invasion of Iraq.

The depth of inequality and the absence of social reform in so much of the world can and does produce romantic, extremist, and intolerant religious and secular movements. It happened in recent European history. It can repeat itself again, only this time globally.

I think I'll conclude there, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Broadbent.

Mr. Barr.

Mr. Gerry Barr (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council for International Co operation): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

It's great to be here again. It's always a pleasure to be in front of the committee talking about the kinds of things with which you are regularly seized.

As most committee members will know, the council is an organization of about 100 non-governmental organizations working to end global poverty and ensure sustainable human development worldwide.

The committee members, of course, know that there are lots of things that can be said about democratic development. It can be about electoral politics and balloting, judiciaries, the recognition and implementation of the rights of citizens. It can be about economic, social, and cultural rights. It can be about lots of stuff.

For those of us who work in the international development cooperation field, who are preoccupied with questions of global poverty, democratic development very often goes to the role of citizens' organizations and social movements in the fight against poverty. And it's a key role. There are more than a billion people around the world living in absolute poverty; a further 1.5 billion who are desperately poor by any reasonable standard, living on less than $2 a day; and together, their combined number approaches half the population of the planet.

The thing about this poverty is that it's fatal. Every day 50,000 people die of poverty-related illnesses and insults readily avoided. More than 800 million people go hungry every day of the year. So the resources to address global poverty, through levels of aid, equitable trading arrangements, and cancellation of the debts of the world's poorest countries, matter immensely. What matters equally are the approaches taken by donor states around the world, as well as by developing country states, to democratic development and human rights.

The Nobel Prize-winning development economist, Amartya Sen, demonstrates pretty incontrovertibly that there will be success in ending poverty when the rights of the vulnerable and the poor are recognized in the face of very highly unequal cultural, social, economic, and political power relations. And with women forming the majority of the poor and the vulnerable, issues of gender equality and processes for women to claim their rights are central, absolutely key, to tackling poverty reduction. Absent these things, we will certainly, but certainly, lose the fight against poverty.

The millennium development goals roll up, in list form, a number of targets from a host of global meetings that occurred throughout the nineties under the auspices of the United Nations to chart social objectives for the planet. They articulate some of the more achievable goals developed at those meetings as an action agenda for the first years of this century. But whether it's about hunger or potable water or access to basic education or HIV/AIDS or malaria or tuberculosis, what is at the heart of it is the question of rights and the circumstances of those whose rights have been denied.

That's why people sometimes talk about the millennium development goals as the minimum development goals. It's a cautionary comment meant to signal that while it is important to set out targets, there is no list, really, that captures poverty. Looked at through a human rights lens, there is no single set of needs that, when materially met, can be said to settle the question of poverty. Poverty is all about impoverishment. It's about a process, and inequality and marginalization are the twin engines of poverty. If our aim is to beat it, equality and inclusion are the ways to go.

Civil society organizations working with a human rights framework know that effective sustainable development change will not take place in the absence of engaged citizens. That's the key ingredient. It is the thing without which success will not occur. And just as in Canada, as members of this committee know well, actions to counter poverty are inherently a political process.

● (1650)

Government actions, national political will, and building the capacity of governments are certainly terribly important, but they are in and of themselves insufficient to support sustained development impact. You get the full picture when you include political and social movement organizing a direct engagement on the part of those who are living in poverty or who are otherwise marginalized by their society. It's the other part and the key part, the crucial part, of democratic development.

In the course of your study of democratic development, it is almost certain that you have run into the Paris Declaration of March 2005, in which donor states agree to approaches to development assistance that help to establish ownership of development programs in developing country economies themselves, that align donor policies with beneficiary state policies; there's an agreement to harmonize, to manage for measurable results, to in some measure accept mutual responsibility and accountability in the development process as between donor and developing country states.

Important as they are, these new donor strategies focus pretty single-mindedly, almost exclusively, on donor-government relationships, aiming to express institutional reforms in both donor and beneficiary states for a more effective and efficient aid system.

For civil society groups, the final question has to be how much aid actually reaches the poor and mobilizes them to address their own problems. That's the key question for measuring aid effectiveness, and it is a question that the Paris commitments have yet to answer. So Paris is important when it comes to donor practices, but it's more about aid than it is about development.

