House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on National Defence

NDDN • NUMBER 018 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, October 25, 2006

Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, I'll call this meeting to order.

This is the 18th meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence under Standing Order 108(2), our study on Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

Today we'd like to welcome the Senlis Council, Norine MacDonald, president and founder, and Emmanuel Reinert, executive director. Welcome. It's good to have you here.

I understandt you've been briefed on the procedure to some degree, so we'll open it up with your comments. Take the time you need to make your presentation or clarify the points you need to, and then we'll open it up to questions in our usual manner.

Go ahead, Ms. MacDonald.

Ms. Norine MacDonald (President and Founder, The Senlis Council): Thank you very much.

First of all, I would like to thank the honourable members for inviting the Senlis Council to discuss the important issue of Afghanistan and Canada's involvement. I apologize for my inability to address you in French, but my colleague Emmanuel Reinert will answer any questions put to us in French.

The Senlis Council is a security and development policy group with a special interest in counter-narcotics. We have offices in Paris, London, and Kabul, and field offices in Herat, Helmand, Nangahar, and in Kandahar province, which is of particular interest to this committee.

I've been living and working in Afghanistan since January 2005 and I've spent a great deal of time, especially in recent months, in our field office in Kandahar and out in the rural areas of Kandahar. We've released a report, “Afghanistan Five Years Later”, which looked at the dynamics, particularly in southern Afghanistan, on the anniversary of 9/11.

We ourselves were surprised. I was surprised to find that even in the last eight to ten months there has been a dramatic deterioration in the security situation in Kandahar, as well as a poverty and starvation crisis among the rural communities of Kandahar.

Kandahar is now a complete war zone. The Taliban are not only winning militarily but, more importantly, they have begun to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the local Afghan people.

The poverty crisis we saw in Kandahar and the rest of southern Afghanistan was due to three factors. This is based on our interviews of the locals in the villages and what they told us was the cause for the refugee camps, and the problem with food and starvation.

First, there is a loss of livelihood through the U.S.-led forced poppy crop eradication last spring. As I'm sure you know, the economy of Kandahar is basically a poppy-crop economy.

There is displacement of the population due to the bombing and the localized violence, especially in Panjwai, and it is a desert area that has suffered from recurrent drought. It's a dust bowl now. And for those of you who are familiar with drought in the Canadian prairies, it's very similar to what my parents described to me during those years.

Makeshift unofficial camps have sprung up and a starvation crisis is jeopardizing the survival of many, especially the young and the very old. Children are starving to death, literally down the road from the Canadian military base in Kandahar, and there are people in makeshift camps who have received no aid from anyone, not from us nor from the UN.

It was clear I was the first foreigner they had seen. They asked us for food and they stated they had not received any food relief from any foreigners, nor any Afghans.

This extreme poverty has led to a growing anger and resentment against the international community and is directly fueling the insurgency and support for the Taliban. People feel abandoned by the internationals and by the Canadians, who they originally believed were there to help them. Canadian troops in Kandahar are therefore fighting the Taliban insurgency against the backdrop of an increasingly hostile local population.

Eradication is generating support for the Taliban. The U.S.-led forced eradication of poppy fields that took place in Kandahar meant that many farmers lost their livelihood and they are now struggling to feed their families. The Afghans are not able to differentiate between American and Canadian soldiers; they can't tell the difference between Americans, Canadians, British, Dutch. They can't tell the difference between military personnel and private military contractors who are operating in the area.

To us, it may be apparent who's a Canadian and who's an American and who's a private military contractor, but to them, and for good reason, we all only seem to be foreigners. So we are all seen by them as complicit in the eradication activities.

This year about 3,000 hectares of poppies were eradicated in Kandahar, but it was the poorest farmers whose livelihoods were lost, because they were unable to pay the necessary bribes to stop their crops from being destroyed.

The Taliban, who are very politically clever, have seen a political opportunity in the anger against the NATO presence that eradication triggered and they've used that to their advantage in building political support in the south. This has created a very dangerous environment for the Canadian military to operate in. And I should specifically state that as a Canadian I was very proud to see our Canadian military operating in extremely fierce fighting. There's bombing every day, fighting every day. The British military next door in Helmand, where we also do research, has stated that it's the fiercest fighting the British military has seen in a generation—and that was the British paratroopers, who are some of the finest military in the world, who found the fighting there very difficult. So you can see that we have much to be proud of when we see what the Canadian military is doing in Kandahar.

When we are in the villages doing research, we are now doing video footage. We're going to show you a very short video from the villages that I visited. There are photos that I took and video footage taken by my Afghan colleagues, and then I'll have some concluding remarks. I am being mindful of the time discipline.

[*Video presentation*]

● (1540)

Ms. Norine MacDonald:

Looking at this dramatic situation, what can we do to help the people of Kandahar in a positive way and make the mission of our troops there a feasible one? I would like to share with you our recommendations for a new Canada hearts and minds campaign in Kandahar.

We propose an emergency task force and a series of three immediate actions to create a more enabling grassroots environment for our troops in Kandahar. This task force would be led by a multi-party-appointment special envoy with the authority to coordinate and integrate the military development responses. A Canadian group of experts and organizations should be formed as part of the emergency task force on Kandahar and to support the coordinated work of the special envoy. The task force would enable Canada to launch three immediate actions to make a real difference in the living conditions of the communities in Kandahar.

Firstly, we propose that Canada should take the lead at the international and NATO level in Afghanistan, to formulate a new Afghanistan policy approach, especially for southern Afghanistan, where the insurgency is strongest. This should be tailored to tackle the real hearts and minds campaign. Canada should convene an emergency meeting of NATO countries to reformulate immediately the approach in Afghanistan to deal with the insurgency.

As part of that, Canada should support the launch of test pilots for a poppy licensing system in Afghanistan for the production of much needed pain relieving medicines, such as morphine and codeine—and you should have the paper on this proposal in both French and English in your pack. An Afghan brand of fair-trade morphine and codeine would help Afghanistan provide to other developing countries medicines to deal with their pain and provide a sustainable and legitimate lawful livelihood for the Afghan poppy farmers.

In addition to the economic emergency plan to be developed, Canada should deliver an emergency food and aid package without delay, this month, as soon as possible in the coming weeks, to help calm the insurgency and engage with the local populations and prepare for the winter.

A series of Kandahar jirgas, the traditional community meetings, should be organized in order to listen to the needs of the Afghan population. In this way development will be tailored to what they say their needs are, as opposed to guesstimate of what their needs are.

And the emergency task force should organize the necessary infrastructure to allow Canadian citizens and organizations to get involved in helping Kandahar in a very practical way: to allow Canada to adopt Kandahar. There are about 800,000 people living there. Through the development of expertise—agricultural expertise, irrigation systems, community support programs—I believe Canadians, both as individuals and organizations, see our commitment to Kandahar and would like to help support our troops there. We can provide an infrastructure for that to happen.

We've made an historic commitment in Kandahar that's not only about Kandahar and not only about Afghanistan, but about who we are as Canadians. We must immediately implement a new approach. If the international community leaves Kandahar or is unsuccessful in Kandahar, we will essentially be making a gift to al-Qaeda of a geopolitical home for terrorist extremism.

Afghanistan is our new backyard. The winter is fast approaching here and in Kandahar; a winter harsher than the one we know here will come to those communities. So far, there is no relief plan either for the refugee camps around Kandahar city or for the rural population of Kandahar.

● (1545)

We have lost, to a great extent, the hearts and minds campaign in the last few months, but there's still an opportunity, if we act now, to win that back. We would call upon this committee to recommend this type of urgent action so that the people of Kandahar can see that Canadians are willing to fulfill their commitment there.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move into our first round with seven minutes for Mr. Dosanjh and then Mr. Bachand.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Thank you very much for visiting us and talking to us.

You said that militarily we're losing the war and that we're losing the war of hearts and minds. You've indicated what your approach would be and what your recommendations are. There is, generally, an argument that's heard in Canada, which is that we first need to provide security, and then we will do reconstruction. We're doing some reconstruction and humanitarian work, but it's negligible compared to what needs to be done.

Yesterday the governor of Helmand province in fact stated—it was reported in the press—that he needs more assistance with aid to provide security by wooing Afghans away from the Taliban. I would like you to address the chicken-and-egg proposition. It is a difficult one. You have been on the ground, and I'd like you to address that.

I'd like you to address one more question. There are estimates given to us by various sources as to how many Taliban we are fighting in Kandahar province or in Helmand. We're concerned with Kandahar. I would like you to tell me what you think we're fighting, how many, what force, what they're made up of, whether they are changing, evolving, increasing or decreasing. I'd like you to inform me of that.

Thank you.

