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**Chair**

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson**

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## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

•(1235)

[English]

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

This is the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, meeting number 30.

On behalf of all the members of our committee on foreign affairs and international development, it's my pleasure to welcome each one of you to this working lunch.

Given the importance that we attach to our relationship and friendship with the European Union, certainly on behalf of our committee, we look forward to exchanging views on matters of mutual concern. Those matters include continuing the global fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, working together on reform of the United Nations, bringing stability and democracy to fragile states, working on international development and environmental challenges, and not the least, on the strengthening of the transatlantic relationship in all of its dimensions.

Our committee has, in recent months, been looking specifically at some of the challenges of how we deliver international assistance in often difficult circumstances. We are completing a report—in fact, hopefully this afternoon we will be able to finish a report—on Canada's role in Haiti in this regard.

Our larger study focuses on the challenges of international assistance and democratic development. How can a country like Canada best use its resources and work with others to promote democracy, human rights, and good governance around the world?

We have been particularly interested in learning more from the experiences of highly regarded European donors. In October of this year, this committee travelled to Europe and met with countries and committees and groups from many of the Nordic countries, as well as the United Kingdom, to hear about their best practices in the field of democracy and governance assistance.

This is an area in which the European Union, as a whole, has a very major involvement, and we commend them. So I am certain that as we gather as a committee, we'll be very interested in hearing your views on some of these matters and some of these areas.

We also understand that you've enjoyed the first part of your visit to Canada. We hope that continues. You have been briefed today by the Department of Foreign Affairs, and you have also met with the Prime Minister's officials and foreign affairs advisers. Today you'll be meeting with officials to discuss environment; tomorrow, fisheries

and immigration; and from there you're off to Quebec City, where there will be a program at the National Assembly.

Welcome.

There are many different countries represented around this table presently. I want to welcome the chair, Seán Ó Neachtain, from Ireland. Perhaps, as the chair of this group, you would have your colleagues and friends introduce themselves.

We look forward to a dialogue. We don't want to rush your meal. We want to thank those who have prepared that.

I should also mention that as we go through this, if you would note, you will need the interpretation for some speakers. I know most Canadians are fluent in at least two languages—most—but there may be some languages represented here in which you aren't fluent.

Welcome, and, Mr. Chair, we look forward to what you have to say.

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain ((UEN - Ireland), Parliament of Europe):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will not speak Irish today, although I would love to.

I'm very grateful for your hospitality here today, and as chair of the delegation from the European Parliament, it is our great honour to be here with you.

I realize your time is very crucial today because you have a very busy schedule yourselves, and we appreciate that. I will just start by saying I'm Seán Ó Neachtain, from the west of Ireland, representing the west and the northwest of Ireland in the European Parliament. It's my second period in Parliament.

I believe you have each of our committees, and so on, so without further ado I will ask my colleagues to introduce themselves to you.

Toomas.

**Mr. Toomas Savi ((ALDE - Estonia), Parliament of Europe):** Thank you.

I'm Toomas Savi from Estonia. I am a newcomer to the European Parliament and I work on the development committee, which does various other things. In Africa we would like to reduce poverty, and we want to fulfill our MDGs, our millennium development goals, there. Of course, we fight against many diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.

Very briefly, that's it. Thank you.

•(1240)

**Mr. Den Dover ((EPP - United Kingdom), Parliament of Europe):** I'm Den Dover, a British Conservative from northwest England. I was in our House of Commons for 18 years, then lost in 1997 when we suffered an enormous defeat. Then seven years ago, I came to the European Parliament.

**Mrs. Agnes Schierhuber ((EPP - Austria), Parliament of Europe):** I am Agnes Schierhuber from Austria. I have been a member of the European Parliament since 1995, when Austria came into Europe. Professionally, I'm a member of the agriculture and rural development committee. I'm very interested in energy and the environment. For 30 years, I have been in agriculture politics, first in Austria and then in Europe.

**The Chair:** You must have started when you were ten years old.

**Mrs. Agnes Schierhuber:** Thank you so much.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Duarte Freitas ((EPP - Portugal), Parliament of Europe):** Hello. My name is Duarte Freitas. I am Portuguese, and I come from the Azores Islands in the middle of the Atlantic, which almost makes us neighbours. I'm on the agriculture and fisheries committees. Of course, there are other main subjects that I follow, but all the matters regarding regional policy are very important because of the interest of my islands, which are very far from the European mainland.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Iles Braghetto ((EPP - Italy), Parliament of Europe) (Interpretation):** My name is Iles Braghetto. I am an Italian parliamentarian. I represent the Northeastern (Venice) constituency. I am a member of the European People's Party, first legislature. I am a member of the fisheries committee—vice-chairman of the fisheries committee—and a member of the committee on employment and social affairs, and environment and public health.

Thank you.

**Mr. Lasse Lehtinen ((PES - Finland), Parliament of Europe):** I'm Lasse Lehtinen from Finland. I'm a journalist by training, and I was in the national parliament from 1972 to 1983. I came back to politics two years ago, to the European Parliament, and I'm a member of the internal market committee.

**Mr. Ian Hudghton ((Greens/EFA - United Kingdom), Parliament of Europe):** I'm Ian Hudghton. I represent Scotland in the European Parliament. That's what I've done for eight years. I'm a member of the fisheries committee, the economic and monetary affairs committee, and the internal market and consumer protection committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'm not certain if there are any other comments the chair would like to make. I think we have a number of questions and comments.

Because this is the 30th meeting of our committee, we will continue in the normal way of conducting a foreign affairs meeting, which is that after a presentation from our guests, we would go to the official opposition and then to the government side.

Would you prefer to go directly to questions, Mr. Chair, or do you have any further comments?

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Mr. Chairman, thank you.

