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Chair

Mr. Jason Kenney

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● (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC)): Good morning, colleagues.

I call this meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development to order.

Our first order of business is to continue our study of the Canada-China human rights dialogue, and the broader question of human rights in the People's Republic of China. In that respect, we're very fortunate to have with us today two witnesses who are representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I would ask Mr. Wangdi and Mr. Gyari to please take their seats at the committee table.

We have before us Tashi Wangdi, who is the representative to the Americas of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Mr. Lodi Gyari, who is a special envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, particularly with respect to discussions with the People's Republic of China. We welcome both of you gentlemen.

I understand, Mr. Wangdi, you're going to be beginning with a presentation, and then Mr. Gyari. The format is that you both have a brief period to make remarks. I'd encourage you to make remarks to brief this committee on the status of the China-Tibet negotiations and perhaps also the current situation in Tibet. When both of you are done, then we will take questions from committee members.

Please go ahead, Mr. Wangdi.

Mr. Tashi Wangdi (Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for the Americas, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the subcommittee, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed a great pleasure and honour for my senior colleague, Mr. Lodi Gyari, and me to have this opportunity to address the subcommittee and make opening brief remarks. I will start the remarks from our side.

I think the most important thing this morning would be to hear from Mr. Lodi Gyari, who is the special envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, based in Washington, but more importantly he is the head of the delegation for negotiations with the Chinese government. He has this very difficult responsibility of trying to find a peacefully negotiated settlement to a very complicated and difficult problem.

I will just make a brief opening remark about the current situation in Tibet and the human rights issue. When we talk about the human rights issue, I think we are talking about symptoms of a much larger problem. It is just a symptom, I believe.

Recently I am sure you have been following a very tragic, sad incident that happened at the Tibet-Nepal border at the beginning of last month when a group of unarmed, innocent Tibet refugees escaping into exile were shot at and there was death and serious injuries. But this is not an isolated incident. This has been happening for more than five decades, but unfortunately much of it has gone unnoticed by the international community. What happened early last month received international attention because it happened in the presence of foreigners, the mountain climbers who had actually witnessed it.

But the interesting thing, which again is illustrative of the situation in Tibet and the problems our people have been facing, is the Chinese official response to this. They said that the shooting was done in self-defence. To make such a blatant statement, totally baseless, in the context of the whole incident having been witnessed by not only one or two individuals but a group of foreign mountain climbers, and I think it was an Albanian who in fact was able to record it.... I'm sure you have seen this. You have seen the reports. And now the whole video film is available on a website. This just illustrates how much distortion, how much has been presented by the Chinese government to the international community as being a completely different matter.

● (1115)

I'll just say this to give an illustration of the depth of the problem and of the difficulty the international community has in really understanding the problem. There was an earlier incident in 1987 in response to a peaceful demonstration by Tibetans in Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet. It was very ruthlessly suppressed; many people lost their lives. And again, that received a certain amount of international attention because there were foreigners in Lhasa at that time. Secondly, a very brave Tibetan, working in the Chinese information department, managed to get a copy of the official film, shot by the official team, of what exactly happened. Actually, that was not for publicity. That was smuggled out of Tibet within a matter of a couple of days and that was shown to the outside world.

At that time, also, the Chinese government tried to stage the whole story by saying that it was in response to provocations by Tibetans. A very interesting thing was that a Chinese journalist who was officially covering at that time and after that the Tiananmen Square event also sided with the Chinese students and came out. He wrote an account of that and he very clearly recorded that when the peaceful Tibetan demonstration was taking place, the Chinese officials had left loaded rifles on the street corners and they had positioned cameras. They wanted the Tibetans to pick up the loaded rifles and use them and that would have been the pretext for suppression.

The suppression did take place, and before the Tiananmen Square event in 1989. Tibet was under martial law in 1988.

That kind of situation just gives a very rough account of our situation in Tibet. And this has been going on, as I said, for more than five decades.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan leadership have decided to find a solution to this problem. I would describe this as a vicious circle. There is suppression, resistance, more suppression, and this has been going on. As has been recorded, more than 1.2 million Tibetans have died in the last 50 years. What happened early last month is just the tip of the iceberg. It's a much larger problem.

We have to get out of this vicious circle, this problem. The only way we can do it is through negotiations. Also, there is this Tibetan movement, this non-violent movement, this peaceful movement, and unfortunately, it doesn't attract that much international attention. At the same time, I think in the last number of years there have been, of course, governments, parliaments—

I would also mention here that we are very grateful to the Canadian government, the Canadian Parliament for their support, and particularly, I think, in the case of the recent instance of the foreign minister's very strong statement in Parliament in response to a question. This is something that we deeply appreciate, and we are very grateful for that. Also, over the years, members of Parliament have taken an interest. I think this kind of thing is of course important.

Sometimes I think there's an impression that China doesn't care about international opinion. I would venture to say that it is the opposite. They do care.

● (1120)

Some years ago—I think it was more than 15 years ago—there was a Chinese official internal document. It was a directive issued from Beijing to the local officials. It stated that the officials have to be very careful in how they handle the situation in Tibet. They said that if a pin dropped in Tibet, it would vibrate around the world. So they are sensitive.

The negotiation process, of course, was started about twenty years ago. It went through ups and downs, but it was never taken to its logical conclusion. There was a total breakdown for about ten years, and then about five or six years ago, His Holiness again wanted to restart this process. He appointed two of his senior advisers to restart this contact and start the process of dialogue. Mr. Lodi Gyari and his colleague, Mr. Kelsang Gyaltsen, were given this difficult responsibility. They have successfully re-established contact, and there have been five rounds of dialogue.

If I were to give an account of what is happening in Tibet now or what has happened, it would be a very sad, tragic story. But we don't want to be bogged down in the past. We want to move forward and find a solution. And that is what we are trying to do. There is a very sincere, committed effort to find a negotiated solution.

I think today it may be more useful for the committee to hear from Mr. Lodi Gyari, the person who is responsible for this, about the dialogue, its process, the difficulties in taking the dialogue forward, and the present status. I think that may be important. As I said, if we can solve the larger issue, the bigger problem, then the other issues, like human rights violations and these things, which are only symptoms.... We are now trying to tackle the main problem. I think it will be very important for the committee to hear from Mr. Lodi Gyari about this important issue.

Thank you very much.

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Wangdi.

Mr. Gyari, go ahead, please.

Mr. Lodi Gyari (Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, As an Individual): Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my colleague and I feel greatly honoured to be invited to testify at your committee.

Certainly we come here not to badmouth the Chinese government, not to do China-bashing, because in my case particularly, the responsibility that was given to me by His Holiness is to reach out to the Chinese government.