● (1550)

Ms. Norine MacDonald: On the first point, next door to Kandahar is Helmand, and then there's Uruzgan as well. We have Kandahar, the British have Helmand, and the Dutch have Uruzgan, and they all have the same problems we have, exactly the same problems. When we're talking to those countries, we're having the same conversations. If Canada says in NATO we really need to solve this problem, we've all got the same problem, let's see if we can work together, I do think that's a useful thing to do.

I understand this silo concept of having the military separate from development and aid. I understand the history of that, but it's not working. When we say there should be a special task force and a special envoy, we're trying to deal with that, because that silo stuff has to stop. It's not working. It's malfunctioning. We have to innovate. The answer can't be that these are two separate things. It's not a war that's going to be won by military means alone. We have to innovate now. If CIDA is not constructed to deliver that aid, then things have to be reorganized. We can't say we're going to lose Kandahar because we have the military here and CIDA here, so it's time for some innovation to meet those circumstances and our commitment.

Regarding the estimated number of Taliban, the answer is endless. There's an endless supply. There are two types of Taliban. There is the al-Qaeda linked Taliban with Arab, Chechen, and Pakistani elements financing and campaigning and organizing that. Then there are the local boys from the village who are firing an AK-47, who've never been to the big city of Kandahar, and who are fighting for money. We had them, and we've lost them, and we can get them back. This lower group of people is endless, because the male unemployment rate is 80% to 90%, and what most of those boys can do is shoot a gun. There are 800,000 people in Kandahar; most of them are living in extreme poverty. Most of them now are angry at us. Helmand has one million. There are lots more over the border in Pakistan. Oruzgan is being called the house of death.

In the Russian war, two million Afghans died fighting foreigners. Two million. The Russians had ten times as many military troops in Afghanistan as NATO has at this moment. The Afghans will fight and fight. We have a formidable situation there. The Taliban is very smart in the way they are dealing with their grassroots political campaign and in the way they're doing their hearts and minds campaign. They're locals. They speak the language. Many of them are from the same tribe. We have to be very clever if we're going to win this one, and as I've told you, I don't think we can accept that we might lose.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: So when you say there's an endless supply....

Ms. Norine MacDonald: We hear reports that 150 or 300 Taliban have been killed, but it's hard to know who's the good guy and who's the bad guy when Afghan males are killed in a village. They look exactly the same and dress exactly the same, so you don't know who you've killed. There cannot be reliable body counts. If 150 Taliban are killed, you can go to a refugee camp where there are a thousand families and hire replacements in half an hour. We are living now inside a hostile population with recruits arriving every day.

If a member of my family were in the Canadian military in Kandahar, I would be very concerned about the environment in which they are being asked to fight. We, the international community, are doing things in Kandahar that put our military at risk and make their mission so much more dangerous than it should be.

I think we're all very well-intentioned when we're there, but there's a lot of blow-back going on from these other policies in other departments. This has to be coordinated. You need a proper counter-narcotics policy that actually addresses their situation. You need a proper development and aid policy that is matched up and supports the military. It all has to be coordinated in some way.

● (1555)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: When President Karzai was here, I heard him say in his speech to Parliament that if we don't kill the poppies, the poppies will kill us. You're giving us a different message, which is to regularize the poppy growth and utilize it the world over—provide an economic base.

Why would President Karzai say that to us, if he knows, presumably, that simply antagonizes people and makes more enemies for him and for us?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Of course I can't say what's in the mind of President Karzai, but I can tell you that our impression of the situation is that the Afghan government does not believe that the international community has given them the option of licensing for morphine and codeine, and that's being resisted by elements of the international community.

The Afghan government is a fledgling government that is in a very insecure political situation. They rely on us to know what their policy choices are. So the international community has to start saying to the Afghan government, let's run some pilot projects to see what happens—which is specifically what we've asked to do—and send a positive message.

I think he needs to hear that from us before he is willing to stick his neck out and say that's what they want to do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachand is next, and then Ms. Black.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Good afternoon.

First, I want to congratulate you on your presentation, because a picture is often worth a thousand words, and what we've just seen is worth any number of theoretical presentations.

I'd like to discuss a few topics with you, but first I want to clarify one point. You can eventually answer a few of my questions. I don't want to give you too much time, because I want to ask my questions. Then you can answer them briefly.

It seems to me there's a difference between the war the Russians waged and the one the international forces are currently conducting. In my opinion, the Russian war was a land occupation war, whereas the war waged by NATO and the international community—even though mistakes have been made—is a war of liberation. They want to improve the lot of Afghans. Perhaps they're going about it wrong, but I nevertheless think that these two interventions are different in kind.

You also put a lot of emphasis on NATO. Would it be possible for you to provide us with more instruments like this, such as documents like that or even, possibly, the cassette?

My colleagues and I have to go to a meeting of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association in Quebec City. And I'd like us to talk about that in a moment. If you could make a little detour, I would like to introduce you to the people there. That will take place from November 13 to 17. If we had instruments, that would be interesting for the parliamentarians who will be there representing all the nations.

There have been interesting discussions at NATO—I've been taking part in them for a number of years—on crop substitution. You say that perhaps the pharmaceutical industry could take part of the poppy production. Talks are currently under way between NATO and the European Union to replace the crop over there. The European Union would guarantee the Afghans a market share. The problem when you change crops is that you can grow potatoes, but if you can't sell them, you're stuck with your potatoes. But if the European Union undertook to make an effort to buy those potatoes and carrots, that might work.

I'd also like to have your opinion on democratic aid. For example, could a country like Canada make a contribution to the Afghan Parliament by sending MPs to explain democratic parliamentary life here? Perhaps the Public Service Commission could help the Afghan civil bureaucracy by talking about the civil service.

I'm considering all the areas where we could participate, and I'd like you to tell us particularly about the poppy crop and democratic aid that we could provide.

I read your document, and I agree with you: if we don't change our current military tactics and focus more on reconstruction and humanitarian aid, things could well get even worse. And yet General Richards, whom I met when I was last in Afghanistan, agrees on that. He says that, if we want to win the war for hearts and minds, we won't be able to do it militarily. It's by providing actual aid on the ground that people will see that conditions are finally improving.

Pardon me, but I had a number of questions to ask you. I'm going to leave you the rest of my time to answer them. I hope that's enough.

● (1600)

Mr. Emmanuel Reinert (Executive Director, The Senlis Council): I'm going to answer your questions in order.

As regards the difference between the Russian intervention some 15 years ago, or even 20 years now, and the situation of NATO troops in Afghanistan—and more particularly that of Canada in Kandahar—I think that what you said was true five years ago. At that time, the situation suggested the possibility of positive cooperation between the international community and a nascent Islamic democracy. But that situation has changed, and the troops, it must be admitted even though this is indeed a fairly sombre view, are now seen as occupation troops. This is a conclusion we've drawn from the interviews we conducted with thousands of people living in Kandahar and Helmand, in southern Afghanistan. In fact, we're talking about perceptions, about the reality of local perceptions.

Of course, the international community does not view itself as an occupation force. That's not at all the spirit in which we've intervened in Afghanistan. But that means nothing if we don't take into consideration the way the Afghans there perceive us. The vast majority of them now perceive us as an occupation force or—and this is what we hear most often—as crusaders. Once again, and this is one of the most important nations in the Islamic world, and it won't take much for us to be considered once again as Christian armies invading a Muslim country. The balance was extremely fragile, and it was broken two or three years ago by the U.S. military machine and by the priority that was given to military actions over the campaign for the hearts and minds of Afghans.

You mentioned the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association, which will be meeting in Quebec City in mid-November. As Ms. MacDonald said, it's true that NATO has an extremely important role to play in Afghanistan. In a way, it's forging its future as an international organization. This is the renewal of NATO's role following the Cold War. So we'll be absolutely delighted to send you all the necessary documentation to inform your parliamentary colleagues in the association.

You mentioned the substitution issue. Since we've been in Afghanistan, that is since 2005, all the substitution programs that should be put in place have been explained and presented to us in a highly detailed manner, and we've been shown the funding tables and programs that the consultants have put in place. The only problem is that, in the field, when we go into southern and eastern Afghanistan, in the provinces of Angar, Helmand and Kandahar, and when we ask people whether they've seen anything, they answer that they've seen nothing. And we ourselves observe that nothing is in place.

This is all plans that attest to a great deal of good will, but that are not actually being implemented there. That's also one of the reasons why we've lost the war for hearts and minds. We promised a lot, and the Afghans remember that. That's also created this poverty crisis that the pictures we showed earlier unfortunately illustrate perfectly.

Substitution and the diversification of Afghan agriculture are obviously essential, but we can't ask Afghan peasants first to eliminate their crops, their sole source of income and their only livelihood, then to start something else. It's as though you told a contractor here, who has a flourishing business and who's deciding to diversify his operation, that he can only do so if he closes down. It can't work. But that's precisely what we're asking of peasants in rural Afghanistan who cultivate extremely arid lands where, to date, only one thing has grown, opium.