I'm sure my colleagues will have some questions to you. As you said this morning, we met with officials from the department, and that was very fruitful and very thought provoking in many ways. So I'm sure after that discussion, some of my colleagues would like to take the floor and put questions to you.

I also would like you to feel free to give us your opinion on anything that would be of relevance to us as members of the European Parliament.

I'm sure you understand that the European Parliament is very different from other parliaments. We don't have any direct opposition, we come from seven political groups that are affiliated in the Parliament, and, as you heard, we come from many member states. While we want to be very united in our approach to Europe, we also always want to show the alliance we have with our member states. That I think would have to be said at the beginning, that we are rather different from other parliaments.

We are proud of the developments that have come about in Europe in the 50 years because of the assimilation we have made in bringing best practices together from the various member states, which now amount to 25 at the present time and will be increasing early next year to 27.

I will give the floor to my colleagues, who might have some relevant questions for you, and again, we are mindful of the constraints of time on you.

Den Dover.

•(1245)

**Mr. Den Dover:** There is, as you know, a target of 0.7% of gross domestic product for all countries to put into overseas investments, help to the underdeveloped countries. Could you tell me what Canada does achieve in that regard?

**The Chair:** That's a very good question. I can tell you it's up from last year, but very minimally. To be quite frank, part of the reason our committee travelled to some of the Scandinavian and Nordic countries was because we were very aware that most of those countries were very good at delivering the 0.7% of GDP.

As a committee, at the present time, we actually passed a vote unanimously that we work with a plan to reach that. When we will is another question, but certainly we do all recognize the importance for greater ODA dollars going to development. So at the present time, I think we're at roughly....

Actually, Ted would be the one who could best.... Ted isn't normally on our committee. He's the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, the minister for CIDA.

**Mr. Ted Menzies (MacLeod, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. That was an excellent job of describing it.

Yes, I guess I would be a colleague to Thomas here. We both play the same role. I'm parliamentary secretary to the minister, so I help out the minister of what we call CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency—just basically what Thomas is talking about.

Absolutely, as most countries have, we've signed on to and we're committed to the millennium development goals and reaching them by the target date of 2015. We have set our targets on maybe not reaching the 0.7%, but increasing our aid in line with the OECD recommendations, as many other countries have.

We've had meetings with other countries that have said they are at 1% of GDP and then their next statement is that they're not sure the money is being spent wisely. So what we're focusing on is effective delivery of those dollars, rather than trying to reach that target too quickly and money being corrupted, going to the wrong place. That's what we're focusing on: effectiveness and accountability to our taxpayers in terms of where the money is going.

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

I'm going to now go to the opposition side. They can ask a question. Someone may answer it, and then we'll go back to your side. We'll try to continue in that way.

Also, Mr. Patry, if you want to answer another question that someone has asked as well, I would encourage you to respond. If you would, please introduce your colleagues and your party.

**Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** First of all, my name is Bernard Patry. I'm from Montreal, in the province of Quebec. I've been a member of Parliament since 1993. Prior to our defeat last year, I was the chair. See, that's the way it goes.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** He was a very good chair.

**Mr. Bernard Patry:** We had a lot of fun.

I'm with Bryon Wilfert, who is from the Toronto area, in Ontario; and Mark Eyking, from the Atlantic provinces. This is the Liberal side, the official opposition.

Before asking you a question, I just want to point out a fact about the 0.7%. There is a big difference between governments and parliamentarians. We passed a resolution in the foreign affairs committee that saw us all agree to 0.7%. It was unanimously agreed to by all parties. It shows that Parliament wants our government—even if it was my government previously, the Liberal one, or this government—to try to reach 0.7% as soon as possible, because we have the backing of the population concerning this issue.

I have a question concerning the EU. We've seen in the past fifteen years—and we appreciate it, in a sense—the emergence of a very strong EU as a global power. This is as a result of the consecutive enlargements and rapid political, economic, and monetary integration in a certain sense. But in another way, it also seems that the EU population doesn't follow its politicians, as we've seen with the French and also with the Dutch. The population rejected the proposed constitution. Also, there's a lot of discontent with the fact that centralization of all the power seems to be in Brussels, in a sense, and there are problems concerning immigration, unemployment, and some other issues.

The ratification of the constitution seems to be postponed until 2008, and it seems it will come out with some amendments. Can any one of you talk to us concerning what types of amendments will be necessary so that the populations of the countries in the EU will accept the ratification of the constitution?

Thank you.

• (1250)

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** I want my colleagues to respond, because I don't want to keep the limelight too much on this. I'll pass this over to Den Dover again. He wants to come in, and other colleagues can feel free to come in on this question regarding the constitution.

**Mr. Den Dover:** The constitution is a very hot political potato. The British Conservatives are totally opposed to such a constitution because we see it leading toward a state of Europe, whereas, as we believe as John Major, our last Conservative Prime Minister, said, this should be in subsidiarity because things are often best dealt with within the nation-state. I agree that Europe is getting to be more of a global power, but from the British Conservative view, we want to see trade, industry, and employment, not political integration. We say that if any part of the constitution is put out for revision to the present arrangements, that has to be by referendum of the British people.

The other main parties in the United Kingdom would disagree. The Liberal Democrats, if they were here, would say they want the constitution. Tony Blair's representative, Gary Titley, will be joining us in the next day or so. He would be in favour of it, but we think it would be a bad step.

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Thank you, Den.

Ian Hudghton wants the floor on the same issue.

**Mr. Ian Hudghton:** Thank you.

I should have said at the outset of my introduction that I'm a member of the Scottish National Party, so I have a very strong interest in Scotland's constitutional position and relationship to the European Union. That aside, as a generally pro-European party, we are not against having something called a constitution, provided that it's just a rubric for improving the efficient operation of what is becoming an extremely big and cumbersome bureaucracy.