It's when we get to this development vision side of things that issues such as the role of citizens, their social movements, the way in which aid can be used to mobilize people's participation, come increasingly to the fore; it's where democratic development arises. And it's a very good thing, therefore, that states are now tracking to a key meeting in Ghana in 2008, where the role of civil society actors is going to come in for some very special scrutiny and the question of the inclusion of this important piece of the puzzle will be raised.

In this connection, I think it's very worth noting that this committee, in its previous incarnation during the last Parliament, reached some key conclusions when it gave its twelfth report to the House of Commons. The committee called not only for increased resources to attain the internationally accepted standard of 0.7% of GNI as an aid level, but also called for steps to improve accountability and the quality of Canada's aid, with all parties agreeing—all sides of the House. The committee cited the need for aid legislation that would ensure that, beyond humanitarian assistance, aid spending would be targeted specifically at poverty reduction with an approach that takes account of Canada's human rights commitments and a rights-based approach to development, and that aid delivery would occur that takes respectful account of the perspectives of those actually living in poverty.

The committee also said that in order to ensure aid effectiveness, CIDA should take account of the particular contributions of civil society organizations both in Canada and in the developing world overseas.

So the committee's report to Parliament, which got unanimous support in the House of Commons, puts democratic development and a rights-based approach at the centre of the development paradigm.

I want to say congratulations for having got it right in the last Parliament, and I encourage you very much to keep on this track as you continue to look at these questions of democratic development, which are so key to poverty eradication.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barr.

We will begin the first round of questioning. It is a seven-minute round. We'll begin with Mr. Wilfert and Mr. Alghabra, in a split, or however they want to work it, but beginning with Mr. Wilfert.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming.

Mr. Broadbent, in 1999, the UN Commission on Human Rights, now the Human Rights Council, passed a resolution on the promotion of the right to democracy. In 2000, as you know, the UN at the Millennium Summit declared that we should spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law.

I have generally been supportive of projects that CIDA has done, and I'll give you an example that I'd like you to comment on.

To promote democracy I believe the best way to do it is from the ground up, and obviously at the village level, particularly in places such as Asia, such as Cambodia. We were very much involved, as you know, in the commune elections. What has happened, however, is that it appears to be a scattered approach, because we were there and we supported them, but the attention has drifted away. What is happening now is we see a government in Cambodia, Hun Sen's government, that has basically stifled both public dissent and human rights.

Do you have any advice for this committee in terms of how we could be in for the long haul? What kinds of approaches should we be looking at for monitoring sustained development of human rights in countries where we're going to spend the dollars to do that?

I think you eloquently pointed out that in Iraq, a top-down approach does not work. I'd be interested in your comments.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That's a good question, Mr. Wilfert.

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Do you have another question you'd like to ask instead?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I do, Mr. Broadbent, but I'll only give you one for now.

The Chair: Mr. Broadbent, it's sounding more like question period.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: It's a totally reasonable question and my answer is that there is no easy answer, no guarantee.

As I mentioned, we did a lot of work, we being Rights and Democracy. It is a very interesting model of a government-funded but an arm's-length institution supported, as I said, by all parties. We worked predominately with NGOs in developing countries. We did some work with governments too, but mostly that was done by CIDA and not by us. We worked in Thailand. We did a lot of work, and Thailand has made a lot of progress, but as we know, there's been a military coup there. It's ongoing work and an ongoing project.

The two big names in history who have written about democracy are Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. No one has done anything better than they did in the 19th century. What they talked about that is fundamental, and it is what Gerry Barr has talked about here in modern terms, is the crucial role of a democratic civil society, a whole range of freedoms that become ingrained in the practices and institutions, if you like, below the superstructure of elections. And that takes time. It really does take time.

I read an article recently on the Crusades and was reminded with great horror how systematically Jews were exterminated, and Muslims were exterminated, and so on, in the name of good Christian action. We went through a long period ourselves. We—those from a Christian, white, Anglo-Saxon background I'm saying here—went through a long evolution when we were, in modern terms, quite barbaric. To get this evolution of groups that will be tolerant, civil, and respect individual rights as well as social rights takes time, and there is no magic answer.