This poppy crop regulation program for the production of morphine and codeine is in fact a form of alternative development. You take the same plant and develop it differently. That should then enable Afghan farmers to diversify their production.

● (1605)

I'll speak briefly to your third point, the development of democracy and aid that Canada could provide for democratic development.

This notion of legitimacy is an extremely important point. All democratic institutions that have been built in Afghanistan in the past 2,000 years are dying as a result of the strong rise of the Taliban. So it's very important to reinforce institutions, and Canada has well-known traditions in this field which could be extremely useful.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Bachand.

Ms. Black is next.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Reinert, for being with us today. I found your video presentation really compelling and disturbing. I'm sure that everybody on the committee felt the same way in viewing those pictures of starving children and very distressed people.

You're working on the ground in Afghanistan, and we heard again in the House today from the minister that there are a number of aid projects in place on the ground in Kandahar. What presence have you seen have experienced with CIDA? What CIDA projects have you witnessed, or what communication have you had with CIDA projects in Kandahar?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Thank you.

I visited villages outside of Kandahar. I visited informal refugee camps around Kandahar, in Panjwai. I think you're familiar with it; that's where most of the fighting has been.

It is on the outskirts of Kandahar. Just where Kandahar City ends, you turn south and drive out to Panjwai. It's about 15 minutes. I visited informal refugee camps inside Kandahar City—I'm living there. Every day, day after day, week after week, they had never had a foreigner visit them, and they had never had any aid from anybody.

I did not see any evidence of CIDA projects in those villages and informal camps where the poorest people are.

When we went there, we would open the door of the vehicle, and the men would come to us and say, “Do you have any food? There are children starving here,” so we started taking food with us. They asked us to bring them food, and they asked us to bring them doctors, because there were very sick babies, very sick children, and very sick elderly people there. We started doing that, continuing our research and taking the videos.

I think you saw some of the people in the videos with bread in their hands. We would arrive with bread, and they would immediately come to the bread. They would pick up a piece of bread.... A grown man would pick up a piece of bread and put it in his mouth. They're hungry.

We started doing food aid there, and that's the first food aid. We started doing food aid because we wanted to do our research, and just as you would, we could take food, so we took food. We could take doctors, so we organized to take doctors and medicine. My staff is still there; they're still visiting those camps—and there still is no aid.

● (1610)

Ms. Dawn Black: It's really disturbing to hear what you're saying.

Have you had an opportunity to meet with or have any association with the Canadian Forces who are in Kandahar right now?

You find this disturbing; I find it disturbing to see it in the video presentation. I think it must also be very disturbing for the men and women we've sent to Kandahar province, if they're witnessing this kind of starvation and extreme poverty and sense of absolute despair and hopelessness that you portrayed here.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: When we're out and about, we're running into the Canadian military. For example, the road down to Panjwai is a paved road now, because it's always been known to be a troubled area. The military plan is to have proper and easy access into troubled areas. So there's a paved road out there. We spent a lot of time going into Panjwai to try to figure out what was going on there and what the people were doing. If you drive past, there's a desert on one side and a mountain on the other. The Canadian military often sits at the base of the mountain. So we would stop—not only to make sure that they understood who we were but also just to talk to them.

These are the most junior soldiers out on the ground. I'm not talking about representatives of the army. We told them we were doing food aid. They are very young men, in their early twenties, from the Maritimes, northern Ontario, or the suburbs of Edmonton. I would tell them where I was going. I would say I was going down to a certain camp. They said it was a mixed Taliban-controlled camp. I said we were going in with food aid, and that we'd been in and out of there before. I would ask them, "Do you know what the situation is?" They said they did. They could see it from where they were. They were concerned and they said they could see how desperately poor the people were. I asked them what they thought about food aid there, and they said they would like to help, because that's how they were brought up as Canadians, but of course that's not their military mission. It's not the responsibility of the young men and women on the ground to sort that problem out. Still, they told me that they talked about it every day. They see those people every day. They're obliged to go into Afghan villages and engage any Afghan male they see. They know they can't tell the difference between the good guys and the bad guys. They know that.

I'm very concerned about the environment the Canadian military is being asked to fight in, not only from the point of view of military strategy, but also because of what our young men and women are seeing and what they're being asked to do. I think it should concern us all.

Ms. Dawn Black: I'm wondering about the central Afghan government. We've heard from a variety of witnesses about the way that Canadians have been helping in Kabul to do capacity building, to train the Afghan national army. And all of these things have sounded very positive. What evidence of this kind of development have you seen from the national government of Afghanistan in Kandahar province? Is there any sense that the state government is in control? Is there any sense that they're able to reach out and do anything to alleviate this poverty or keep a basic level of order in the province? Does the government there have any means or ability to do this?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: It's very difficult, especially in the south. They started from nothing, with very little infrastructure. We spent a lot of time, money, and effort on having an election, but the locals don't understand elections and democratic power. Being elected as an MP in Afghanistan, for example, doesn't mean anything to them.

You ask those people, "Did you vote?" They voted. It was organized for them to go and vote, but they don't understand what they did. They don't understand what an MP is. In their culture this means there's no authority to this system. It's the commander, the local strongman, who's running the joint. So the MPs themselves are hamstrung, because nobody understands what they do, and they have no independent budget. The Afghan government has no independent budget, because the international community is telling the Afghan government pretty much what to spend money on and what not to. So the parliamentary infrastructure is very light on the ground. It has no reality in rural Kandahar, none whatsoever.

● (1615)

Ms. Dawn Black: I know that you met with members of the opposition parties earlier today and shared your information. Have you had an opportunity to present your information to the minister or to any of the minister's officials, here in Canada?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: We wrote the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, but their schedules did not permit them to meet with us.

The Chair: Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you for being here.

I have a number of questions, which I'll try to keep brief, and I hope you'll follow my lead.

My first question is concerned with reports we've heard from various media sources, including the BBC, that on October 15 the democratically elected government of Afghanistan asked your organization to close its offices and leave the country. I understand you received a letter from the interior minister to that effect. I'm unaware of any other policy think tank that has been asked to leave Afghanistan. I wonder if you could explain to the committee why the democratically elected government of Afghanistan would ask you to leave.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: He didn't ask us to leave. We did receive a letter from the Minister of the Interior that said they were concerned that in discussing growing poppies for medicine, morphine and codeine, we were violating the part of their constitution that said poppies should not be grown for heroin, and we should be very careful about that in the future.

We accept their concern and their warning, and we're staying. I imagine people asked us because they're concerned that we are raising controversial counter-narcotic issues and criticizing eradication policies.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Perhaps, Mr. Chair, on a point of privilege, we could get a copy of that letter, as it was quoted in the answer.

The Chair: If it's available, I'm sure they'll supply it.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Yes, it's in Dari.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Okay.

You made statements to multimedia outlets in the past few days, and certainly during this committee meeting. The claim was made that starvation is a serious problem in parts or maybe all of the southern region of Kandahar. But yours is the only group I've heard make such a claim. So I had my office talk to the International Committee of the Red Cross today, and they were unable to support that assertion.

I also noted that only a few days ago, the UN World Food Programme, which is actively involved in delivering aid to thousands of people in Afghanistan, also submitted evidence that there's great success in their ability to deliver food aid.

In light of the fact that at least two recognized organizations actually engaged in emergency relief do not corroborate the message you're communicating to us today, I wonder if you can provide us with more details, perhaps the names of the villages or the number of people you believe are affected.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Yes, I'm happy to do that.

The World Food Programme in July, along with the Afghan government, asked for $93 million for emergency food aid for southern Afghanistan. We checked their website, and they said they have received .03% of the funding they requested.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Interesting. I have additional information. Perhaps we can discuss it after the meeting.

My third question has to do with the point you were making about the eradication of poppies. I think it was at our last meeting that we had a person providing evidence, Colonel Capstick, who told this committee that "We have to be careful about drawing direct linkages between eradication and starvation." That's a direct quote. He said that it's more complicated than that, that the drug cartels are providing the seeds, the fertilizer, and they actually harvest the poppies, but they only provide the farmers with subsistence cash and that the farmers are actually trapped into this particular lifestyle. He also noted that no NATO forces are involved in the poppy eradication program.

In light of the fact that the United Nations International Narcotics Control Board suggests that micro-credit loans are an effective tool to combat illicit poppy cultivation—and I note that Canada is the largest donor to this particular micro-credit program—and in light of the fact that Thailand and other countries formerly plagued by the problem of opium production were able to convert their farmers to the legal production of other crops, why is it that you're against this proven strategy in Afghanistan?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: We're not against that. We're saying that poppy licensing for medicine should be part of a diversified agricultural economic plan for southern Afghanistan. The United States promoted that successfully in Turkey and India during the Nixon era, and I think we should follow suit with that.

To follow up on your question about whether there's starvation in Kandahar, I should formally, on the record, invite the entire committee to come to our field office in Kandahar and come with us on food distribution. If there's any question in your mind about whether there is extreme poverty and starvation in Kandahar province, please come and have a look.