The EU as a whole has raced ahead of public opinion in many respects. For example, in Scotland, Brussels and the European Union have been seen to be directly responsible for the virtual destruction of our fishing industry. There's a big argument behind that about the extent to which Brussels, as against successive U.K. governments, has been involved. There's a very real feeling of pain that is felt all around our coasts, and it leads to accusations of insensitivity on the part of the whole European Union.

As for their constitution, the one that's not quite on the table at the moment, I can't see that it can possibly be retabled in France and the Netherlands, for example, without taking account of the reasons why it was rejected there. I also think that had there been a referendum in Scotland, in the U.K., it quite certainly would have been rejected there too. Any one rejection is enough to kill it, so I think we have to look very seriously at how to get out of this and how to improve communication of what those who approve the constitution believe it's about.

• (1255)

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** One more colleague, Agnes Schierhuber, wants the floor.

**Mrs. Agnes Schierhuber (Interpretation):** Thank you very much.

I would just like to add briefly that you can see here the various opinions, although colleagues do not come from the same political group. Like other member states, Austria has accepted these contractual actions, and we would actually welcome the coming into force of the so-called constitution. Here again you see, in this different approach to the various cultures and traditions of the soon-to-be 27 member states, the difficulty we have. But we are convinced that Europe is more than an economic policy, and we believe that we do need a common security policy and also a common vision of how we play along.

Thank you

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there another question?

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** There are two more members on the floor, Duarte Freitas and Lasse Lehtinen.

**Mr. Duarte Freitas:** Thank you very much.

I will try to be very quick, but this question on the constitution is very delicate, and as you can see, it divides us a little.

I come from a centre-right party in Portugal. I can say that in Portugal all the parties, except the extreme left, agree that we need a new constitution, and most of the parties in Europe think the same way. It is not only a question of governance, because now, with the actual treaty, it is not easy to govern the European Union among the institutions. We will have two more member states in January. We are going to be 27. We already have 25 commissioners and now we are going to have 27. The whole procedure inside the European institution is not easy. At least because of this, we will need another treaty, but this is not the only thing.

This new treaty can give more power to the European Parliament, which we represent here, and with this, with more procedures of co-decision, for example, we are, in my opinion, giving a more democratic view to the European institutions, not only by the council of the member states but also by giving more power to the European Parliament and the co-decision procedures in other aspects besides this one.

There are other big issues on which we can do better with a new treaty. The problem with this treaty in France and the Netherlands and in other countries is not the treaty itself. I think the treaty was more a consequence of federal things than a subject of no...and all

the politicians have their own faults. In Europe, when something goes wrong we point to Brussels. When something is good, we say it is us, each country. That is one of the biggest problems. We will have to have a new treaty or constitution, whatever you call it, not only because of the governance but also because of democratic procedures and also because of getting more power and more regionality in the decisions. I am sure of this.

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Thank you, Duarte.

Lasse.

**Mr. Lasse Lehtinen:** When I listened to Mr. Dover I thought about my years in the 1980s in London as a diplomat. I once heard Margaret Thatcher explain to a journalist that Mr. Jacques Delors wanted to make Europe a huge Sweden. She couldn't think of anything worse than Sweden.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Lasse Lehtinen:** We looked totally differently upon this thing. Maybe it was too ambitious to call it a constitution in the beginning, but we could accept very well, as Duarte said, the contents of the deal and everything that worked there. What we certainly need is a new way of making decisions. We can't do it so that all 27 countries have to agree. No parliament, no council, works that way anywhere in the world. So if we pick up what is workable from this and don't call it a constitution anymore, but have another agreement and we name it after some small Belgian town, then maybe we would get an agreement.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Chairman, our EU ambassador of this commission is here, Dorian Prince, and he might like to add something before we sum up that thought-provoking question that Mr. Lehtinen—

**The Chair:** I know all parties here are going to want to have some questions.

Go ahead, sir.

**H.E. Dorian Ford Prince (Head of Delegation and Ambassador Designate, European Union - Delegation of the European Commission in Canada):** I think the first thing to remember is simply this: the fact that the constitution has not been ratified does not mean that the EU institutions failed to work. They're very cumbersome, and they need to be streamlined, but very many English language newspapers here are talking about a crisis in Europe, and I think that's not accurate, frankly.

I'd like to come back to your point at the very beginning. The major problem, I think, is how do we communicate better with the man in the street? I was watching Dutch television the night of the referendum in the Netherlands. They were interviewing person after person coming out of the polling booth, asking how they voted.

The interviewer suggested to one gentleman, in his seventies, that his no vote meant he was against the EU. The gentleman told the interviewer that when the Netherlands joined the European Economic Community, we didn't have a referendum. We were never consulted. When the Netherlands signed Maastricht and accepted the euro currency, we never had a referendum. When we enlarged the European Union five times, nobody ever consulted us. So last week, when this man received through the post from the Dutch government this "brick"—I'm using his word—of 400 pages of legal gobbledegook, he realized that they actually expected him to give a reasoned opinion on this day. And remember, this was the first referendum in the Netherlands for 126 years.

In those remarks I think you have the real problem. If you're going to do a referendum, you have to make it clear what you're having a referendum about. You have to give people the basic information. But don't send them a constitutional treaty.

I have to admit, even I have never read it from cover to cover.

**The Chair:** We will go to Monsieur Blais.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ):** Thank you very much.

My name is Raynald Blais and I represent the riding of Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine. We'll have an opportunity to meet again, since I'm also a member of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. You'll also get a chance to meet two of my constituents: a seal hunter and a seal entrepreneur who will be testifying here tomorrow. Today, we're not necessarily going to talk about the seal hunt.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to introduce to you my colleague, Diane Bourgeois, the Member for Terrebonne—Blainville. Her riding, if I'm not mistaken, is located north of Montreal.