Part of what Gerry Barr and the minister have said in terms of general principles and the role of CIDA, what Gerry Barr has said about the importance of civil society, and what I've said all mesh, in my view, if they're carried out. What we musn't have is a top-down approach using force, certainly military force, or imposing our rights agenda. They have to come to it, if you like, the groups within their society, where they are free to act. Somebody mentioned Cuba, China, and these other countries and what we are doing there. We're not doing anything there because they won't allow anything. They won't allow the Rights and Democracy type of organization there.

I've taken some time to answer the question to say that there is no foolproof solution. Democracy is an evolving thing and it's very important, but what is crucial, though, is the civil society structure. It's not just the electioneering or periodic elections. It's getting the institutions to allow the free flow of rights in society.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I guess it's the old issue of butter or bullets, and it's choices. In any event, I'll turn it over to my colleague.

The Chair: Mr. Alghabra, you have about a minute and a half.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Broadbent, thank you so much for coming here.

I have two questions, and I'll try to make them as concise as possible. First, given the fact that Prime Minister Harper declared Afghanistan the centrepiece of our development aid and foreign policy, how, from your experience, do you evaluate our performance over there, given that you also mentioned the risks of using military means to deliver aid?

The second question is a broader question: how do we avoid the risk of applying double standards when we are providing or promoting aid? We heard on our trip last week in Europe that some countries know they are committing to double standards. How do we avoid doing that?

● (1705)

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I want to deal with that—another "easy question". What do you mean, in this context, by double standards? What do you mean there?

Mr. Omar Alghabra: It's that we select a country to provide aid to, while there are other countries in greater need and receiving absolutely no aid.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Okay. I don't have an easy answer to deal with that. Again, the institution Gerry Barr works at would probably give you a better.... I mean, we could do as some countries do, direct all our aid just to the poorest countries. I don't have an easy answer to that.

I think there are some reasons for us.... We're with countries we have historical associations with—some French speaking, some English speaking—and there are certain trade patterns. We may have contacts and historical connections with certain countries that we don't have with others, and it may well make sense for us to choose them perhaps over others. But basically, I guess my general criterion is that those in greatest need should get our greatest priority.

On the Afghanistan question, I'm kind of with you. I'm glad I'm not a politician today; I don't have to have an answer, in one sense.

Initially I supported the action, in an entirely different situation from Iraq—entirely different. You had a barbarous government that was supporting a barbarous international terrorist movement. There was a response to this—and one, I repeat, that I personally thought was appropriate.

Then you raised the question that we're in there now, and how do we deal with that terrible dilemma? On one hand, my friend and colleague Alexa was asking questions about the ratio of aid spending to defence spending. I don't know what the answer to that is, and I also frankly don't know what it should be, because I know there's both a security dimension that has to be dealt with and an aid dimension.

What Afghanistan illustrates, if I can put it a different way, in one sense with the advantage of 20/20 hindsight, is the wisdom of George Bush senior in the Gulf War. In the Gulf War, Mr. Bush senior was urged by a number of his, in this context, American conservative colleagues, some hawkish, to continue into Baghdad after Saddam Hussein was pushed out of Kuwait. He asked the appropriate question: "What'll I do when I get there?"—a very serious question. And he didn't go, because if he had gone, then there would have been under Bush senior the mess we now see in Iraq today.

Canada is involved, with our NATO partners and with UN sanction, in trying to square that circle of helping to create security so that we can put the emphasis on aid. And we're doing it in a country that, historically speaking—and I don't want to be misunderstood in this—is from the standpoint of democratic development behind even where Iraq was originally. There are much more complex and historically medieval structures in Afghanistan.

I just think it's a problem without a ready answer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Broadbent. We won't try to find one.

Madame Barbot, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Broadbent, Mr. Barr, thank you very much for being here today. After our meeting with the minister, it is somewhat refreshing to talk to people who answer our questions to help us better understand the issues, and who try to find solutions. After all, asking questions in the interests of making progress is part of the committee's job. To my mind, we are not here to criticize what Canada is doing, but, rather, to ensure that we really understand the facts. That is why I am so pleased that you are here today.