● (1620)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I think the committee is actually considering such a request, so—

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Happy to see you.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: —we'd love to take you up on that opportunity.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I expect to see you there, sir.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I hope to be there.

The leader of the NDP has suggested that we cut and run from Afghanistan, but today you were quoted in the media as saying that we should not cut and run. I wonder if you could explain for this committee why it's important for us not to cut and run.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I can appreciate the Canadians who are concerned about our Canadian military in Kandahar. As I said, they're being asked to fight in a very hostile environment, and in that situation many people who care about the Canadian military and the troops can naturally say they should return home.

In my opinion, we've made a commitment to Kandahar. We've made a commitment to Afghanistan, and as Canadians we should stick with that commitment. If we leave Kandahar, we are in fact making a gift to al-Qaeda of a geopolitical home for extreme terror. I think that's unacceptable to all Canadians, and it would be an unacceptable desertion of the Afghan people.

What we need to do now is support the Canadian military in Kandahar and we need to support the Afghan people in Kandahar and give them a chance at the durable peace and prosperity that we in Canada enjoy.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I actually agree with that particular statement. I think we agree on at least some aspect of this mission.

My last question has to do with the funding of the Senlis Council. I understand that the annual financial statements for your organization are not available on your website, and that's not necessarily a surprise. Could you clarify for the committee the source of your funding and what interests are actually represented by the Senlis Council?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: It's financed by the Network of European Foundations, which is a group of western European foundations that work together on various global issues. I myself am a member of the Network of European Foundations. I run a foundation called the Gabriel Foundation for a Swiss philanthropist, Stephan Schmidheiny, who was a co-chair of the Rio Earth Summit and the founder of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. He's the major financier, through the Network of European Foundations.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Great. Those are all my questions.

The Chair: We are right on schedule.

That ends our first seven-minute round. We're going to start our second five-minute round with Mr. McGuire, then Mr. Hawn, and then Mr. Bouchard.

I'm sorry; it is Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thanks very much.

The three-D approach obviously was in our international policy statement. Then, in hearing Colonel Capstick, we understand the silo still exists, and certainly that's what you're saying here.

In your understanding of the Canadian government, do we actually have a structure in place that deals with the three Ds together in a machinery way within the Government of Canada? How would you suggest that we get the three Ds in balance? Obviously what you're telling us is that winning the hearts and minds and expanding our development side is the way of actually allowing the military side to be more successful. How would you do that?

Obviously we in government know that we've had trouble, even after the tsunami, in terms of how we get different government departments to work together properly. If we had the minister responsible for CIDA here, what would questions would you be asking her?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: First I'd say that all the Canadians I've met who are working for the government or the military in Afghanistan are extremely well intentioned and very committed. Everybody who is there with the various assignments is trying to do their best in an extremely difficult situation. All the Canadian government employees in Kabul and in Kandahar are absolutely trying to make that three-D approach work.

What exactly caused this situation in Kandahar is not a malfunction of the three-D idea. I don't see that. It's a confluence of things that happened all at the same time when we first arrived in Kandahar—one of which, as we quite clearly said, is eradication. The problem is not necessarily the three Ds. It's the three Ds applied to that situation, a very dramatic situation that none of us expected.

What should we do now? I think you have to do one of those things you might do in a corporation when you recognize that you have to reorganize really quickly. We have to find one person who is going to sit down with all these guys and ask what we can do in a spirit of goodwill. I understand the silo problem, but I wouldn't want to spend too much time talking about what's wrong; I'd get busy on how we're going to fix it, because everybody who's there wants to fix it. This is an issue that all Canadians and everybody in the civil service can agree on, so let's just try to get into the solution phase, as opposed to talking about what the government might have done or should have done.

● (1625)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think that in your recommendations on the hearts and minds strategy, you're saying you want to launch food and humanitarian aid immediately, to back up the possibility of being successful on the military side—it's not going to work on just a military arm. How would you make sure the food and humanitarian aid got where it needed to be? I think that's what we have always been concerned about.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I can speak to what the situation is on the ground. When we try to do our research, we're trying to figure out how to get to places too. That's my job too—how to get to places—so we work with Afghans. We talk to the Afghans and we travel and dress as Afghans so that we don't have this tension when we're there. It's a matter of sitting down with the local people and saying that we want to go in there with food.

The great advantage when you go in there with food is that people are welcoming. If your children need food, you're happy to see whoever is delivering it. The actual delivery of food aid itself is not the hardest part of it, and after you've done it, the community is welcoming to you.

I guess what the minister is saying is that they don't have the current methodology in CIDA to do it, and the military is doing their military stuff. That is why we're suggesting that we need to put somebody in on an emergency basis to help them sort that out and get the job done.

I'm not sure I know enough. I know what's going on in Kandahar; I don't know what's going on inside the various parts of the Canadian government. It's not something I'm familiar with. I wouldn't want to comment, because I don't know the inner workings of it. I just know what I see on the ground.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I guess what I'm asking is if you're calling for massive food and humanitarian aid in order to complement what we're doing or make it more likely to be successful, would you be able to help the minister? If she all of a sudden were able to cut a cheque for the development side, could you make sure it got where it needed to go?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: We'd be happy to do that on a short-term basis.

When I go back now, we are going to do food aid to the best of our financial ability, because I've seen that situation now. As a Canadian, I'm working there, I'm doing the research, and I'm going to do the best I can in our modest circumstances to deliver it. I'm happy to help anyone in any way deal with that situation, out of concern for the Afghans and concern for the Canadian military.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Can I ask just one dumb little question?

The Chair: Is it a very short one?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

I have heard, and I can't find it anywhere, that poppies are the very best source of biodiesel.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I've heard that as well, and people have sent us that stuff. I've heard it; we have not researched it, but we have some information about it. It's possible, and that would be a blessing.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I have sugar beet farmers in my riding who think sugar beets are the best source, but we'll have to sort that out. Thank you.

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for coming.

Let me say at the outset that I don't question your sincerity at all, or your motivation. I do make one comment, before I have a question, on the film. I don't doubt that there is an aspect to some of the things you talked about. I saw two fathers, one child, and an armed Taliban in the background in most of the shots.

I've talked to an awful lot of Canadian military who have been there, and my information is that they are participating in *jurgas* regularly with the villagers. They are integrating with the villagers the best way they can; they are providing as much food aid as they can, and certainly medical aid is being provided on a regular basis by the Canadian Forces throughout Kandahar.

Are they telling me the truth?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I was there for weeks and months and didn't see it. So....

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Well, these are young men and women who were there for months—

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I guess what we can say is that it's not.... Those camps are half an hour outside of Kandahar. I was as surprised as anyone. I was there to do research on something else. If they're there, they're not getting as broad and deep as they need to go.

● (1630)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: There's obviously a difference of opinion, and that's fine.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I don't know whether it's a difference of opinion, or that there's some place where I didn't go, and vice versa.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Well, there are probably places you don't go, and that's fair. From the security point of view, there are obviously some places you don't go, and that's proper.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I will say that I believe I was in territory that is mixed control. We were able to go there, and if you were in a military convoy it would be a different situation.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: You said they're fighting in a hostile environment. I've never found fighting in a friendly environment, but that's just....

Ms. Norine MacDonald: That's a fair one.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: There was a comment made by someone, a number of witnesses ago, who talked about the Afghans' reaction. This is somebody who had spent quite a lot of time with the Afghans, too, not with the military—although he spent time with the military as well. His assessment of their reaction to the unquestionably dire situation, or less than ideal situation, that they're in was that compared with the Soviet era it was a cakewalk. That was the word he used. We can argue about terms, but notwithstanding that they're not where they should be, in fact today they are not worse off but are better off than they were under the Soviets—which isn't much of an advertisement, I grant.

What kind of reaction do you get, comparing the Soviet regime with what's happening now?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: We asked the question—because we're doing the "five years later" report—in a survey: "Are you better off now? Are you better off in the last five years, or what has changed in your financial circumstances?" I think the answers in rural Helmand and rural Kandahar were "We're worse off."

You can see the remnants from when the Soviets were there, in the cities of Lashkar Gah, Kandahar, and Kabul, of large building projects—schools, ministries, and in every city there's a big bread factory. A lot of this is destroyed now, of course. There was a lot of infrastructure development. In the schools, there were a lot of people who were taught in Russian engineering, so there was a generation of engineers.

The Americans were in Lashkar Gah in Helmand province for a while; you can see the remnants of that. There was, if I can use this term, a "westernization" of Afghanistan at a certain point. Most of that's gone.

You hear nostalgia for the Russians and you hear nostalgia for the Taliban now. The first time I heard nostalgia for the Taliban, my heart sank when they said "We were better off then."