I represent a rural riding. Fisheries and tourism are the two industries that drive my riding's economy. My colleague and I are also sovereigntists. We're members of a political party dedicated to laying the groundwork for independence and for the referendum that will one day be held in Quebec.

That said, I'd like to hear your views on international relations with respect to a matter like the seal hunt. As you can well appreciate, we have a great deal at stake. It's worth recalling that right now, unfortunately, a disinformation campaign about the seal hunt is under way. My feeling is that our meetings today, this evening and tomorrow will surely shed some light on this debate.

Moreover, I've had an opportunity to participate in a session of the Council of Europe. I've also welcomed to the Magdalen Islands members of the Council. They met with seal hunters and with residents of the Magdalen Islands and were able to speak more directly to them. This dialogue was a step in the right direction.

When you decided by a majority vote to sign the declaration to ban the import of all sealing products to the European continent, what was your rationale for adopting this position? I'm not speaking from the standpoint of the fishery or the marine resource, but from the standpoint of international relations. I know, as you well know, that when Quebec forms a nation - as it happens, there will be a nice

debate on this very subject tomorrow — and becomes a country, we will advocate respect for the customs and ways of other countries.

From what angle did you examine the question of the seal hunt? Thank you very much.

• (1305)

[English]

**The Chair:** Merci, Monsieur Blais.

Mr. Chairman, do you want to direct that question to some of your colleagues?

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** I'll hand it over to my colleague Ian Hudghton, who is an expert on fisheries overall and is a member of the fisheries committee.

I'll give it to you, Ian.

**Mr. Ian Hudghton:** Firstly, I didn't sign the declaration. That was because of the fact that I'm not, in principle, against population control, if you like, in these circumstances. But particularly, I didn't sign it because we had the opportunity in Brussels not that long ago to meet with the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Mr. Hearn, who made some reasonably good points, I thought, about what we should take into consideration, namely to hear the other side of the argument first. So I preferred to not sign and to come here first and hear the background.

I'm not at all surprised that a majority of members did sign the declaration. The context is one of extreme pressure by organizations, by individuals who care about animal welfare. For example, this is from *The Scotsman* newspaper from only last Saturday. On the front page of a national newspaper of Scotland it says, "From the killing fields of Canada to the shops of Scotland", and it goes on for two pages to make the whole case against this wickedly cruel seal hunt, as it is called, which, according to this newspaper, is mainly for the purpose of providing a decoration for sporran making in Scotland.

That's the context.

There were hundreds of e-mails that I'm sure we all received from people in connection with this written declaration. They weren't headed: "Please sign to stop the import of seal products to the EU"; they were headed: "Please sign to stop this unacceptably cruel seal hunt". I think there was a context of that sort of pressure on the part of many well-meaning individuals.

But we look forward to having detailed discussion here tomorrow, and then in Newfoundland, just to see to what extent the information that we were given by those against the hunt was accurate.

• (1310)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

*Madam Bourgeois, vous avez deux minutes.*

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Good day, ladies and gentlemen. I find it quite ironic to hear people talk about the constitution and about the European Union when we in Quebec are experiencing problems with the same issue.

That said, the European Union is keenly interested in safeguarding human rights. Recently, I received a document indicating that 173 countries had signed a UN resolution denouncing the US embargo on Cuba. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe some of you denounced Cuba's treatment of certain prisoners.

I need you to clarify your position for me. With respect to human rights, it's a known fact that human rights are violated in many countries. I'm somewhat uncomfortable saying this, but the UN has also taken a stand on the Aboriginal question in Canada.

Since you are very concerned about human rights, how do you feel about Canada's treatment of Aboriginals? Is this an important issue in Europe?

On the other hand, you are the defender of human rights in the world. Where would you like to see some changes made? Where do you stand on Cuba?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Bourgeois.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

**The Chair:** Maybe you would like to direct that question to the chair.

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Thank you.

Before I answer that, I just had a request from Agnes Schierhuber for the floor. I will come back to this question in a minute.

**Mrs. Agnes Schierhuber (Interpretation):** Thank you very much.

I also belong to those who accept the fact that there is a seal hunt here. As we have heard, there is no problem with regard to environmental protection, etc., that the area is inhabited. But my question is very simple. What is so criticized in the European Union by bureaucrats, based on those pictures and based on what animal protection means in Europe.... Is there no other type of hunting, especially as far as seals are concerned? That is the question here.

**The Chair:** That was on the previous question.

Mr. Blais, just quickly respond.

[Translation]

**Mr. Reynald Blais:** Very quickly, I'll have you know that we will be broaching this subject in detail tomorrow.

First of all, I want to say that the seal hunt as it is currently carried has been analysed by a group of independent veterinarians. By independent, I mean that they are not paid either by the government or by another party, for instance, by groups opposed to the hunt. These veterinarians examined current sealing practices. They

concluded that these methods were neither cruel nor barbaric, and that proper regulations were being followed.

We'll have an opportunity to present to you in detail the veterinarians' report and tomorrow, you'll receive additional details. If I had more time, I would gladly provide you with more details, but we'll have a chance to do just that either this evening or tomorrow.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Ó Neachtain—perhaps a question?

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Thank you.

I'm sorry for that, but we will have an opportunity tomorrow to elaborate further on the subject. Believe me, we came here to be very open-minded on the aspect of the seal hunt, and so on. We're here to learn, look, and see. We're not here to judge. That's very important.

I'm sorry, I lost the question of Madame Bourgeois in translation. It was on human rights in Cuba particularly, if any of the colleagues want to answer that. If not, I'll hand it to our ambassador, Mr. Prince, to answer that in general.