At the same time, we believe—and this is something we have made very clear to the Chinese government—that until such time as we find a solution to the Tibet issue, until such time as the Chinese government starts to respect the fundamental rights of the Tibetan people, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all of us also have a moral and historical responsibility to our people to speak the truth. So it is in that spirit that we come in the presence of this august committee to speak today.

We also believe, as my colleague has very clearly stated, that for the Chinese and us to find a solution, there is an important role for the international community. Particularly, the government and the Parliament of Canada have an important role to play. Again, the role is not just siding with one party and trying to be unfriendly to the other; it's a role that can ultimately help both the Chinese and the Tibetans find a solution that will be mutually beneficial.

For the last five years I have been directly in touch with the Chinese government. We have had five rounds of meetings. I just wanted to share with you that as far as the meetings go, we are quite satisfied. I say we are quite satisfied because I also had the honour or the difficult task of being part of a delegation that His Holiness sent to China as early as 1982 and 1984.

Compared with the experience that we had in those periods, I must say that the experience I have had in the last five rounds is much more encouraging. I say “encouraging” because the Chinese government has, in my view, in some limited manner come to a situation where they are also beginning to learn to listen to our viewpoint. Those of you who live in total freedom may even find it astonishing and say, “What does he mean? Don't listen.” But we know from our experience that there was a time we did not even have an opportunity to express our views.

So to us that definitely is an important departure. Also, I say it is encouraging because for the first time both parties, both the Chinese and us, have been able to speak in our discussions very candidly of our differences. I say “differences” because at the present moment the only success that I can share with you is the success in being able to more or less identify our differences. Unfortunately, we have not even begun to explore, particularly from the Chinese side, resolving the issues. But I can certainly say that we have begun, and we have, I think, quite successfully at least identified our differences.

I think the Chinese government's official statement and the statements that I have issued after our visits are identical. Basically what we say is that we have now been able to identify our differences; therefore, now we know that the gap is very wide. The differences are many, and many of the differences are fundamental.

That having been said, under the guidance of His Holiness the Tibetan side remains fully committed to trying to bridge that gap and trying to minimize our differences and ultimately to be able to find a solution.

● (1130)

In a way, if the Chinese leaders have the political will I really think it is not as complex as it looks sometimes. On our position and the Chinese position, if you look at it purely from a political point of view we think the major gap has been bridged. Unfortunately, it has been bridged not by the Chinese government but by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama came out with the very difficult but very courageous decision to look for a solution, not seeking independence, but within the confines of the People's Republic of China, we feel we met the most important concern or position of the Chinese government.

If you recall, when we first established relations in 1979 there were two clear messages from the then paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. First, don't talk about independence; that is non-negotiable. Second, if you accept the fact that you're not seeking independence and you're looking for a solution within the People's Republic of China, everything can be discussed. From their point of view, independence was not acceptable. For us, any other things we would discuss.

Unfortunately, the Chinese government continued to always lecture us privately and publicly that we couldn't talk about Tibetan independence—which we're not. But they continued to accuse His Holiness of having this hidden agenda. As I said on one of my visits, we always have the first message repeated, but we quite often don't have the second part of that message, that if we don't talk about independence everything can be discussed. To be very candid, we have not been permitted to discuss everything until now. Forget about meeting our hopes and even being allowed to discuss them. But there has been some slight change, and at least now they listen to our views.

So we have reached a very critical stage. We are now able to identify the differences, and are going to make efforts to see if we can somehow overcome those differences. This is where the international community, and particularly a country like Canada, which has historically had rather cordial relations with the Chinese government.... For the last many years I have kind of voluntarily decided not to go around testifying before many committees, but I felt I should join my colleague. Because of Canada's relationship with China you will be able to understand our motives a little better. It is important for us to be able to seek your help.

For example, Canada has the unique experience of dealing with its own situation. It may be of great help if you are willing to share, with both His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government, your experiences in dealing with these issues. Unfortunately, right now the Chinese are in a kind of self-denial. They feel the best way to deal with the situation is to suppress it, put it under the rug, and impose their own way of thinking. But I think you have tried to deal with it differently. You could invite His Holiness here the next time he comes, so he could get a deeper understanding of how you have handled some of the issues, and the Chinese—hopefully together, which I think might be a little difficult at this stage—separately.

One of the issues for us is the preservation of our distinctive Tibetan identity, in which language is one of the key issues. If you look in the Chinese constitution and the Chinese bylaws you may find them quite similar in origin to what you have, but in reality there is no possibility for the Tibetans to mention the bilingual aspect of it. Here again, you have dealt with that, so therefore you could maybe even encourage the Chinese, but it's not enough to put it in writing; they must really implement it.

● (1135)

These are the kinds of things that we hope you will be able to help us on. Specifically with the regard to the negotiations, I hope, at least from our side, that we are ready for the next round, which would be the sixth round. I had already communicated to our Chinese counterparts some time ago our readiness to come back. In fact, both my colleague and I came back from Dharamsala, where we spent several days of intense discussions among ourselves and where we very thoroughly examined the proceedings of the last round, where, as I mentioned, Mr. Chairman, we identified our differences on both sides. We go back, at least from our side, with a number of important decisions where we tried to meet with some of China's concerns. Similarly, it is our hope that when we go back the Chinese government has in the interim also given serious consideration to our point of view and will at least make an effort to address some of the issues we have raised.

In a nutshell, what we ask has always been very transparent. While this is a very daunting and unpleasant task, on the other hand I tell people that my task is also not very complicated, because we have a leader who has always been forthright, very transparent. Therefore, we have always gone to the Chinese with our bottom line. The way we are negotiating is in a very unique Tibetan style, not learning from any of the textbooks of the modern-day negotiations.

We basically have stated that we are willing to stay within China but we need—all the Tibetan people today residing within the People's Republic of China—to be given the maximum self-rule in areas where we know best how to preserve our language, our culture, our way of life. These are basic things for all Tibetans.

At the present moment, when the Chinese government talks about Tibet, they are only talking about half of Tibet in terms of the physical and also in terms of the population. The rest of the Tibetan people are now in various Chinese provinces, but they are all identified as Tibetan autonomous areas. In fact, the areas that we would like to put together are already identified, and if you look at the Chinese political map, they are already designated as Tibetan autonomous areas. So what we have been asking is not at all complex.

We have also made it very clear that His Holiness himself has no personal agenda. He has made it very clear that the moment he is able to help conclude an understanding between the Chinese and Tibetans, he will not at all hold any political position. I know that our Chinese friends continue to mislead people by using terms like “You know that the Dalai Lama wants to actually rule one-fourth of China”, or “You know that the Dalai Lama actually wants to replace the present socialist system in Tibet by imposing the exiled Tibetan government”.