You both said that the involvement of civil society in international aid is crucial and can contribute to the success of a mission. I would therefore like to ask you a question about a specific group of civil society that Canada appears to want to further involve, particularly in Haiti. We have been told that Canada wants to work with the diaspora to deliver aid to Haiti. You said that civil society has an important role to play and that we should not try to do for people what they can do for themselves. The desire to "use" the diaspora seems to be based on the premise that those who have left Haiti and developed new skills, but who have also maintained contact with their home country, could, if they went back, use their new knowledge and their unique cultural sensitivity to help Haitians.

However, my understanding of the Haitian issue is that the diaspora has been away from the country for so long, and their life experience has been so different from those who remained in Haiti that they are actually not very well liked there. Furthermore, in States where there are so many problems, the diaspora is actually part of the problem.

I would like to hear your ideas on using the diaspora; tell us about the ties that they have with Haitians, what role they would have in international development, and how donor countries could use their services to work more effectively.

● (1710)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry): Mr. Barr.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gerry Barr: I would just like to say that the diaspora, particularly in Canada, is an asset. It is truly multicultural and enjoys close ties with the rest of the world, particularly with third world countries. Obviously, this makes it much easier for Canadian civil society to build relationships with other countries.

In Canada, the involvement of civil society organizations comprising members of the diaspora in democratic development is a relatively recent phenomenon. In fact, although the communities have always maintained close ties, it is only recently that they have begun operating as non governmental organizations. One can imagine, however, that they will play an increasingly important role in developing relationships between Canada's civil society and that of other countries.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barr.

Mr. Broadbent.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I think that in general, it is a good idea to work with members of the diaspora, but I have to say that, in the past, we have experienced some difficulties in certain countries. In one instance, members of the diaspora took sides in a conflict that was raging in their country of origin. In this case, it was not such a good idea to turn to members of the diaspora living in Canada. This sort of situation has to be taken very seriously. We only made that mistake once.

Since then, we have exercised more caution to avoid such a problem recurring. As I said earlier, when all is said and done, it is generally a good idea to turn to the diaspora for suggestions regarding their country of origin.

● (1715)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Broadbent.

Madam Barbot, you have about thirty seconds if you want to continue.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: We have been told that in Afghanistan, for example, corruption is rife. What can be done to get aid to its intended recipients in such a situation?

[*English*]

Mr. Gerry Barr: The quick answer is that where it's not possible to provide aid in a proper fashion through government channels, you have the possibility of non-governmental organizations that can give you management and accountability. That's often the case where challenges of accountability have just reached the collapse point. But it takes a long while to get to the collapse point, I think—and perhaps rightly so—but that is the classic strategy.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barr.

Mr. Casey.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you very much.

Mr. Broadbent, it's certainly good to have you back. I was just looking at your résumé here, and it says, among other things, "During his most recent term as an M.P. he was responsible for... Child Poverty." I don't think that's a fair accusation.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bill Casey: I had a most interesting discussion with a senior government official from Iran the other day. We got into a discussion about human rights and we compared Canada and Iran. He said you can't compare them because Iran has a different culture and a different religion, and their government is based on religion. That really brought home how difficult it is to advance the causes of human rights, equity for women, rule of law, and civil society if they don't believe there's a problem.

It was a fascinating discussion, but I was just wondering what we can do to try to break into that, to try to separate those in countries like Iran and other countries, where they just don't accept these things.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: That's a very tough one. I think we have to reply frankly that, yes, there are different cultures, there are different values, there are different religions, but there is one declaration that all members of the United Nations are committed to, and that's the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When it was prepared, not only was it prepared by Christians and Jews, but Muslims and leadership from the Muslim community globally at that time. All religions and non-religious groups were considered in drafting this universal declaration.

I think that has to be stressed to leaders of authoritarian states and brutal states, like the one Iran is, especially in their treatment of women, but not just women. Yes, you have a different culture and you have a different religion, but where there is a clash between the cultural practice and a right found in the UN system, the practice should yield.

A wonderful NGO declaration on human rights was prepared by Asian NGOs in 1993—I think I'm quite right on this. It's worth tracking down. It's a wonderful declaration about human rights prepared, I repeat, by Asians, not westerners, and they make this point that is often made by, for example, ordinary Iranian citizens—and I know that in the case of Iran. In all these authoritarian societies, it's the heads of these societies who like to invoke their authoritarian tradition as an excuse for not complying with the elementary rights that their ordinary citizens would want.