• (1315)

[Translation]

**Mr. Dorian Prince:** Thank you for the question.

On the subject of human rights, the European Union is very active, as you know, and once a year, we produce a report on the human rights situation in each world country, beginning with member states. Obviously, if even a minor violation is noted, the matter is brought to the attention of the Court of Justice. The same goes for violations by third party countries. Consequently, once a year, member states, the European Commission, the Parliament of Europe and the General Secretariat of the Council of Europe — because our structure is quite complex — work together to draft a report on how Canada has done in terms of meeting the obligations it has agreed to and, if necessary, we formulate recommendations.

We drew up our report on Cuba the same way. We found that in some respects, there was no justification for the US embargo. However, we were also critical of Cuba's attitude. We try to remain neutral. You understand what I'm saying.

Our last report on Canada - the one released last year — was critical of certain things, notably the disadvantaged position of the Inuit, along with drug and prostitution problems in certain communities. However, we also recognized the considerable efforts made by the provinces and by federal authorities and we did not raise any objections or make any recommendations.

On a yearly basis, we look at the situation in each individual country. A working group comprised of member states, known as COHOM, focusses on human rights and determines if any cases should be brought before the United Nations Human Rights Commission. For example, every year, the European Commission has tabled resolutions to the UN on the human rights situation in North Korea. It's a matter of procedure.

Obviously, I don't want to take up too much time right now, but this is a very timely issue in Europe, one that is being followed very closely.

[English]

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

Are there some questions from your side, Mr. Chair?

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Are there any questions from members on any specific aspect of our work and your interests?

As you know, we have a very wide program in coming to Canada. We have diversified our interest in the seal hunt and other areas, and we want to give a lot of time and attention to those in their various places. But if there are any questions on foreign affairs or development particularly....

Mr. Toomas Savi.

**Mr. Toomas Savi:** Thank you, Chair.

When we came to Canada we knew that the main issue would be the seals. But I represent a small country and we are a new member. After the last enlargement in Europe, we have seven or eight countries that are struggling now with the visa requirement question. I am very happy that the Canadian government has abolished this visa requirement for Estonia. So, in this case, I travelled to Canada without requiring a visa.

But our very close neighbours, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Federative Republic, and Hungary have difficulty now. As you know, every country in the European Union has to be treated equally, whether we are new or small. So what will happen in the near future on this issue?

Thank you.

• (1320)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm going to ask two people to answer that question. First is Mr. Van Loan, and then Mr. Patry—very quick and concise answers, please.

**Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC):** I am the parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs, with specific responsibilities for the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East. It's a file that I've been engaged in actively. The fact that Estonia just had its visa requirements lifted has nothing to do with the fact that I'm from Estonian background.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Peter Van Loan:** However, I have been active on it, and the approach the government has taken has been to establish certain criteria to evaluate whether countries are making progress toward having the visa requirement lifted, not unlike what you might be doing on EU accession. We want to see the refusal rate reduced to an acceptable level, and so on.

Estonia was in that range for a long time, although the previous government took a decision not to lift visa requirements for anyone. We looked at it right from the start, and Estonia was clearly in a very low range of refusal with virtually no problems, so it was very easy.

There are a number of new accession countries that are very close, and some have a bit more work to do. We've committed to review it on a regular basis. It's something I continue to press our government

to pay attention to. I do not expect to see imminent release for all of those countries, but there might be very good progress in the short term for some of them, based on the kind of criteria you're looking for.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Patry, do you want to supplement that question?

**Mr. Bernard Patry:** Yes. Every time we meet our colleagues from these countries, the question is raised. There was a review done in 2005, and there will probably be another review done by the department some time in April or May 2007.

We don't accept reciprocity just because another country gives it to us. Some guarantees are needed, and we're very careful about this. But it doesn't mean we don't have any interest in this. Parliamentarians have a great interest in this, and we're pushing our government to do these reviews as quickly as possible, because I think that's the solution. We want to give all of these countries the same reciprocity they give us. We know that next spring there will be another comprehensive review, and we hope that some new countries will benefit at that time from our government lifting the requirements.

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

Mr. Chair, do you have another question on that side?

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Mr. Dover has a question.

**Mr. Den Dover:** I was delighted to hear last night that Canada is playing a very strong part in Afghanistan in infrastructure development. But could you deal with the two dreaded words "Iraq" and "Iran"? What is the view, if any, of the Canadian government?

**The Chair:** I can speak on that a little bit. Mr. Wilfert may want to add something.

Canada has a leading role in Afghanistan. We are committed to staying there. We believe it's a very important country, not only for the Afghan people and the human rights and all those things, but we believe it's a test of a couple of other institutions, one being NATO and the other being the United Nations. So I think the government has been very clear that our military actions are committed until 2009.

We recognize that delivery of humanitarian aid is very difficult if we haven't secured the area, so it's important. We commend all NATO countries that are involved in it. There's an ongoing request to invite other NATO countries to become more involved, and we're deeply committed to....

Pardon me?

**Mr. Peter Van Loan:** Iran and Iraq.

**The Chair:** Iran and Iraq. Actually, you didn't mention North Korea. Or did you mention North Korea? Yes, we've got enough with Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq; we don't have to bring up North Korea.

I think the resolutions that have been brought forward to North Korea are very important with respect to how we deal with some of the other countries down the road. I think we must be very sure that any country that has any element of influence in that country, especially those in close proximity—China, other countries—will exert whatever ability they can to see that the letter of the resolution is followed, and that we make it very clear that we are not going to waiver, because Iran is watching.

Certainly, I think all parties, all countries, are very concerned about what we see happening in Iran. Hopefully, the United Nations will be able to step up to it.

We're not involved in Iraq. There are issues there. Maybe I'll leave them to Mr. Van Loan.