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Again there is a clear difference of opinion there, because the sentiments we heard from somebody else, who had spent a lot of time with the Afghans, was clearly not that—certainly with respect to the Russians.

What would you do about the Taliban?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: As I said, there are two different kinds of Taliban, and the guys who are connected to al-Qaeda are very clever and should be of the greatest concern. The types of Taliban guys you saw were young guys from the villages, and they all were friendly to me, because I was delivering food. So we can win those guys back to our side with relative ease.

I don't mean this as an insult to my Afghan colleagues to say that the Afghans switch sides easily, but it's an historical fact. They are basically interested in economic prosperity—I simplify here—and they will move where there is an economic advantage. But by the way, we call that capitalism and entrepreneurship, and they're trying to feed their families. So economics is a great way to build support in the south. We have to make it more interesting to be friends with us than it is to be friends with the al-Qaeda guys.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: You mentioned there is severe drought in Kandahar. How much of the poppy problem is the result of severe drought, and how much is the result of actions being taken by the government?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I'll just simplify by saying it's half and half. We all know as Canadians what severe drought can do to a community. Then what happened was, the irrigation systems were destroyed in the war, so what water is around can't get to the crops. It turns out the poppy is a very drought-resistant crop. So you ended up in a very bad cycle there. With drought coming, the other crops dropped back and poppy came forward.

But there is anger at this hunger and anger at the eradication. As I said, this anger has fuelled the insurgency. So in the end, we ended up at the same place.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bouchard, for five minutes.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you as well, madam, for your presentation.

You've given us some very convincing arguments, but what is most convincing is when you have the Afghans speak for themselves and their words support your comments. I was very moved by it, and I thank you for that.

You also put forward a concrete plan of measures that concern the poppy fields. Could you explain to us in detail why you think that poppy cultivation is a good thing that the Afghans should continue?

Why aren't you proposing another crop, which could replace these poppy fields, with a system that would enable the Afghans to sell their new products? You've no doubt considered that alternative. Why don't you propose it, instead of proposing that the poppy fields be kept?

Mr. Emmanuel Reinert: I believe I mentioned that briefly earlier in answering your colleague. In my opinion, this is an emergency solution, and we're currently in an emergency situation, with regard to both the Afghans and Canadian troops.

Eradication isn't a solution, first, because it's ineffective. We've seen it: despite the eradication operations that have been conducted in the past two or three years, production figures have not fallen, quite the contrary, and the measure is totally counter-productive, since it fuels the Taliban recruitment machine.

Furthermore, introducing alternative crops is obviously one of the best solutions, but it takes too much time to put in place, and it's simply impossible to put it in place in the present conditions, particularly in southern Afghanistan, which is a desert where only poppies grow.

So this is a pragmatic solution. What are the resources of the present Afghanistan, the true, the real Afghanistan? On the one hand, there's opium, and, on the other hand, villages where there are very strict rules that the local communities must obey.

Let's make a better use of what's there, in order to divert part of the local opium production to the production of pain medication. This is simply a factor that must break the infernal machine, the vicious circle of the illegal market. This will make it possible to develop other crops. Once again, by enabling farmers to maintain their source of cash and their livelihood, we can enable them to develop other crops, whether it be wheat, potatoes, citrus fruits or I don't know what.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: You also said that there's a major famine in southern Afghanistan. Children have no food and are dying of hunger. In addition, fathers don't have the necessary resources to feed their families. You mentioned quick food aid. I'm almost certain that's part of a priority point or measure.

To implement that, do you need a cheque? Or do you need food from Canada or other countries? Would your organization distribute it? Will the Afghan government distribute it? Or would an organization that would have to be created together with NATO?

[*English*]

Ms. Norine MacDonald: We're a small research organization, and we ended up doing food aid because we were in villages where people needed food. As I said to your colleague, when I go back now, I intend to continue doing that. We have infrastructure there, and we will help any government, any agency, in any way to see that happen.

The reason we said there ought to be this special envoy is that somebody has to immediately find out what the possibilities are. As I've said, we do military and counter-narcotics work, so we've stumbled into this. Somebody has to immediately assess what the possibilities are and how to get that food on the ground. You can buy food in Kandahar City; it's possible. You could organize that in fairly short order. So our suggestion for this special envoy is that somebody has to figure out what the possibilities are and how to get the food there right away. I think that's a short-term answer, and then you have to have a medium-term answer and a long-term answer while you let a proper diversified economic plan take root there.

We're willing to help in any way we possibly can, but I think there has to be an assessment of what the options are. If the World Food Programme doesn't have the financing, they should have the financing if they're going in there. You have to go through your list of possibilities very quickly.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go over to Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In your June report you said:

> Licensed poppy cultivation would impact positively on the current security situation by decreasing popular sympathy for insurgents and increasing support for the central and local government.

In your October recommendations you suggested that farmers be allowed to cultivate the opium poppy under a village-based strict control system. How would you protect the poppy crop from the insurgents?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Right.

Since we released our first feasibility study, we got a bunch of Afghan experts from Britain to go in there and study at the village level. In every village—so maybe it's a little bit like our prairies—everybody knows how many jeribs or acres of land everybody else has. They really do know. They know how many kilograms of opium can be grown on every jerib. They really do know. So you pretty much know, if you're a farmer, what the yield is of the guy next door. So our idea—to kind of use your micro-credit idea, so we can find something to agree on—is to give a community licence to a village, to the jerga, and say, "You have a licence to produce this many kilograms of opium because your community has that many jeribs. So you must deliver that amount, and if you do not deliver that amount, the whole bunch of you farmers, all of you are going to lose your licence." So you've got the community committed to that community's not allowing any diversion of opium.

If you think of maybe a small community in Saskatchewan—for example Yorkton, where I was born—all the farmers, my dad and my uncles, all knew how many acres they had, what their yield was, and how everybody's crop was going. So they pretty much knew what the guy next door was earning every year. And it's the same idea, that the whole community gets the licence, and if one guy yields to the pressure everybody loses.

Now, at the moment, as I said, the democracy is just in its infancy, and that has to be supported and continued. We cannot rely on democracy and the rule of law to support a licensing system, but this type of village-level discipline exists among the Kandahar farmers, as it exists in Canada, and that's the type of enforcement mechanism that we want to try. So what we have said, specifically, is that we do want to run and we will finance pilot project tests in Kandahar, to see whether they work and to answer all these very legitimate questions that people have been putting to us, to see whether we can actually run these poppy farms for medicine without diversion and without their going into the hands of the insurgents. We don't know. We're academics and policy people. We want to go in a give it a try in the field in Kandahar.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Is it practical? It doesn't seem to me that the local councils.... You've already stated that they'll go back and forth, that the loyalty can be purchased, if I can paraphrase what you've said.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Yes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: How would the local council be strong enough? All it would take is a bit more money being offered by the drug lords to basically implode your plan. Do you think that local councils are strong enough to override the financial resources of the drug lords that are already there?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: That's such a good question, and I've asked them that directly when I've sat in their jirgas. I don't want to go and run a pilot project in a community that can't do it. And I've said to them directly, "Will you allow this to be diverted for heroin?" They have a type of Islamic oath that they sign, which they use all the time. It's like our personal guarantee or our promise on my word. They've said that. They want it. They want that opportunity. They want to make a lawful living.

All I can tell you is we want to go and run the pilot projects. That's the appropriate next step.

● (1645)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: If I follow this line of thinking, then—and I'm trying to work my way through this from a logical perspective—if we were to put the onus on the local jirgas and the community with the little plot of land and have some kind of pool board mentality where we pool all the resources—

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Like the co-ops.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I don't want to get into the Wheat Board.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: You might have something there.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'll tell you how well that's working.

But the thing that I see here is that is we'll be putting the villagers in that pilot project—in that test situation—a situation in which they'll either be fighting us or they'll be fighting the drug lords. Either way, they're going to be fighting. Don't you think that's what's going to happen? They'll have to pick up their guns to defend their crops from the drug lords, or they'll be paid by the drug lords to pick up their guns and fight against Canadian soldiers. I don't see any way out of this with your plan. If you could convince me otherwise—

Ms. Norine MacDonald: These are the conversations I'm having with them. So that's why I go and talk to the local commander. And the local commander is committed, in fact, to his community. They're all his relatives. So you have to make the deal with the *shura* and the local commander.

In that case, they will have to choose between us and the other forces that are at play there. They have to decide that they'll have a more interesting future with us than with them. That's why we have to try it and see which way they go. I can't tell you which way they'll go, but they're telling us they want to try. So I think we should make an attempt.

In the end, it will divide those people. They will either choose to be with us, or they will choose to be with the al-Qaeda. But at the moment, we're not even giving them an economic choice.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay. But—

The Chair: There may be time later.

Mr. McGuire, for five. Then over to Ms. Gallant.

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I don't know if you're a monopolist like the Wheat Board, or if you want to give the producers choice.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I'm a prairie girl.