Those things are totally baseless. In fact, you will know, as many of you have met His Holiness personally, he has made formal statements making very clear that he is not seeking any political position. In fact, he will not only not seek but he will refuse categorically to accept any political position once the issue has been resolved.

● (1140)

He made it also very clear that once agreement has been reached, he will voluntarily dissolve the Tibetan government in exile, because on that day the purpose of the government will have been fulfilled. He said he set it up not to challenge the Chinese but to fight for the rights of the Tibetan people. If that has succeeded, then he will himself voluntarily wind up the government in exile. At that time, only one government will be the Tibetan government. It will be one government, where the Tibetans will have their say. That will be the best—

As I said, in a nutshell this is our position. I can assure you all that from our side we will vigorously pursue this with all sincerity, because we believe it is our moral responsibility to the Tibetan people. But also, we believe that ultimately it is an important thing for China.

I want to conclude by saying that I would like you to convey to the Chinese that they must not fail to seize this opportunity. It is only when His Holiness the Dalai Lama is there leading the struggle that they have the historic opportunity to be able to conclude this in a way that will benefit everyone.

If they feel it is to their advantage to leave it unresolved, I can assure you that will be the biggest blunder. If His Holiness is not there, there's no doubt for us, the Tibetan people, that it will be a tragic situation. I can also tell you that our bitterness and our sorrows will not go away, but will become multiplied, and at that time there will not be anyone with the moral authority to keep the Tibetan people non-violent.

Today we feel very proud that on the plateau of Tibet, in spite of so much suffering, there is hardly any violence. That is not because of the ruthlessness of the Chinese authorities; it is because of the Tibetan people's deep reverence to their leader. It is because of his advice that, in spite of all these decades of untold suffering, we feel so proud of our Tibetan Buddhist tradition of really being able to remain non-violent.

Also, the other reason is because no one, except maybe people who are not sensible, will resort to doing anything stupid if there's hope. As long as there's His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan people will always have hope. Because of that hope, they will also not indulge in anything that can cause suffering to themselves or suffering to others. When that hope is gone, then I know maybe many people will reconcile to the situation, but not everyone will reconcile. And honourable members, you know that you need only a handful of people to create situations that in the end will become a gigantic problem.

So I just want to again ask that collectively, individually, you convey this to the Chinese, because none of the Chinese leaders have personally met His Holiness. Many of you have met His Holiness. You know His Holiness far better than the Chinese leaders in Beijing. Again, if you can, convey to them—this is not begging—that for the good of China they should seize this opportunity of reaching out to His Holiness the Dalai Lama for the common good of everyone.

Thank you very much.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gyari. Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

We shall now go to questions.

Mr. Silva.

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you very much for your presentation.

I want to get some clarification in relation to your negotiations. You said you're going to the sixth round soon. I want to know whether the Strasbourg peace plan that His Holiness put forward back in 1998, with a five-point plan, is the fundamental five-point plan you're still going forward with in your rounds of discussions.

Mr. Lodi Gyari: I'm very glad you asked that question, because this is a question my Chinese counterparts also ask us.

The five-point peace proposal, and most importantly, also His Holiness's speech to the European Parliament, certainly does form the basis of his philosophy of a middle-way approach. But if you ask whether, for us, the Strasbourg proposal especially is the basis of our dialogue in its totality from our side, the answer is no, but it reflects the whole philosophy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. For example, I think he asks there what it is that people are asking.

We made it clear to the Chinese that these two documents themselves need not necessarily be the agenda for the discussions. But, yes, the basic philosophy of this middle-way approach is definitely articulated in these two important documents.

Mr. Mario Silva: Given that the United Nations Human Rights Commission is now the council—the new council that has been formed recently—and member countries like China will have to provide reports, all of us will be interested to see what those reports will be on the issue of Tibet, and will comments be allowed from His Holiness as well, on some of those reports.

Mr. Lodi Gyari: Of course, the UN is a very respectable organ. In the early 1960s, we ourselves went to the UN for refuge and we have three resolutions from that august body. Unfortunately, in the last couple of decades, such important institutions as the United Nations have been too dominated by a few nations. For example, many of us do not even have the possibility of setting foot in some UN premises.

But you specifically asked us about the human rights commission. Both my colleague Tashi and I have spent.... At one time, it used to be our yearly pilgrimage to go to Geneva with the hope of raising our issues. But we have to be very frank: we've not totally given up, but we have a little bit, because we've found that while there are a lot of very decent people, as an institution it is totally dominated by the permanent members of the Security Council. At the end of the day, in the UN system everything is decided not by the sovereign nations, who are quite proud to be members, but by just five nations, and they have their turf already settled global-wise.

So at the moment, to be very frank, we do not spend much of our energy and resources knocking at the door of the UN.

Mr. Mario Silva: There are those who have made comments and observations that what's happening within Tibet amounts to cultural genocide, that there is a systematic program by the Chinese government to annihilate the culture and the traditions and the language of Tibet. And particularly with the massive movement of people from mainland China, do you have any statistics of what the numbers might be in terms of the population ratio right now in Tibet? What may be happening—I don't know if it's underground—to continue to maintain the culture and tradition of the Tibetan people?

● (1150)

Mr. Lodi Gyari: I'm sure my colleague will also add to that.

First of all, using the word “genocide” with regard to Tibet was not something we coined ourselves. In the early 1960s the prestigious Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists conducted a very thorough investigation with many legal luminaries and also a large number of people from Asia. They came to the conclusion in their report—I think it is “The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law”—that yes, indeed, cultural genocide has been committed in Tibet. Obviously, those are issues such as language, such as our culture. So we base our remarks on the findings of this prestigious global institution.

One of the real threats to survival of the Tibetan identity is the demographic invasion. Our Chinese friends, of course, will deny that. In our discussions, also, they in fact always confront us with their figures to prove that the Tibetans are more than the majority in all the Tibetan areas, but the reality is.... Today, just look at our holiest city of Lhasa, which is not only the political capital but is the centre of Tibetan civilization. The only landmark of Lhasa is the Potala Palace, which fortunately still stands majestically, and then a small part of sort of a Tibetan ghetto, which is now there around Jokhang. Other than that, if you don't look up in the skyline and see the Potala, you don't even know that you are in Tibet. You could be anywhere, in any part of China.

I know from talking to many westerners who go to Tibet that Tibetans come to westerners, foreigners, in their own capital city asking for directions, because even the directions of where to go to some places are in the Chinese language. This is the major concern we have. If we become a minority in our own country, which we are becoming, there is not a possibility for us, in terms of having a distinctive personality, and that's why we always make it an important issue when talking about having some limitations on the ongoing demographic invasion of Tibet.