• (1325)

**Mr. Peter Van Loan:** First on Iran, picking up on the security theme, we're very supportive of the process that was put in place in which the EU has been involved. Obviously, we're not a party to it in terms of dealing with the nuclear issue. I'm a bit disappointed, as I am sure everyone else is, that it has not borne better fruit up to this point in time, but rest assured that Canada strongly supports taking a firm position on the proliferation issues and the risk there and supports the efforts of the European Union there.

In Iraq, in terms of reconstruction, obviously we don't have military involvement. There are some military folk who, through transfers with the States, have been in Iraq as members of U.S. contingents. But in terms of development, we've been involved on the security front with the training of police, doing it out of Jordan, and I believe we've been pretty involved in the donors' group—Ted can perhaps correct me if I'm missing the mark on that—including chairing one of the meetings, I think. So we've been involved in the reconstruction. We've given generously there. Our biggest recipients of aid have been Afghanistan and Haiti, but Iraq has figured into the equation because we recognize the reconstruction there is very important.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Wilfert, very quickly.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** With regard to Afghanistan, the previous government committed troops there, in part in the war on terrorism. We believe very strongly in three elements: development, which we don't hear enough about; diplomacy, particularly dealing with her neighbours, including Pakistan; and obviously defence. Canada has, through a resolution of the House of Commons, committed itself until 2009.

In terms of NATO, we certainly would like to see more heavy lifting by some NATO countries. In fact, there are restrictions by some NATO countries in Afghanistan in terms of offensive capabilities. This, of course, is a concern because that puts more burden on our forces, particularly those in the Kandahar region.

As far as Iraq is concerned, the previous government decided not to support the replacement of the government of Saddam Hussein on the basis that there are many countries in the world whose governments we may not like, but we don't believe in regime change; that is really up to the people in those countries.

As far as Iran is concerned, I think Iran and North Korea clearly... Any exclusive club—the nuclear club—does not want other members to join. What happens in North Korea will have a direct effect, certainly in my view, on Iran. As far as North Korea is concerned, the Chinese clearly are displeased with the North Koreans. They have the ability to really, if they wanted to, put the screws to them. They don't, obviously, because they don't want the Americans up at the Yalu River. On the other hand, they are very concerned that this is a regime that has continued to defy both its friends and its foes. And Iran is watching, clearly, in terms of what response the UN has taken.

We certainly have appreciated the support of the EU countries with regard to that, but again, I think the byword is that we have to be consistent; if we're not consistent, we'll continue to see proliferation, particularly if it winds up in non-state actors, which is a real concern.

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

I do recognize that you wish to attend question period. My feeling is that we could probably go until 1:45 or 1:50. I'm sure they will have reserved seating for you in the gallery, so we can probably stretch it.

I want to make sure Madam McDonough has an opportunity here, but Mr. Menzies has a question now.

Ted.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** I will not take a great deal of time.

We started down this path with the 0.7% question, and I want to carry on a little further with regard to the development aspect. Something that has been very near and dear to my heart is the 2001 Doha development round. I'm sure many of us in this room share the frustration and the disappointment that we may have just seen this huge opportunity to help the developing countries....

Canada isn't faultless in this either. We are not squeaky clean. We have some issues to deal with in our own protectionism. We look at the U.S. Farm Bill; we're just not sure what the next Farm Bill is going to hold. We look at the European Union common agriculture policy. It's protectionism, and a lot of it is for our agricultural industries. Subsidies to the tune of \$360 billion go to farmers around the world. That's against, in direct proportion, the \$60 billion we give in foreign aid.

I think we will all rue the day if we don't get this back on track. I'm hoping that now that the U.S. election is over with, we can maybe get the negotiations kick-started again. It's going to be very difficult.

I would like you to share some of your thoughts on that. Is there some hope here? Do you hold out some hope?

• (1330)

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Braghetto wants the question, but I'll take it, if I may, because I have been to Cancun and Hong Kong, and next week will be in Geneva, trying to do exactly what you have said, trying to revive the process and in the manner that indeed you mentioned, which is very important for the global economy. It's a very ambitious project, of course, to get unanimity on overall trade, particularly on the point you mentioned on agriculture.

Now, this is not the view of the delegation; it's particularly my own view regarding agriculture, and I hold it very, very close.

Agriculture represents 5%, give or take a percentage point, of world trade. The other 95% of trade is held back by this insistence on everything agricultural going through. As you know, agriculture is a very emotive issue, with very regional aspects.

I come from the west of Ireland, where we have only small farmers. I would say that the common agricultural policy has sustained small units right throughout its history. We have, I believe, reformed that to be non-trade-distorting. I hope that in agriculture we will get some sense of bringing together those who wish to go forward on trade overall. That is our ambition, and that is very much the ambition of our commissioner, Mr. Mandelson. I do not agree with him that he should reduce our agricultural portfolios, because I believe we should not outsource our food security. That's an aspect that I in particular will be very strong on.

Now, the overall project of the Doha development round is our ambition and our aim, and it will continue to be that. We'll have to tweak the system on agriculture somewhat, but I believe we can. I believe by agreement we can. But you know that the U.S. Farm Bill has to be revised accordingly and downsized accordingly to even approach our level of reform in the CAP.

At the same time, I don't think you should dismantle the whole project by being over-ambitious. We have to be careful here. Even though I might be a lone voice on the international trade committee in the European Parliament at times, I'm not talking about the rancher-type farmer; I'm talking about the heart and soul of Europe, the small or medium farmer.

So we have to be conscious of that overall approach.

That is my response to you, sir.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Any other comments?

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Agnes Schierhuber.

**Mrs. Agnes Schierhuber (Interpretation):** Thank you.

You know my background; I come from Oesterreich. So you know where I come from.

Throughout the reform process, the European Union has undertaken, over the course of the last 15 years, I think, a reform thrust that has to be recognized, and the European Union, with the reform of the common agricultural policy of 2003, has actually set the pace for the Doha Round. We are not of the opinion, and it is always here a grey area of the European Parliament...it is not a unanimous opinion that we are not moving any further in one direction.