Whether their ordinary citizens use rights language or not is another question. Young girls want to go to school as well as young boys, whether young girls in Iran say it's a right or not. They want to have the right to pack up and move down to the next town if they want. They want mobility rights whether they use rights language or not.

But those rights are, I repeat, in the universal declaration. Every member of the UN is obliged to comply with them. Finally, when there's a clash between a culture and a right, then the culture at some point has to yield.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Broadbent.

Mr. Van Loan, you have about two minutes left.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Broadbent, in your presentation, you did speak about something we've heard about from other witnesses, and that's the importance of civil society and democratization, and in fact democracy promotion having some kind of base within that society. You talked about how those kinds of groups have exploded in numbers on at least the human rights front, and presumably on other fronts too, in recent years.

You also talked about the need for funding, to the extent that we provide it, to be arm's length and so on. To what do you attribute that explosion in the funding from organizations? Whether it went through Rights and Democracy or the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, or any of these other organizations, is that one of the causes of that explosion? Has it helped?

● (1720)

Hon. Ed Broadbent: It would be vain of those of us in the west to say we were a cause. It would not be vain to say we were a facilitator or that we helped. Many people I worked with in the nineties had their lives on the line in Guatemala, in El Salvador, in Indonesia. They were the risk-takers. I never was. I travelled on a diplomatic passport.

When we went in to help, it was because they were asking for help. They were trying, within their own societies, to develop what we call a rights-based society, a civil society. So it was not us who created this flourishing. We in democratic countries certainly helped. But the principal initiative, as it has always been historically, was that people in those countries did the pushing and the risk-taking in the demand, if you like, for freedom. We just helped a bit in making it possible.

I heard your earlier question about an arm's-length institution. If I may say so, because I'm not there now—another day maybe—we have in this country an arm's-length institution called Rights and Democracy, which was created as a recommendation of an all-party committee, through unanimous agreement; there were only three parties in the House at that time. It has a wonderful mandate. It's not a Canadian mandate; it's the whole UN family of rights mandate to build toward democracy.

I'm not there—it's not self-serving now—but I would personally have loved to see that institution significantly expanded. It could do some of the things it hasn't had the resources to do, like election monitoring and party-building, in addition to doing the fundamental civil society.

So to your point that I listened to earlier about arm's-length institutions, they are important. We have a unique one here in Canada in Rights and Democracy, and it gets most of its funding from Parliament, without political interference from any of the parties. I think it does a good job abroad.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Barr, we had an earlier witness speaking to us—you obviously wouldn't have been here to hear him—and he was a professor at the University of Toronto. I think he gave quite compelling evidence. One of the pieces of evidence he gave us was that $6,000 U.S. per capita income is the minimum threshold you want to see in a country if you expect to see democracy become sustainable, in order for you to apply your democracy promotion efforts in those kinds of countries. He said that's where you should focus. I was going to ask if you agreed with that.

The Chair: In thirty seconds or less, Mr. Barr.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: So it's yes or no.

The Chair: We know the bells are going to start ringing, and I want Ms. McDonough to have—

Mr. Gerry Barr: It's an empirical question and a very tough one. I don't honestly have a good answer to it, but skepticism is rolling forward as I hear your characterization of the position. Institutional weaknesses are the kinds of weaknesses one would look at, rather than GNP or an income number.

If I can take advantage of this—and I'll do it very quickly and very much in the interest of the committee—I know there was a lot of discussion about Afghanistan earlier on. There has been, of course, quite an important interdepartmental discussion going on now for more than a year. It has been a three-D discussion about Canada's policy with respect to failed and failing states. At the heart of this notion are issues of human rights, responsibility to protect, and humanitarian law. I would suggest to you strongly that there's this already quite mature work under way interdepartmentally. In the course of your study, you probably want to see that in front of you or have some of those involved in developing it come to speak to you as we are today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barr.

We're going to go to Madam McDonough, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm now going to fish for another compliment to this committee.

We appreciate your comments about the work we did together, collaboratively and across party lines. We reached unanimity in urging the government to move on 0.7%. I hope that resolve remains, because it was absolutely humiliating to be in the Nordic countries and the U.K. last week, as a committee, facing governments that are literally between 0.9% and 1% in some cases, having resolved to exceed the 0.7%.