Hon. Joe McGuire: I suspect somebody is growing poppies for the medicinal trade. I'm not sure how many acres you need to support that particular endeavour, how you would satisfy that supply, or where it's coming from now, but maybe it's not as far-fetched as we first thought when we heard about it.

I think your position of supporting our troops and supporting the people of Afghanistan is basically the position of the Canadian people and people around this table. It's certainly our position that we should support our troops and we should do what we can to support the people our troops are sent there to help.

To leave Kandahar for a while, what is going on in the rest of Afghanistan, as far as progress being made and as far as good government is concerned? You've been in Kabul and in other areas outside of Kabul. Describe the situation there. Are hospitals being built? Are girls going to school? Are schools being built? Are highways and the infrastructure being...? Is the money and sacrifice we're putting in there showing dividends elsewhere, while we're still trying to grapple with Kandahar province and so on? Can you give us an idea of what's happening in the rest of the country?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Absolutely there's good news in lots of parts of Afghanistan, in the north in particular. There is a lot less fighting. There is some indication of Taliban resurgence in Badakhshan.

In Kabul there's a lot of economic development. If you listen to the complaints, there's a new rich, but the poor are still poor. So there's a big income divide going on there.

Somehow Canada got one of the three worst provinces. There is Helmand, Oruzgan, and we got Kandahar. Most of the people in Kabul will not travel to Kandahar. The southern part is the area that is now a Taliban no man's land. You can really divide the country that way.

The poppy problem is a problem throughout Afghanistan. Alternative livelihood programs don't last long enough. A lot of the schools that have been built in the south have been burned.

For every good story there is a really bad story. Afghanistan is a bit like a roller coaster. You can have one day where you think there are wonderful things happening here, it's a beautiful country with beautiful people, and somehow we're going to see this through. Then the next day, all you can see are the difficulties we are faced with and you feel like we'll never sort it out, it's always been a problem and always will be. You want to throw up your hands.

When we went there after 9/11, we all did a remarkable thing. They welcomed us with open arms. They thought we were freedom fighters. That was a fantastic opportunity for the western world to build a really close relationship with an Islamic nation. We're kind of on a cusp now, a tipping point, as to which way this is going to go. That is why I'm pleading so strongly for staying the course there and finding new initiatives.

I can walk around on the streets in Herat, in Kondoz, in Mazar, in Jalalabad. I cannot walk openly on the streets in the city of Kandahar or in Lashkar Gah. You can really see two different stories at this moment. Unfortunately, we are responsible for part of the area where it's most difficult.

● (1650)

Hon. Joe McGuire: Do the people in that area know what's happening in the rest of Afghanistan, that their fellow citizens are enjoying at least a level of prosperity and peace and safety?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: The people you saw on that screen live in villages, and they've never even been to Kandahar. When I ask them about their aspirations, they tell me they would like to go to Kandahar one day. It's a half-hour drive away. They're very unsophisticated people, and they don't read and write, but they're clever about survival.

In the city of Kandahar, you can see the international community and you can see our wealth. You can see our cars, you can see our gadgets. There is this huge disparity between what they perceive to be the immense luxuries of our lives and their struggle for survival. That does cause a real tension on the ground.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks, Joe.

Ms. Gallant, five minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your presentation thus far.

On the topic of the drug trade in Afghanistan, we can all take great pride in the job the Canadian Forces are doing in Afghanistan. They were successful in seizing nine tonnes of marijuana. In the south, 55 kilograms of opium was seized. That's a significant amount of dope that won't be poisoning the youth of our countries. The profits of these seizures will not be used to pay insurgents who in turn kill our soldiers. It's something we can celebrate.

I applaud your philanthropy. I wish you were around to help our maritimers when foreign countries ganged up on them when they were struggling to survive and they lost one of their livelihoods.

It was asked during the course of this discussion if simply cutting a cheque would help the starving people in Afghanistan. Over the weekend, the Canadian government did cut a cheque for approximately $40 million—$18.5 million over the next four years. That will hopefully assist in dealing with the starvation. In the foreign affairs committee, I believe the minister made a statement as to how much food distribution is going on. We'll probably have those details in a little while.

It may also comfort you to know that Canada's defence minister testified before this committee one week ago that whatever solution NATO and the Afghan government come up with to suppress the drug protection, there has to be some way to legitimately compensate farmers. That's the position of this government. The minister also advised us that at the moment it's the U.K. that's responsible within NATO to try to bring the opium production under control.

I do have questions.

You claim that the Afghans living near the Canadian troops are starving. The Minister of Defence, who is currently testifying before the foreign affairs committee, has just confirmed that our troops have scoured the area surrounding Kandahar, and they have handed out food to over 8,500 people. The minister for CIDA has just announced an additional $5 million towards an emergency food program on top of the money announced by the Prime Minister earlier this year.

Can you be more specific and inform this committee about exactly where the starving people you have seen are located?

● (1655)

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I can. And I'll reiterate my invitation. I'm going back to Kandahar soon, and if you'd like to join me, I'll take you there.

You drive south past the Pakistani embassy and into the last development. There are about a thousand families there. In Panjawai, when you leave the main road, you turn left and go about 15 minutes past the Canadian military presence in the desert. You'll find about another 1,500 families there. If you would like to go north of Kandahar, you can go to Arghandab district, and you will see three Kuchi villages by a small river there. If you want to go farther north into Nazyan district, which that gentleman lives in, you will see two villages with about 6,000 families together. If you drive south through where the Panjawai battles were, you'll find another village in the desert with about 10,000 families. It takes about a half an hour to drive through that one.

Would you like me to continue?

I suggest you come and visit.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I hope we have that opportunity.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: You mentioned earlier that you're funded through the NEF Mercator Fund and that you're the operational arm. Does the Senlis Council derive revenues from any other sources?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: No.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: None whatsoever?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: None whatsoever.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: You're an attorney, I understand.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I am a Canadian lawyer, and I'm a member of the British Columbia Bar.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: So you have lawyer-client confidentiality privileges?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I do, but I have no reason to claim any lawyer-client privilege today.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: After 9/11 there were anti-money-laundering rules put into place, I understand. Is it true that law firms and lawyers are exempt from that particular legislation?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I'm not familiar with that legislation.

The Chair: I'm not sure that was relative to our study.

I have a couple of questions, but we've got one spot left to wrap up the second round, with Mr. Dosanjh, and then if the committee will allow me, I have a couple of questions before we go on.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you very much.

I want to tell you, Madam, that after I saw you I remembered your name from my days in British Columbia. You are a Queen's Counsel, and that's a distinguished background.

Isn't it true, in some cases, that our CIDA workers are non-existent in some areas, as one would assume, and those who are there sometimes are confined to the bases because it's really difficult for them to travel? If you don't know, you don't have to answer.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I don't know that.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: The question that I have is on the issue of poverty. You've made a case that poverty exists on a very large scale, and it's found in the neighbourhood of Kandahar, just outside of the city. I saw this video and the children looked emaciated. Tell me, in terms of the Afghan government itself, how much food aid is it able to provide without your assistance or without the assistance of a military to those kinds of camps, if the writ of the government runs in those areas at all?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: The Afghan government had joined with the World Food Programme in July in asking for the $97 million in food aid, so that was a joint request. I think it would help the Afghan government immeasurably if they were involved in the food aid programs, because we're trying to support the authority of the Afghan government, and when I said that would lower the temperature for the operations of the Canadian military, and put us in a more positive light, it would do the same thing for the Afghan government. Once again, I'm not familiar with the current inner workings and capacity of the Afghan government in Kandahar, whether they could or could not, but it would be a real advantage to them to be seen to be involved in providing some immediate food relief to those camps.

● (1700)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I have one more question. Do you have any first-hand knowledge of the corruption that allegedly exists in government ranks, lower down, or in the middle ranks? If you don't, what do you hear?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I think everybody who lives and works in Afghanistan has first-hand knowledge of that. This is an economy that, as we've discussed, is almost an 80% drug-trafficking economy, another thing we haven't spoken about today but that should concern us all.

If you are a policeman or a civil servant and you are being paid a very small amount of money, and they're often not paid on time, and someone comes and offers you the equivalent of three years' salary to be involved in some corrupt practice, and if you do not participate your family will be harmed, you will end up with a police force and an army and people who are working on counter-narcotics who are corrupt. It is a fact of everyday life, at this moment in Afghanistan, that corruption exists from the bottom quite high up.

I don't think it's correct for us to immediately point fingers at every Afghan who's involved in that and say what you're doing is wrong, stop it. Because if you were in their circumstances.... I don't know what their choices are when their families are put at risk.

I don't want to say yes, there's corruption, as a condemnation of the Afghan people. That's what they are suffering from because they have a narcotics-based economy. We're busy registering our organization and doing various things with the Afghan government, and there's corruption all the way up. If you refuse to pay bribes, and we refuse to pay bribes, you can wait a long time to get your work done there. But we refuse and we wait, because what we want to do there is contribute to a proper functioning democracy.