Mr. Chair has discussed this at length, but the point here is that we also have a certain responsibility to provide the 450 million, soon to be 500 million, inhabitants of Europe with base products, feeding

them healthy food and giving them a certain basis. It is well known—and this is, I believe, not sufficiently highlighted at the international level—that the European Union is the biggest net importer of agricultural products in the world. The European Union imports more agricultural goods than, for instance, the United States, New Zealand, Japan, etc., together, and this is a point where we see the weight of our responsibility.

We are all interested in reform, but we simply cannot accept that we in Europe would have to give up a production that we also absolutely need, and also with regard to what the European agricultural policy is, where we have made our position clear in the decisions taken in Luxembourg. The European Union confirmed that it was promoting a comprehensive farmers' agriculture in all regions in Europe, meaning also in the peripheral regions and in the difficult regions—I think of my member state, where more than 60% of the surface area is in disadvantaged mountain zones—where it is absolutely necessary for cultivation, and also because of and with regard to environmental concerns.

So what we have here is a totally different tradition from the one I know and have gotten to know over the past five years in Canadian agriculture.

● (1335)

**The Chair:** Mr. Menzies, do you want to respond to that? You have about 35 seconds.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** It's hard for a politician to say anything in 35 seconds.

I do appreciate that, Ms. Schierhuber, but I do hope we recognize that all countries are trying to protect their farmers in some way, shape, or form. The way the developing countries are trying to protect their farmers is to give them an opportunity to trade. And that's what we need to recognize, that these developing countries need an opportunity to compete so that one day a farmer can feed his family and also hold up his head and say, "I'm growing food for more than just my family."

We need to provide them market access, whether it's in the United States, Canada, or wherever, so that they can compete and help themselves. Otherwise, this just becomes a bottomless pit where we're throwing good aid money after bad. We have to involve them in international trade so that they can help themselves.

That was more than my time, I'm sure.

Thank you.

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** I'm conscious of the time factor, Mr. Chair, but our Italian member has asked for the floor, as has Mr. Duarte Freitas. Perhaps you would allow us to have those questions.

**The Chair:** That's great. After that, I want to recognize Madam McDonough.

Mr. Freitas.

**Mr. Duarte Freitas:** I'd like to make a brief comment on what our friend has just said.

I understand your worry, but I don't know if this is the way to give the opportunity to those developing countries. What happens most of the time is that in Europe the little farmers have no conditions to produce, and the big capitalists take the money, go to the developing countries, and don't respect the environment or the social things. We cannot compete with this.

We have to protect our farmers. We have to ask for free trade, but more than that, we have to ask for fair trade. On the Doha table we have to put this as one of the main points for agriculture. We cannot open our doors to someone who is burning the Amazon, producing things using almost slaves, while stopping our farmers in Europe or in Canada from producing.

So we have to take this into consideration as well.

**The Chair:** It's more a comment to that.

We will go to our Italian colleague.

**Mr. Iles Braghetto (Interpretation):** I'd like to speak on a totally different topic, and from a certain perspective, a matter of curiosity, but one that could also shed light on the very diverse models of integration that are being applied in the world.

My question has to do with native Americans; that is to say, my questions are as follows: What place do they occupy in Canadian society today? What institutional guarantees have they been given so that they can live according to their traditions? What is the type or types of involvement and participation in the country's government? And as a matter of curiosity, how many are there? I know of the Cree and the Inuit; I do not know if there are others.

• (1340)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm looking around to see who serves on our aboriginal committee. I think Mr. Patry did, at one point in time, a long time ago.

I'll turn to Mr. Van Loan.

**Mr. Peter Van Loan:** I am not an expert, but the first nations function at two different levels. One level is as full citizens of Canada, with all the rights of all Canadians, and we have some native members of Parliament as well. In that sense, they're fully integrated members of society.

At the same time, there are special rights that are accorded to them by virtue of the status they may have as first nations, particularly on reserve. It results in certain privileges in terms of income support and other assistance from the federal government.

The federal government has the responsibility, whereas normally the province has the responsibility, for things such as education, health care, and so on. The federal government has the responsibility for the first nations population, which is often delivered through the provinces through agreements.

In terms of actual population, I can't give you a count on that. In fact, most people probably couldn't. There are on-reserve Indians,

off-reserve Indians, and Métis who come from the original fur traders, some of whom interbred with the native population.

Determining Métis status is a very difficult and challenging thing to do, because it has gone on for many generations. At what point does someone cease to be Métis and become a mainstream part of the population, and so on? They don't have reserves, and it's difficult to come up with accurate numbers.

If we looked at the census, I'm sure we could come up with peoples' self-declarations, but I don't have those.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

Very quickly, Mr. Patry.

**Mr. Bernard Patry:** I want to let you know about the numbers. It's difficult because we have first nations within their own bands. A lot of them live outside the band and a lot of them live in cities. The data is different. It depends on whether you take that into consideration or not. But I think there are 600 different bands across the country, and I must say a lot of them are very successful.

What you see on television is the same thing we see in any region when a band has a problem. We have a problem right now with the water supply for one band, and it's shown everywhere in the world.

I must say there are thousands and thousands of companies that are successful. In my own province of Quebec, there is a band called Innue Essipit. This band has full employment, and they hire white people. They own camping grounds. You name it; they own everything. They're very successful.

I really feel the government is treating them well in the sense that over \$6 billion was budgeted for them, according to responsibility.

When you have mining companies up north, there are mining companies for diamonds and mining companies up north in the Northwest Territories, and there was negotiation. When the government negotiated with them, they took part of their customs. When it's time for fishing and hunting, they close the factory and they close the mines. Everything is taken into consideration.