The Chinese do have the mechanisms. Look at Hong Kong. Even though in Hong Kong no one disputes that this is part of a sovereign China, not every Chinese citizen is free to walk into Hong Kong. No. There is almost a strict.... Maybe it is even more difficult. It is much easier for many of us who have a Canadian passport or an American passport or a European passport to come to Hong Kong than it is for citizens of China. It is quite a daunting task. Similarly, if the Chinese government has the political will, and they are willing, they could create some kind of mechanism so that there is no indiscriminate flow of non-Tibetans to the plateau of Tibet.

The Chair: I'm sorry, we'll have to hold it there.

Before we proceed with the next round of questions, I just wanted to advise those waiting to present on the Cuban issue that we'll be starting that segment about 15 minutes late, because our committee started 15 minutes late. I'd ask all of our questioners and our witnesses to try to be brief so we can give everybody, at least each party, a chance for a question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. St-Hilaire.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming here today. It is a pleasure to hear from you. It is also very interesting. I have always been confident that you would succeed. If Tibet has succeeded to get that much international support, it is probably because your movement is non-violent. In the Province of Quebec we also want to do things in a democratic and peaceful manner. You are also proceeding in a peaceful manner and it is probably why you get that much sympathy even though, as you told us this morning, you are still very far from reaching your goals.

Mr. Gyari, I think, has spoken about the role of the Canadian Parliament. Could you tell the Sub-committee how specifically Parliament could help you in your quest?

● (1155)

[*English*]

Mr. Lodi Gyari: Thank you very much.

First of all, I wanted to mention that specifically here in Canada, as elsewhere, it was always the parliamentarians who actually took the first step in understanding our plight. The governments sometimes came a little reluctantly on board and sometimes not at all. We just wanted to express our gratitude.

We believe there are definitely a number of concrete ways that Parliament as a whole, and specifically this particular committee, can help. Parliament as a whole, we believe, can help either unanimously or with a consensus of Parliament in being supportive of His Holiness and really recognizing that in his effort to find a solution he has gone to the maximum. I know you've haven't done this in the past, but in the current situation.... I'm sure in each country you have a different sort of system of how you do it. I think it is very important that it be acknowledged, not because he as a person needs to have it acknowledged, but because we as a people need it. It's also going to be important in our negotiations.

We would also like you to express your support for some of the key things we have been struggling for—for example, our right to the highest form of regional autonomy. Again, from Canada's experience I think you have the right people to say that they deserve it. They are a distinct people and as such should have the highest form of internal governance.

Another thing is with regard to the area I talked about earlier. The Chinese government says that the Dalai Lama's urge to have all Tibetans under one administrative area is totally unacceptable because it was not the case historically and so forth. We would like you to point out that it is absolutely legitimate because we are one people. Even according to the Chinese Constitution, we are one nationality. They call us the Tibetan nationality. Obviously we are one nationality living on the same plateau. We are not scattered. We are not saying one portion lives 500 miles to the east, nor do we have a situation, as the British did when they left Pakistan having created East Pakistan and West Pakistan, which didn't work in the end. We are all on the same plateau in the contiguous area. We would like you to express your support on this.

Then there is, as I said, the whole bilingualism aspect of it. Parliament could express its support for it, and, constructively, offer the Chinese and Tibetans your experience. This committee alone could think about a visit to Tibet. We know that other parliamentarians from Europe, for example, dealing with human rights issues have conducted on-the-spot visits to investigate the situation and then have reported back to their colleagues and shared their findings. This would not be meant as a way to embarrass the Chinese, but simply as a way to help find the situation there by bridging the gap.

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Thank you.

You mentioned dialogue, but I can see certain things behind what you are saying. There have been discussions and negotiations, but do you really believe that it is the key? Do you hope that it will be the solution? If not, would there be another approach? You are talking of a sixth round, but have you seen any concrete results in Tibet?

As concerns Canada's aid to Tibet, I suppose that it goes through China. Does humanitarian aid from Canada reach Tibet?

[*English*]

Mr. Lodi Gyari: With regard to the sixth round of talks, I think what I said is that it is crucial, because in the last five rounds, somehow we have been able to identify our differences. As far as we're concerned, we are now committed from the sixth round to start making efforts to overcome those differences towards a common understanding. But we have no illusions at all that we will be able to get our differences in one or two rounds. Unfortunately this is going to be a fairly long process. In fact if both sides are serious, it's natural that it will take time.

Are we hopeful? I am hopeful. In fact, I always say that the moment I feel this is totally hopeless, it is my moral responsibility to resign from my position, because of my respect and the responsibility that I have for His Holiness, my leader, and because for me to continue to be head of an important effort if I don't really believe in the philosophy of his middle-way approach and in the possibility of this becoming a reality—

Having said that, why do I hope? Absolutely not because of the behaviour or the position of my counterparts at the present moment. I have a hope in this because of my understanding of the sincere commitment of my leader, His Holiness. So if you hear that I am no longer heading this, it certainly means that as an individual I have lost my confidence. This does not mean that the dialogues will be broken, because His Holiness is committed. He wants to resolve this through dialogue, because non-violence is through dialogue. Someone else, maybe with more hope, will take on from that.

The last question is important. Yes, first we do understand that the bulk of Canadian taxpayers' money does go to China, and we are beginning to understand that a bit of it seems to sort of trickle down to Tibet. That is very much appreciated, because we have a different position from some other international organizations. I don't want to name names, because you know that there are some international freedom movements with political leaders who deliberately allow their people to suffer, to remain in very pathetic conditions—let's say, the bitterness is in their mind—so that they continue to resist, and also to make their opinions look bad to the whole world, in order to say, “Look, this is what we have been reduced to”.

Our approach has always been totally different, because we should not play with the livelihood of our own people. Therefore while we are negotiating, while the Chinese will not allow us to have any access to Tibet to do anything—not even to set up a little school directly by His Holiness—we have always urged and pleaded with international agencies, governments, and even individuals to say whatever you could to help our people, because the real marginalization is happening inside Tibet, and our whole negotiation is about stopping that marginalization.

If we say don't do that because we are talking, then I think we are being hypocrites and not being faithful to our own people.

So we would like to encourage—but we wanted to ask through you, the Canadian government, and through your federally funded institutions—that it's important for them to consult with us. They can consult us in the corridor, they can consult us in the coffee shops, it doesn't matter. But if you really want to help Tibetans, don't listen to the Chinese government in Beijing.