But it's also true—and I say this in response to Mr. Broadbent's comments—that this committee urged that Rights and Democracy gain some increased funding after five straight years of the biggest slide in the resources they had to work with. By raising this, you've actually put me off my original intention to question in another direction.

As you may or may not be aware, Tom Axworthy and Jeffrey Kopstein appeared before this committee a couple of weeks ago, arguing for a new structure, a new agency, to be set up to engage in democracy-building work internationally. I'm trying to build on the repeated theme of the importance of democracy building really being about working with civil society in failed and fragile states, and also in developing countries that are, one hopes, moving toward democracy.

To really raise the question, if we have NGOs that are starved for funds, if we have civil society groups in those countries that are starved for funds to do the democracy building, do we need another new agency, or do we need to get on with delivering the 0.7%, get on with expanding Rights and Democracy's ability to do the job? Should we keep on trying, as a committee, to push forward on these fronts?

● (1725)

The Chair: Ms. McDonough, I have a feeling Mr. Broadbent wants to answer this one.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Yes, I do.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I'd like Gerry's comment too, because it's about civil society being funded as well.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I want to emphasize my view. I don't think we need another institution. I think Rights and Democracy is there. It's beautifully structured and at arm's length from the government. It has a universal mandate, that being the UN system of rights and freedoms. It's focused on the kind of thing Gerry Barr has talked about, which is building civil society.

Most of Rights and Democracy, both when I was there and under my successors, has been working with groups. By and large, we left to CIDA or Elections Canada a lot of the election-related work or institution building—to ensure that you could have the rule of law and so on. I think that needs to be expanded, with an increased budget for Rights and Democracy, again with all party support.

I'll be political again here, if I may emphasize this, and give some credit to Mr. Mulroney as Prime Minister. When I became the first president, I proposed that we have a representative on the board from each of the parties; that is to say, they did not have to be active at that time, not MPs, of course, but there would be someone from each of the parties who had been active in political life and had an interest in human rights. That practice was maintained for many years, during all the time I was there. From all the parties in the House of Commons, there was some active person who at one time had been active in their party.

So Rights and Democracy is a political organization, but there was never a partisan decision made by the board, nor was there ever a suggestion made that the activity was partisan. The institution is there, and I urge the committee to look at maybe expanding the mandate somewhat, although I don't think that's necessary. It needs more resources, but new areas that they might work in could be discussed with the committee.

I'll shut up now and let Gerry get in on the question.

Mr. Gerry Barr: I'm sensitive to the fact that you're pressed for time. I would just say that although the roots of good political culture actually are in a robust civil society and pre-party, if I can put it that way, plainly the organization of social movements and political parties is an important part of the equation. To the extent that people are arguing for some attention to be paid to that, I think that's a good thing.

The question about vectors or channels is just about identifying efficient ones. If there is no efficient one now, then by all means, let's make one. It's a good emphasis, and an additional emphasis on some of the work that's going on now.

If I remember correctly the history of the discussion that went into the founding of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, it was just such a discussion. I think this was the discussion, in large measure, at the very beginning. The conclusion of people at the end of the day was to have something that would be somewhat broader in reach, if I'm not mistaken. Maybe historically I'm wrong, but I think that was the case.

● (1730)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Several times during our travels last week it occurred to some of us—I don't remember who, although we had a full discussion about it—that there might also be a more robust role for the Parliamentary Centre that could compliment some of the other work. Do you have any opinion on that? I never really thought very much about it before we were abroad.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: They can, should, and I'm sure would be totally willing to do more. I suspect it's a question of funding. I know they do good work.

To go back to my point, we already have that institution established. We have Rights and Democracy established. In fairness, I didn't hear Tom Axworthy's presentation, but I've heard the general argument before. I don't think we need another institution.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Broadbent.

We want to thank you both for coming. It's a pleasure to have both of you here today. Certainly we're going to study your testimony. I know that as we travelled and looked at five countries, all of those countries were involved in democratic development. More specifically, I want to look into some of the organizations you've talked with. All of them were involved with the development of political parties in countries where people were not able.... They'd get elected, and some of them didn't even know the responsibilities of being a member of Parliament, and they didn't know how government works. To them it was like a job.

I'm certain we'll look at your testimony. We'll look at the mandate of some of those organizations that you've talked to, and we look forward to that.

We will adjourn.

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