It's very frustrating. I know that a lot of international organizations and companies that operate there pay the bribes. Then we're drawn into it and we're complicit in it.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

The Chair: That ends our second round. Before we get into the next one, I would like to ask a couple of questions.

We've heard from presenters, particularly people who deliver aid, that a person in a uniform shouldn't do that, that it's best not to do that. But on the other hand, you're telling us that in order to win the hearts and minds of these people, we have to show them that our military is not there only to shoot. Wouldn't it be better if.... I'm asking your opinion, what you think of that. What if the military could—and I'm not saying this could happen at all, because they're pretty busy folks—what if the military could be the ones to also deliver the aid? Would that not send a message to the people that we're there to do the right thing?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: You're not the first person to ask me that, so I think that is an idea that's being considered.

It's a lot easier to go in those villages if you're dressed in what they refer to as normal clothes, which is the type of clothes you see on the screen. When we're working there, we dress as Afghans. I wear Afghan men's clothes, and so do the other non-Afghan colleagues with me who are ex-military.

When I said it's a war zone, that's an area where weapons are prevalent and people are carrying weapons all the time. So most of the people who are out and about are carrying weapons, and the young men carry weapons. So you have to be comfortable with that environment.

An idea that I think could be explored is that part of the military wear local clothes—and you have to wear a beard, because they're all growing their beards back—in which it is comfortable carrying a weapon as part of the food aid distribution, because in the pictures that you saw, when we're doing food aid there are weapons around. You have to find a balance and a way to manage that and manage the risk. The second or third time you go back to a village, you can be more comfortable because they start to protect you.

I'm not familiar enough with how the military is structured, whether it's an insurmountable problem to take them out of their uniforms. I don't understand enough about that. If it were possible... if the military delivers aid, I can see doing it out of their uniforms would help them be more successful and manage the risk to the military who are involved with it.

● (1705)

The Chair: You'd almost want them to know it was the military, though. That's what I'm saying. If they realized that's who is delivering the food, maybe it would—

Ms. Norine MacDonald: But they know immediately you're not an Afghan, so they ask you and you say. So they know I'm a Canadian.

The Chair: What brings me to that is I don't know if it would work, because one of the cases, and you know it very well, is the case of the suicide bomber who attacked our people who were handing out stuff to kids. How do you combat somebody who thinks like that? Or how do you deliver anything, in a society that thinks that way?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Right. That suicide bomber was trained, organized, financed, and sent there by the al-Qaeda that is this part of the Taliban. It's not these guys. He was going there to do that, no matter what the Canadian military were doing that day. So even if the military is in local clothing and doing food aid, they are subject to those risks.

As I said, even though we are welcome in those communities now because they know us and they protect us, we are subject to those risks, because those people will kill any foreigner they can find.

The Chair: Okay, I appreciate that.

The third round is five minutes. It starts with the official opposition, government, then the Bloc.

Official opposition?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I wouldn't mind speaking on this.

I know our friends at Médecins Sans Frontières are absolutely, totally opposed to soldiers ever handing out food, because eventually you couldn't trust people handing out food because it might be a soldier. I think it's what they've experienced around the world, that it would put their people at risk. Is that your understanding of that?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: As I said, I do military and counter-narcotics. I only got into food aid recently, accidentally. I can understand their opinion. I think it is so important that we solve this problem for our Canadian military as soon as possible that they might even be convinced that this is a circumstance where they can make an exception to what sounds like a thoughtful rule. I'm not sure, in these circumstances, where our military are so at risk and the Afghan population is faced with starvation, that you want to stick to that sensible rule. It might be time for an exception.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But you're saying you can get into places because you're not in a military convoy.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Yes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That's because you're trusted that you're not a solider.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: And because I'm bringing food, so it's all—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Okay, but if eventually they found out you were a soldier, you could then be found at risk.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Yes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think there is a chicken and egg, but I think that the purity of this is.... So having Canadian development workers who are experienced helping you handing out the food is optimal, having more of us there on the ground who are not soldiers?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I think this is all worthy of a much longer and more complex conversation, with a lot more information about what the options are, and in consultation with the Afghan government, etc.

I don't have a clear answer for you about that. I think the problem has to be solved and you have to innovate, but because I don't know what all the options are and whether the military can do this or that, I can't give you a clear answer. You just must find an answer.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I can't resist this question. The bottom part of this is that the war on drugs isn't working, and that we actually need to find a different way of going about this, in terms of the fact that warlords are in charge of illegal drugs, and if drugs were legal there would be a different way of going about this.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Just to speak specifically about eradication policy, manual eradication policy, from a counter-narcotics policy point of view, manual eradication is a legitimate part of a counter-narcotics strategy where there's an alternative livelihood. If somebody's growing poppies for opium out of greed, and they could be doing something else, you should go in there and eradicate the crop manually, not chemically.

Even the UN agrees that when there is no alternate livelihood it's not the appropriate response. The United States helped Turkey switch to opium for medicine; the United States and the UN in Thailand had a grace period and they transitioned to alternative livelihoods. There are lots of examples. What we are proposing for Afghanistan has been done by the United States elsewhere, under their counter-narcotics strategies. So it's not that we're coming up with a radical idea here, folks. We're just repeating to you a U.S. counter-narcotics strategy that's used elsewhere that we think should happen there.

There are parts of the war on drugs that absolutely don't work, have never worked no matter how much money you put into it, and there are parts—if you call Turkey, India, and Thailand part of the counter-narcotics strategy—that worked. So let's try to find something that works is what we're saying, from a counter-narcotics policy point of view.

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes, thank you, Chair.

First of all, let me say you will never find a Canadian government, I don't think, who would ever ask the military to grow beards and wear civilian clothes and go into a situation like that without their protection. It's just not going to happen. The military delivering aid, that's a different question.

I have a question on the poppy thing. How strong are those local commanders? Will the Taliban ever follow the Islamic oaths that are taken by communities of farmers, and would the Taliban ever allow an alternative crop to poppies when they can earn so much more from illegal drugs than they can from legal apples?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I'm going to try to start being really quick now.

We need to run the pilot projects, but if they grow poppies for medicine, our studies have shown that the net farmer income, which is different from the farm gate price—you guys know what I'm talking about there—is the same or more, we think. Please let us go and find out.

Will they obey their Islamic oaths? Yes, because first and foremost, the people of Afghanistan are Muslims.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I'm talking about the Taliban, not—

Ms. Norine MacDonald: First and foremost, an oath on the Koran does the trick. It's the same as an oath on the Bible here.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: That's very debatable, whether the Taliban follows any religion.

It's not what the farmer makes, it's what the Taliban will allow the farmer to make. You say the net to the farmer can be better doing it for legal drugs than illegal drugs, but I'm not sure the farmer has any input into that under the Taliban.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: No, but we would have input into that under a licensing scheme. For example, that Indian farm gate price of opium for morphine and codeine, if you look the farm gate price and the retail, there's a 5,900% markup, so there's a lot of the value chain there that could be reallocated.

I think these are good questions, and we have to go and have a look at it. I'm with you; there's a big long list of questions that have to be tested.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I'm afraid we might be being a little naive there, but they're good questions.

Does it come down to something as simple as taking care of the poppy problem with money? Do you think that alleviates our problem of dealing with the Taliban? When I say "dealing with the Taliban", I mean killing the Taliban so that we can allow other progress to go on. I mean we have to buy the poppies and kill the Taliban—is it as brutally simple as that?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: We should deal in the harshest manner with the al-Qaeda Taliban, absolutely, but for those young men who can go either way, we need to find a way to make friends with them.

When I say we want to run pilot projects because we don't know if this is going to work, I mean that: we don't know if it's going to work. But I can tell you that poppy production is up. We've spent millions on cultivation. Anybody can go there and tell you that what we're doing now in counter-narcotics policy isn't working.

The first step is to say this is not working and ask what other things we would try. This is one of a portfolio of things we should try. As I said, it's been done by the United States elsewhere.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I don't dispute that. I don't think we're entirely dealing with the same mentality with someone in Vietnam as the Taliban.

I think you give the Taliban too much credit for giving a rat's patoot about the Koran, frankly. I don't think they're governed by any religion. I think they hide behind religion. They carry out acts in the name of religion that are clearly not in accordance with the teachings of the Koran. We can argue about whether the Koran is....

● (1715)

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Perhaps that's for another day.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Any legitimate religion does not condone the kinds of things the Taliban does. For them to do that in the name of religion is utterly fraudulent and utterly without credibility, so I'm not sure how you can trust them to follow any Islamic oath.

That's a question or a statement. You can argue with it.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: It's certainly a longer conversation, but despite any extremist political beliefs, my observation of people in Afghanistan is that an oath on the Koran is binding, even to those with extremist political beliefs.