It's very important that you consult with us. Also, it is our hope that at least some of this aid will start going through NGOs, because the bilateral is not only with China. With many countries, when it's bilateral, a lot of that money doesn't really trickle down to the recipients, unfortunately, in much of the third world. Maybe this is not a politically correct word, but in the future we would like substantial funding to go through NGOs, which are accountable—NGOs whose books will be audited and whose activities could be questioned by people such as you and us.

● (1205)

So this is our hope, and we also hope to be able to share these things with people in government.

The Chair: That's very useful testimony.

We'll pass now to Mr. Sorenson.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you.

I certainly want to thank both of you for appearing before our committee today. I guess when we have people come to appear as witnesses before a committee, there are a couple of different reasons why we might have them. First of all, as a committee we want to understand the situation; we want to be educated on a certain subject; we want to know what's going on in your area of expertise and to get your experiences and to learn from them. But the other objective is to move us to do something. Certainly as a committee we want to understand and learn, but we also want to be provoked to action. I guess that would be one of my questions. What action would you want to see us take? You've already mentioned in response to Madame St-Hilaire's question that engagement by parliamentarians has been fairly positive. That is the driver of this thing primarily; governments sometimes go a little slower, or are hesitant and reluctant.

So what specifics would you like to see happen here in this committee? Canada does have somewhat of an historical relationship with the exiled leaders and the power they represent. But when we think about what's happening in Tibet and with the Buddhists, there are some countries that.... Maybe I'm wrong in assuming this, but I think India, for example, because of its proximity, has been very active on issues with Tibet. So I want more clarification as to what they do compared with what we do. The United States has come out very strongly on Tibetan Buddhist issues and on humanitarian violations with China and them. Some European countries—

We've done certain things; we've made the Dalai Lama an honorary citizen of the country. It's provoked discussion; some think it's been positive, but others think, what were we thinking when we did it? Those are the various opinions in the country, and maybe even in Parliament. But what specifically can the Canadian government do, in comparison with the actions other countries are taking?

I have one other question. You say that in your dialogue with China, you don't want to lead an independence movement; you don't want to do that; you want to preserve your culture, your language, and all those kinds of things. But you also say you would like some kind of local autonomy, some kind of local government there. What would that government look like? Would it be a government chosen by your religious leader? Would it have some principles of democracy? Would it be a bright light of democracy in a dark area? What would it look like?

The Chair: There are lot of questions there.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Yes, and I have two more.

The Chair: Oh, you're joking. You don't have two more?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: No, no, go ahead.

The Chair: We only have three and a half minutes left in this round.

Mr. Lodi Gyari: Thank you very much.

Again, we would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to India. You mentioned that. I think quite often people don't understand, but the fact today is that the Tibetan identity is alive and thriving because we have been able to take refuge in India. The Indian people and the Indian government have given the maximum opportunity not only for us to survive, but really for our Tibetan culture to thrive.

Similarly, you also mentioned the United States. Yes, it is a fact today that both the Congress of the United States and even the administration no doubt have taken the most important interest and the lead with regard to Tibet. And this is deeply appreciated by us. But at the same time, it is our hope that others will also join, because the Chinese also have a very unique relationship with the United States. When this becomes the issue that is always being pushed by the United States—and we are very grateful for that—it really gives the Chinese also the opportunity to view this as if this is driven not by the urge or the suffering of the Tibetan people, but because there is a special agenda.

It is for these kinds of reasons that we have always hoped that a country like Canada, which has a different kind of relationship.... Of course your relations with China are very, very new compared with our relation with China, which is centuries old. Yours just began in the seventies. But even before you even had diplomatic relations, you had an interest in the relations.

What we would like to see is maybe more cooperation, for example, with the EU. We are trying our best to make the European Union take more interest. The European Parliament, as you know, is one of the most supportive organizations. Maybe as parliamentarians, selectively by yourselves but also in collaboration with other parliamentarians you can help.

Coming specifically to what kind of help, yes, we are certainly not only asking for certain kinds of individual rights, such being able to speak Tibetan, but we are definitely also asking for—which is guaranteed in the Chinese constitution—our Tibetan autonomous government. Will that government be nominated by religious leaders? Absolutely not. In fact we have already separated the church and the state. His Holiness himself has, in spite of very strong opposition from some of our Tibetan parliamentarians.... We have a very thriving small group of parliamentarians. In fact, twice they voted against His Holiness because they somehow feel that the Tibetan state must have a unique relationship with Tibetan Buddhism, and His Holiness absolutely said no. Times have changed. It is both healthy for the church as well as for the state that there will be no relation between them, so they are totally separated.

What we are looking for is a government that will be a government, hopefully, elected by the Tibetans themselves. In fact His Holiness has no intention of nominating anyone. It will be entirely for the Tibetans to democratically set up a government of their choice.

● (1210)

The Chair: I'm sorry, we're way over time, so I'll have to pass to Mr. Marston.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Sitting here listening to your description of the Dalai Lama's middle-of-the road approach and when you consider that 1.2 million have died, it certainly speaks well of the total philosophy within your country, and particularly of the Dalai Lama.

To the chair, I don't think we should underestimate the request or suggestion we heard earlier about a motion of support for the position of the Dalai Lama. There are certain subtleties that have to come into play, and I appreciate listening here to the messaging that came through on that.

We've spoken in this committee in regard to the fact that the Olympics are going to occur in China and that this may open some doors. To be brief and to the point, China, to say the least, does not have a commendable human rights record. When you consider what happens in Tibet, to the Falun Gong, and in our case we have a Canadian, Mr. Celil, over there, it is of grave concern to us.

When I think in terms of Hong Kong and Taiwan and the fact that they have a fragile relationship with this government now, perhaps that's the best you can truly hope for. It's almost a rhetorical question.

● (1215)

Mr. Lodi Gyari: Again, I think you say it is for the Canadians to uphold your principles. Absolutely. Certainly democracy and freedom are your principles, so it is for Canada to uplift that. We do believe that, yes, democracy in the end is going to be the most important vehicle of change in China. But people are reluctant. People feel that with China you can't even talk about a democracy, because if you do that it is going to ruin your relations with China.

I think some of us have a better understanding of China than, with all respect, many of the self-styled China specialists that I've seen in my years of working on this issue. They go for a quick trip to China and come back and write a book and the next thing you know so-and-so has become a China expert. We are experts by compulsion. We didn't become experts academically, but because for us it is a life-and-death kind of issue.

China is changing and China is ready to change. I think there are millions of people in China today who would actually like China to become more free and democratic. I will not be surprised—in fact I think we can say with certainty there are even those in the leadership who believe that for China to really become a prosperous and strong, important nation, she must also politically change. It's not enough to economically adopt the western, whether it's good or bad—some think it's very decadent; some think it is wonderful. But what China has so far taken is the economic system. Totally, it has restricted itself. But if you keep on pushing it, I think there will be a surprising response, even from the section of the leadership who understands that in China's interest even the economic success cannot survive unless there is ultimately a political liberalization.