I must say that when you live in Canada, the reality is much different from what you see abroad or in any other country.

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

I want to go to Madam McDonough.

Thank you for your patience, Madam McDonough.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP):** Thank you very much. There's never enough time.

Welcome.

Your chair has made it clear you're not all of one view; you're not in complete accord on all issues.

Our chairman spoke about where we are in Afghanistan.

It will come as no surprise to you to know that not all of us, as members of this committee, are in agreement with the decision of the Canadian government to extend by two years an already committed mission that had nine months to go—subjected it to a vote, basically suspended the normal rules, and put that vote through without the benefit of briefing notes, without the benefit of evaluation of how the current mission was going. So my party, although it's a difficult thing to deal with, voted unanimously against the extension of that mission. I think subsequent events make it even clearer why that was the wise course, which doesn't solve the problem, that's for sure.

I want to pick up on something I wasn't going to raise, but someone else did, and it deserves an alternate point of view, and that is the status of our aboriginal people. In some ways, the first question raised, which was about Canada's commitment to delivering on its official development assistance levels, is our greatest international shame. Our greatest domestic shame is the current status of our aboriginal people.

Not to take it from us, because I think in some ways it's a more appropriate question to be put to the aboriginal Canadian community. Today, by chance, is the tenth anniversary of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, a document that was drafted after a very exhaustive consultation across the country and a great deal of research and soul-searching.

It is not an exaggeration to say that ten years later that document, which was called *Gathering Strength*, is viewed by many aboriginal people as perhaps better named *Gathering Dust*. The reality is, yes, there are some aboriginal people doing very well, but there are many aboriginal people, inner-city people, non-reserve based, who are living in terrible conditions of poverty, with very high levels of unemployment, and there are many reserves where there are unemployed people in the 70% to 80% range, who don't have safe water in today's world, which is simply unacceptable.

It was never supposed to have been a maximum, but a minimum international obligation by donor nations to commit to 0.7% of gross national income for overseas development assistance. I have a question around the role the EEC may play or not play in this regard.

Very quickly, when I was elected to office initially, it was in the province of Nova Scotia, at the provincial level, and as chance would have it, I was the only woman and the only New Democrat elected in that election. Through some mysterious process, I know not what, the EEC somewhere took pity on me and invited me to come on a one-month study tour of the then member countries. I was instantly struck by something, now over 20 years later, which has stuck with me ever since, at the model—then EEC, now EU—for setting standards toward which you constantly work to try to elevate your member nations and toward which you try to bring aspiring members to a certain level to bring them in.

In some ways, the Canadian model is the inverse of that, and one of the criticisms about the free trade deals—not fair trade, but free trade deals—into which you've entered is that it tends to be based on a drive to the bottom, to the lowest common denominator, without setting clear standards.

With respect to that model, I've watched the success of it with respect to economic development in Ireland, the result of that

regional economic policy. The result of that is I've lost my younger son to Ireland, and I have two Irish granddaughters and a third one on the way—because of the dynamism of that.

My question is whether there is a role for the European Union. I realize they can't reach in and directly affect domestic policies, member nation policies, with respect to meeting the ODA obligations.

• (1345)

Is there a process at the EU level that works on bringing countries up to deliver at least on the minimum of 0.7%?

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

**Mr. Dorian Prince:** I will answer very quickly. I don't want to take too much time, because this could take an hour. Basically, it is an obligation on member states. So you have a council regulation, and member states have to submit a timetable by which they will reach 0.7%. So we have the good guys, like the Swedes, who are there, and we have others who have to catch up. It gets more complicated as more members come in, but it's an obligatory process. It's not left to discretion. Perhaps the best thing I could do would be to give you the annual report on development assistance, which explains the mechanism.

What usually happens is that for each country getting aid, you have an EU program, and then it's shared between the member states and the European Union. So it's very rare for the European Union to act on its own or for a member state to act on its own. Do you see what I mean? The whole thing is coordinated, and the European Commission itself runs about one-fifth of the total EU budget. We run about €7 billion per annum, and the total for Europe as a whole at the moment is about €38 billion.

I think the best thing is if I give the committee a copy of the annual report. It explains how it's done.

• (1350)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Bourgeois, did you have a very short, little, concise question?

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** I have a quick comment, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to mention three things in connection with the aboriginal question.

Firstly, ten years ago, the Erasmus-Dussault Report was released in Canada. As my colleague mentioned, this report is still very timely.

Secondly, an agreement was concluded with Quebec's aboriginals pursuant to which we now consider them as our equals. The agreement is referred to as the Peace of the Braves.

Thirdly, our committee is studying democracy and you can see for yourself that regardless of party affiliation or ideology, we can express our opinions freely. Our chair allows us the freedom to do so. Furthermore, since we are studying democracy, I hope that colleagues on the other side of the House will come to understand the aspirations of our First Nations and, very democratically, consider them as our equals.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madame Bourgeois, for clearing that up for us.

We want to thank our friends and our colleagues from the European Parliament for being here. I think our relationship, our friendship, grows closer every time we have an opportunity to meet. We certainly wish you well as you continue your meetings and your dialogues here in Ottawa and across the country. And thank you very much for being able to spend this lunchtime with us.

On behalf of our committee, we wish you the best. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Seán Ó Neachtain:** Mr. Chairman, on behalf of my delegation, thank you very much for receiving us and for your hospitality. It was so wonderful and delightful to be with you. We

understand your pressure of time, but we look forward to having a very good mission here and collaborating with you into the future. Perhaps some of you will be able to visit the EU.

Just in case you might think, from our various presentations, that we are divided on many issues, we are varied, and variety is the spice of life. Our motto is, "Unity by diversity". I'll tell you one thing—more unites us than divides us.

Thank you very much.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I would encourage you, if you are going to attend question period, to rush over there.

We are adjourned.

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