But it's a question for another day.

The Chair: Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a number of questions that I'll try to ask briefly so you can answer them quickly and we can cover everything.

First, when you, the Senlis Council, are on the ground in Afghanistan, you do exactly what you want. You take orders from no one, you go where you want, when you want and you do what you want.

Is that correct?

[*English*]

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Yes. That's not to say I'm not afraid of anyone; it would be foolish in Afghanistan to take that approach.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: That leads me to my other question.

Madam, you also said that you were protected in the villages. You're not protected by the military forces. Perhaps you feel protected by people that the military forces are also hunting.

Is that possible?

[*English*]

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Certainly I am aware, when I'm in those villages, that there are people there who, for reasons we discuss with them, have chosen to allow the Taliban and those fighting forces to pass through those villages. I'm very interested, as a security policy analyst, to understand the motivations of the violent actors there. They will never admit it to me directly, but I believe after spending some time there you can have a feeling for it. The people in the mixed-control villages protect us because we're bringing food, and I think there is a political lesson to be learned there.

I have been in villages where I've been very concerned about some people who have been there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Okay. So you're a political analyst.

I have another question.

The criticism that's often made of the 3D approach is that it operates in isolation, without others knowing what's going on. However, you've just confirmed that there's probably a fourth stakeholder in the field: the NGOs. That must cause a problem. We're more defence specialists. However, I know people who program, plan and command military operations. It's a bit difficult for them to conduct a military operation and to invade a village without knowing that the Senlis Council is in the middle of that village.

Is it possible for liaison officers between you and the military to be informed of what's going on in the next few days or hours? That would prevent the military from invading a village while you're distributing bread to people.

[*English*]

Ms. Norine MacDonald: No, we don't have regular contact with the military. But the fact is that the military have to keep their operations to themselves. However, we send reconnaissance trips to the villages before I go. Some of the guys who are with me are ex-military and Afghans and they go and check. If there are military operations there, we don't go there. If I see Canadian military guys, I stop and identify myself and say I want to go there, I'm doing food aid. They know that I'm there and they'll tell me if it's not a good idea.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Okay.

In your document, you contend that information gathering is very important. You, more than the military, must probably be in the middle of a major source of information, because you associate with those people closely. I know because, in Bosnia, we went into the cafés, had a drink or a coffee and talked with everybody. However, we needed translators.

Do you have any translators?

[*English*]

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I can understand a little bit of Pashto but very little. I'm getting better. I have Afghan colleagues who are with me all the time by my side, who work with me doing the translation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I see.

We've previously had surprises with translators who didn't translate exactly what we meant. I witnessed scenes where the translation was of no help. We learned that afterwards.

The following question may be a question of moral ethics. Let's say you learn that people that very evening are going to attack the Canadian Forces, which are at the base of the mountain, beside the road.

What would you do with that information? Would you share it or would you be quiet?

● (1720)

[*English*]

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I would contact the Canadian military and tell them that, of course. My concern is for the Canadian military and the Afghan people.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: The third point concerns the 3D approach. There's a lot of talk about defence and development, but never about diplomacy. And yet, with respect to the jirgas, the Department of Foreign Affairs should have specialists and very good translators in the field in an attempt to establish ties with political decision-makers and commanders.

You told me you've seen very little development. However, have you witnessed Canadian diplomacy in Afghanistan?

[*English*]

Ms. Norine MacDonald: The former Canadian ambassador, Chris Alexander, is no longer the ambassador but works as the deputy chief of UNAMA. I saw the results of his work often and I think he exemplified the best of the diplomacy in the three-Ds and set a really good example of exactly what we would want for Canada in Kandahar. I can't speak highly enough of his work.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'll take a little bit of a different route here with some questions.

You've shared with us your experiences of you being able to dress in customary clothing and everything and go there and be in relative safety. First of all, I'd like to ask if you ever felt you were in a situation where you weren't safe. Have there been occasions when you felt that your personal safety was threatened while you were delivering food or going out and doing your research?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: It's a war zone there. There's bombing and fighting all the time, and that's a regular occurrence. There's an Afghan code of hospitality, so if you're there they protect you, and if they can't protect you, they warn you and you have to leave. So if we were in a village, and people arrived that they were concerned about, they would say it's time for you to go, in a very polite way. If we received those warnings, we left and returned another time.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: How much food have you been delivering? Can you give me an indication? For example, is it just as much as you can get in the trunk? What are we talking about?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: I think we would appall any person who had a PhD in development, and I really have to apologize to them, but what happened the first time was that the men from the village in Arghandab made me promise to bring back food, so we simply bought a lot of bread and put it in the backs of vehicles. We bought rice, oil, we took advice from Afghan colleagues about what to take, what they could actually use, because they're cooking in a very primitive way. Now when we go we always take bread, because they can immediately eat it, because we want to talk to them. If they're hungry and we give them rice, they want to go off and cook some, so from a practical point of view we always take bread. I'm sure that's probably, as I said, appalling to anybody who knows anything about food aid and development, and I'm embarrassed to tell you that it was that basic.

We simply thought, if we found a bunch of people in Canada who were hungry and we could take them food, what would we do? So we went and bought food, nothing sophisticated.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Is the reality that they don't have food to purchase or that they don't have money to purchase food locally, or is it a combination of both?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: No, you can get food in Kandahar. There is food, mostly coming from Pakistan, but you can buy food in Kandahar. Normally in the villages, from which it's difficult for them to get to Kandahar, they were growing their food. But they've moved into these refugee camps, and there's no way for them to grow their own food.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay.

Have you shared your experiences with any other aid organizations, such as the Red Cross or any other organizations—NGOs—that would normally go in?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Yes. Since we came out we've been talking to a lot of the Red Cross agencies about this: the British Red Cross, the Canadian Red Cross, the Italian Red Cross. We've talked to more of them as well about buying Afghan morphine. The Italian Red Cross has endorsed buying Afghan morphine, because there's a shortage of morphine in Italy.

With the Red Crescent organization in Afghanistan, we've started a relationship to run an addicts treatment centre in Kabul along with the Italian Red Cross. We are now telling everybody we can about the situation and offering to help in any way we can.

● (1725)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: On that line, then, I'm more concerned about the food delivery than I am.... My line of questioning is more about the food delivery, and if the starvation is what you claim, that's where I want to go with this.

Given that you have a model of delivering food that seems to work, are there any other NGOs right now that are using this model to deliver food?

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Not that I saw, because a lot of them that were originally in Kandahar left because of the security situation.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Enough said. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Black.

Ms. Dawn Black: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to support what my colleague Ms. Bennett said about international aid organizations. They are fundamentally opposed to the militarization of aid. They see it as a very dangerous way of delivering aid and feel that it puts the recipients in a very dangerous situation. If they're seen to be receiving aid from military personnel, it puts them more at risk from the opposition side. That's the reason they're so opposed to it. They also feel it puts them more at risk—the aid organizations themselves are more at risk—if they're seen to be tied in any way to a military force.

I imagine it would be against some kind of international law for soldiers to disguise themselves, which is what it would be. I think that would be a really dangerous kind of thing, just to put that out on the table.

I want you to know that this committee is going to write a report from the information we've heard from witnesses. You spoke earlier about how you felt there should be an emergency task force led by a special envoy. You talked about the dire need for emergency food and aid—right now, not bogged down in too many bureaucratic muddles about it—and the food needing to get there and get there immediately.

I'm wondering whether you could, and this is probably the last opportunity, reiterate, or tell us exactly—help us with how we write this report—what specific recommendations you would make to this committee on this.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: If I understand the comments from all of you today, it is about an evolution of the three-D approach, and to make it work in the reality of Kandahar. I can see you all struggling with some answers to this today. It's like you have an approach that seems like a sound approach, and then it has to be applied to the reality of Kandahar. That reality of Kandahar, as I said before, not only involves food aid; it needs an alternative for the farmers for their income.

These difficulties that have been encountered with the silos have to be solved, but not solved next year; they have to be solved immediately, because Kandahar and the climate the Canadian military are fighting in is at stake. That seems to be what has to be grappled with next. I'll be interested to see how you manage that.

The Chair: You have some time left, if you wish.

Ms. Norine MacDonald: Thank you. It's okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have one quick piece of business. We need to have unanimous consent from the committee to deal with a motion that was put on your table today.

On October 25 the researcher sent out a list of potential witnesses to bring in to tell us what they're doing in Afghanistan. In order to give the clerk some time to bring them in, we would like to pass this motion. The list includes everyone from General Leslie to the U.S. ambassador and other ambassadors.

Do I have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: I want to thank you very much. You came and answered some really tough questions. We appreciate it. We've had people here who haven't been on the ground in Afghanistan trying to tell us from a distance what they've learned. You have actually been there and done the deal. I think what you've offered today is going to be very helpful, and I thank you for that.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

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

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