But it is not for us to preach. I think it is for a great nation like yours to uphold, and not to trade everything. Trading is a wonderful thing, but certain things, in our view, should not be treated as commodities to be sold. These principles, I think, must be preserved.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Very briefly, when you raised the issue of the United Nations, very clearly your last comment on trade is the actual fact of the interference of the United Nations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Perhaps I could put one question of my own, before we close.

Our Parliament and the Government of Canada received criticism, both internally and from China, for having made the symbolic gesture of granting honorary citizenship to the Dalai Lama, as was mentioned. Some have argued that this sort of thing is a provocation and counter-productive. Would you care to comment on that critique of these kinds of symbolic gestures of solidarity?

Mr. Lodi Gyari: Yes. I'm not surprised that you heard such comments. First of all, as a Tibetan, I can tell you that your gesture has sent a very strong message of hope. Again, I think each time that you make such a gesture, you are actually contributing to the stability and the peace on the plight of Tibet. Hope. You are telling Tibetan people, “Don't resort to other methods; keep on the track, because there are people who still respect a non-violent approach. There are still a lot of decent people out there in the world who care about some of these issues of principle.”

At the end of the day, I can assure you that this has also sent a positive message to the Chinese. It is important for them to understand that it is more important for them to engage with the person who really has so much admiration and is loved and respected by so many millions of people than to send the message that says we'll close our eyes—do whatever you want to do in places like Tibet.

In conclusion, as a Tibetan, not as His Holiness's special envoy but as a Tibetan, I really want to say we felt a deep sense of gratitude. I have spoken with some Tibetans who have come out of Tibet. That is most important, because those of us who live in freedom have other ways of getting oxygen for our struggle. But Tibetans who live day and night under the Chinese brutal system need a bit of reassurance; they need a message of hope. And by awarding His Holiness this great honour, you have sent to the millions of people who live under Chinese communist rule a message of hope. I really wanted to thank you for that.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you. That's encouraging to hear. Thank you both, Mr. Gyari and Mr. Wangdi.

[*Translation*]

We wish you a pleasant stay in Canada and everywhere in the world.

[*English*]

Thank you very much.

We'll now suspend for two minutes so that we can bring forward our witnesses on the next topic, Cuba. I ask that everybody move as quickly as possible so that we don't lose any time.

● (1220)

(Pause)

● (1225)

The Chair: I'd like to get back to business, because we are behind schedule, having been pushed back by the committee that previously occupied this room.

I'd like to call the committee back to order, as we proceed to our second item of business this morning, which is the reconsideration of this committee's examination of the human rights situation in Cuba.

Just for context, many of you may know or recall that this committee in a previous Parliament received evidence and began preparing a report on the Cuban human rights situation, but with particular respect to the 76 political prisoners. We as a committee have decided to pick up where we left off before dissolution of the previous Parliament. In doing so, we have invited before us some witnesses essentially to give us an update since our last hearings on Cuba.

We have before us, from the Canadian Foundation for the Americas, Christina Warren. As well, we have, from the Christian Labour Association of Canada, Brian Dijkema, and we have Ian De Waard, also from CLAC.

Please go ahead, and first is Ms. Warren.

Ms. Christina Warren (Program Director, Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL)): Thank you very much.

I'm very pleased to be here to provide the committee with a brief overview of the human rights situation in Cuba and to offer a couple of recommendations for Canada's policy towards Cuba.

Cuba is ruled by an undemocratic government that represses nearly all forms of political dissent. The Castro regime, now in its 47th year in power, shows no willingness to consider even minor movements towards any sort of political or economic opening. Fidel Castro's deteriorating health and his proclamation of July 31, when he delegated power until his recovery to his brother Raoul Castro and six other officials, reminds us that the possibility for profound change is on the horizon in Cuba. There are plans currently under way inside the island to ensure a smooth communist succession following the end of Fidel Castro's rule.

Given recent developments, it's appropriate to speculate about how a successor regime that Raoul Castro seems likely to dominate would fare. It's difficult to estimate how long he might last in power after Fidel dies, however, as the variables that will suddenly come into play at that time will be so complex and numerous that any predictions can be tenuous at best.

While the experts predict the likelihood of some sort of economic opening, it's not hard to also imagine a continuation of grave violations of civil and political rights under this scenario as the revolutionary regime seeks to maintain its political monopoly amidst the likely stepped up activism by Cuba's determined domestic opposition in pursuit of its agenda towards a non-violent transition to democracy.

At present, Cuba's government continues to enforce political conformity using criminal prosecutions, long-term and short-term detentions, mob harassment, police warning, surveillance, house arrest, travel restrictions, and politically motivated dismissals from employment. The end result is that Cubans are systematically denied basic rights to free expression, association, assembly, privacy, movement, and due process of law. Cuba's legal and institutional structures are at the root of rights violations on the island, and Cuba's criminal code provides the legal basis for the repression of dissent. The mass media, both print and electronic, are under Communist Party control.

In a July 2005 report, the Cuban Commission of Human Rights and National Reconciliation, a respected local human rights group, reported the existence of 306 prisoners incarcerated for political reasons. Of the 75 political dissidents, independent journalists, and human rights advocates who were summarily tried in the harsh crackdown by the government that took place in April 2003, over 60 remain imprisoned, serving sentences that average nearly 20 years.

In addition to these profound political restrictions, Cubans also face significant economic restrictions. A determined campaign by Fidel Castro has been under way to roll back the timid economic reforms he felt obligated to allow in the early 1990s after the Soviet Union, the island's partner and patron, collapsed. In response to this crisis, Castro opened up the door to foreign investment and allowed Cubans to set up small private businesses. Cuba's highly restricted self-employment sector, however, has increasingly been squeezed out as the Castro government moves away from market-based mechanisms.

At their peak in the mid-1990s there were 240,000 licensed entrepreneurs running home-based restaurants and cafés, working as handymen and beauticians. Their number has now dropped to 140,000. This move away from market-based approaches is facilitated by a very lucrative economic alliance with Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's president, who provides cheap oil in exchange for Cuban expertise in areas such as health and security, and soft loans from China. Thanks to these relationships, earlier this year Mr. Castro formally declared the post-Soviet economic crisis over.

Despite Castro's pronouncements of the end of Cuba's economic crisis and the government's continued allocation of significant resources to Cuba's extensive system of social benefits, in various recent studies from inside the island sociologists and economists describe a Caribbean society with rising poverty and growing class and regional inequalities, inequitable access to public services and economic opportunities, and a re-stratification of a society along racial and gender lines.

They have described problems facing Cuba's social services, including a deteriorated system of health care and education, reduction in pension coverage and the real value of pensions, as well as a steady increase in the housing deficit due to the very low rate of housing construction and the destruction of part of the existing supply due to lack of maintenance.

● (1230)

The rate of poverty in Havana, defined as individuals lacking sufficient income to cover basic food requirements and essential services, was conservatively estimated to be 20% of the city's population during the 2001 to 2003 period.

The growth of poverty and inequality in Cuba contradicts the government's official discourse of equality and social solidarity and is contributing to a mounting questioning of the Cuban model as well as widespread demoralization inside the island. These factors, coupled with Fidel Castro's imminent death, open the door to a new period in Cuban history.

It is the view of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas that Canada should renew and retool its policy towards Cuba at this critical juncture in order to more actively and effectively impede the consolidation of a communist succession in Cuba and lay the groundwork for a best-case scenario for change on the island based on peaceful democratization led from within the island, economic prosperity, sustainable social development, and reconciliation among Cubans.

In doing so, Canada should explore how it could work more cooperatively and strategically with other key members of the international community, including the United States, to achieve these goals. While a sole reliance on heavy-handed pressures for change is likely to backfire, respectful yet firm suggestions for a democratic opening and respect for human rights accompanied by a promise of generous economic aid and technical assistance linked to a genuine political opening once Fidel Castro departs from the scene are likely to help. That is, the right balance of carrots and sticks should be applied in order to create the appropriate incentives for incremental movement towards positive political and economic change and genuine dialogue.

A key lever of influence will be to create the conditions so that political change is seen as an opportunity to improve living conditions for the majority.

Thank you.

● (1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Warren, for that very pertinent testimony.

We'll now move to the Christian Labour Association of Canada. I'm not sure which of you is going to present, but go ahead.

Mr. Brian Dijkema (Ontario Solidarity Organizer, CLAC Solidarity, Christian Labour Association of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, members of the committee, for having us. It's a pleasure to be here again. As the chair mentioned earlier, this is our third meeting with this committee, or a version thereof, and we're happy to be here again.

One of the things mentioned when we first came was CLAC's concern with nine members of an independent union in Cuba called the CUTC, Consejo Unitario de Trabajadores Cubanos, essentially Cuban independent workers. Nine of those were in jail.

This presentation will go through the facts of our involvement in the human rights situation in Cuba. We will look briefly at Canada's involvement with Cuba, and coming out of the previous two meetings we will offer some suggestions that will hopefully be concrete enough for this committee to recommend to the House or to the powers that be that we re-examine and hopefully change Canada's policy towards Cuba.

To start with, the situation on human rights in Cuba has not improved since our last meeting in November. The wave of repression that happened in March and April of 2003, in which 75 Cubans were arrested for such things as being involved in a trade union and being involved in independent newspapers and the like, continues. As Christina mentioned, 60 still remain in prison, and there have been more arrests since that time.

Among those arrested at that time, as we mentioned, were the members from the CUTC. They are being faced with not only arrests and short trials that lasted two days without any independent counsel and without foreign diplomats or reporters being allowed to witness them, but they're also being kept in prisons that are often very far away from their family members and their colleagues, making visitation and communication difficult. These prison conditions and all the difficulties have been recognized and deplored by the United Nations, Amnesty International, and a number of other groups. Essentially what we're saying here is that the case of the CUTC is but one example of the deplorable situation in human rights in Cuba.

There are further things beyond just individual rights. The rights of workers in Cuba, which we're obviously very concerned about as well, are also not recognized. Independent trade unions are simply not allowed. In fact, Amnesty International has suggested that any independent organizations apart from those sponsored by the state are barred from having legal status. We are very concerned about that. Cubans who are working and disagree with the government often find themselves dismissed or demoted from their jobs and unable to find work; work in Cuba can only be found through state employment agencies, and these employment agencies—as has been mentioned by the Canadian government in its guide for doing business in Cuba—are paid $500 a month by the company operating in Cuba, while the employee receives $25. That's 5%.

Canada has been operating for a long period of time now with a policy of constructive engagement. The point of this policy is to export Canadian values, including respect for human rights, to Cuba, and of course it's also for the mutual benefit that comes with trade.

This part of the presentation will very quickly go through Canada's relationship with Cuba and then come to our suggestions.

Right now, in 2005, we have a $1 billion trade relationship with Cuba. It puts us as the second-largest export country and the sixth-largest source of imports with Cuba. We rank behind, as Christina mentioned also, Venezuela and countries such as China. It was interesting to be here this morning to follow the report on China. Canada is also one of two leading donor countries for Cuba—along with Spain, we are one of the top two. Our projects in Cuba deal with modernization of the state; that's modernization of tax administration and infrastructure programs. Also, moneys are dedicated towards participatory development.

It's interesting to note here that $8 million goes towards things that are dedicated towards modernization of the state. That involves tax infrastructure, information infrastructure, etc., while participatory development, which is supposed to be focused at NGOs in Cuba, ranks under $1 million, and it's unclear whether those moneys are continuing since 2003. CIDA does not have information on that, and we're not able to access it.

● (1240)

Their goals, interestingly, are food security and participatory development solutions through popular education and pilot projects, with greater collaboration between Canadian and Cuban NGOs. The difficulty, of course, is that Cuban NGOs, as has been stated by Amnesty International and other groups, simply are not allowed to exist. They're not legally allowed to exist.

The fact that Canada has continued to engage with Cuba despite these repressions in 2003 has led some people.... For instance, at our last meeting, the Honourable Ed Broadbent called the policy of Canada a “euphemism”—I'm quoting him here—hiding the reality that “there is a complete absence of civil and political rights in Cuba”.

CLAC believes that statement to be true. The fact is that since 2003, since this repression happened, there's been a 65% increase in trade with Cuba: a 65% increase in trade. There has been one public statement by a government official, by Mr. Pettigrew, and that wasn't even picked up by any of the major newspapers.

Essentially what we're saying here is that the Canadian policy towards Cuba, if compared with Cuba's respect for human rights in terms of the political and institutional situation in that country, is in fact a euphemism, and it's becoming increasingly embarrassing. We're hoping that this committee will begin to work towards a policy that will do a better job in that regard.

We have a number of suggestions. Now, a concern or question that came out of our last meetings was on whether or not the Christian Labour Association of Canada was going to make policy suggestions. We do have some here. If I may, I will go through them briefly, just so this committee has something on its plate to chew on and to hopefully take forward in its report.

First of all, we're looking for some sort of public statement on the fact that there are still 60 prisoners of conscience in jail. We would like the Canadian government to do more than simply put one small media release or conversation in Reuters. We want them to be regularly using diplomatic and other channels to pressure the Cuban government for the release of these people and for the recognition of independent organizations, such as trade unions, in Cuba.

One of the difficulties with Canada's policy of constructive engagement is that there are simply no measures by which we can determine whether or not our policy is effective. There are no metrics by which we can say our engagement is in fact constructive. We believe it to be the case that we are engaging, as I mentioned earlier, with no understanding of whether or not that is doing what we hope it will do—that is, increase respect for human rights and strengthen civil society, good government, and justice in the country of Cuba.

One of our suggestions is that the committee work with different department officials, etc., to create an objective set of measures that are publicly known so that Canadians involved in and interested in Cuba will be able to hold the government, and our policy, accountable in that regard.

The third suggestion we have is for a benchmark on the amount of civil and political rights violations we're willing to tolerate before we alter our policy. Again, the difficulty here is that we are working with constructive engagement, yet we have no idea how many violations of human rights are needed in Cuba before Canada begins to alter its policy. At CLAC we believe that 75 violations, and that the continued violations, are far too many. We would like to see a lower benchmark, and we would like to see Canada act on that.

We would also like to see a refocused investment in Cuba. Interestingly, the investment done by CIDA is focused on modernization of the state and social development. That primarily focuses on schooling and medical care. Very little, as we've mentioned, goes towards Cuban NGOs. In fact, I would offer that Cuban NGOs don't exist, so no money goes to them.

● (1245)

We are hoping for a complete refocusing of Canadian aid dollars. Right now, our money is going towards Cuban projects that in effect—at the United Nations, in its media releases, and so on—blunt or soften criticisms of its human rights violations for trade unionists and individuals. What happens is we invest heavily into their social development—health, education, etc.—and that in turn is used by the Cuban government to say "Things are actually quite fine here, and we've made progress in these types of rights", and the rights of individuals and communities and organizations that are attempting to foster dialogue and democratic renewal or democracy in Cuba go unheard or unmentioned.

Finally, Canada has a series of programs of exchange with Cubans—the Cuban government, Cuban officials, lawyers, etc. We would like to see the Canadian government have non-governmental dissident groups, including the CUTC and other such individuals and groups, come to Canada. We should not be exchanging with a government that is ignoring the rights of its citizens and regularly violating the rights of organizations to exist.

With that, Mr. Chairman and members, I would like to conclude.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and you're right on time.

I would like a point of clarification before we begin with questions. You said there were 60 political prisoners in Cuba. Did you mean there are 60 of the group of 75 still in jail?

Mr. Brian Dijkema: Yes, that's true.

The Chair: Presumably there are other political prisoners, in addition to those people.

Mr. Brian Dijkema: Yes, there have been more since 2005, in fact.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva: Thank you very much for your presentation.

As you mentioned, Canada's policy, which is for constructive engagement, is supposed to include, in that engagement, respect for human rights through economic and cultural development engagements. Now, that particular policy direction is sometimes—and I think that's what I heard from you—in conflict with our objectives, with the moneys that we're putting forward with CIDA. If the CIDA programs focus on two priorities, which is the modernizing of government and local development, as you've stated in your presentation, sometimes that is used by the government, in fact, to state that things are going relatively well.

How do we refocus the programs? How do we in fact make sure that on the issue of program development and work by CIDA that in fact it is meeting those objectives of human rights and that it becomes very much a priority?

Mr. Brian Dijkema: Is that directed at me?

Mr. Mario Silva: It could be to you, yes.

Mr. Brian Dijkema: Well, the difficulty is that right now there are no independent NGOs in Cuba. If we want to know whether our policy is working in that regard, I think Canada has to take a leading role, like it did with China. It needs to recognize the dissidents and it needs to publicly do that in such a way as to support them. If the Cuban government is unwilling to tolerate our support of independent organizations like the CUTC, then the government also will need to think about what it will do in response to that.

The difficult situation is that right now it seems as if none of the cards are held by the Canadian government. We're involved in a relationship with Cuba and we are not able to exert our influence on where that money goes. It says it goes to NGOs, but they're not legally recognized in Cuba. So what we would offer as a solution to that—and obviously it's a very difficult point to take—is we need to begin recognizing, as a nation, independent organizations like the CUTC, to begin with. That would be the place to start.

Mr. Mario Silva: I assume you're stating that our programs have not been working in meeting their objectives specifically in the area of human rights. Finding out what the best approach is is also difficult because the United States' approach, for example, which has been to isolate Cuba, has also been quite detrimental to the allowing of civil societies and the growth of democracy there, as well. That approach does not work. It seems that our approach is not working. What is the best approach, really, to get human rights respected in that country?

● (1250)

Ms. Christina Warren: I agree with you: nothing works. That's the problem.

Clearly, though, there is historic change about to happen in Cuba. Will it be in a few months? Will it be in a year or the next couple of years? One doesn't know. One has been hearing for quite a while that Fidel Castro is ill and aging and about to depart from the scene, but it is actually happening.

Canada is limited in what it can do right now, given the context on the ground in Cuba. I do agree that just out of principle, it should assert its democratic principles more forcefully and explain to the Cubans in a respectful way that there are other models out there, including ours here in Canada, which are not the American model, but democratic, capitalist systems that are also socially progressive. That is what the Cubans actually aspire to; however, here it's economically viable.

Definitely, one should assert oneself at this stage, but one should be very realistic that it's limited in terms of the kind of change that one could influence right now while Fidel Castro is at the helm.

We should be doing a lot of preparatory work at this stage to be planning for the big change that is about to happen and try to influence that change in a positive direction. A key recommendation I would make to do that would be to try to come up with some sort of concerted strategy with the international community. One idea would be to put together a golden carrot to influence potential reformers on the island to take the steps we would like them to take.

Mr. Mario Silva: Thank you.

Some of the basic questions that I wanted to ask have been answered, but maybe I'll speak about the judicial system there and how it operates. You have a situation, as has been reported, where about 75 political dissidents have been arrested since the spring of 2003. How do they go to the court system? How does the judicial system operate there and how can we maybe get some influence over the judiciary? I guess what I am trying to get at is, if we're going to be engaging them, should we not try to see if we can help them also? If we're going to reform the tax system, why not try also to reform their judicial system?

Ms. Christina Warren: I'm very pessimistic as to what kinds of real reforms would be taken at present in the judicial system; I'm not sure what could be done, and I don't think it would be a lot. We could play a more effective role just by helping to publicize the existence of those dissidents to help legitimize their agenda.

I don't know if Brian has a comment.

Mr. Brian Dijkema: In my conversations with government officials, if I'm not mistaken, there have been some judicial exchanges where judges from Cuba have come to Canada to observe how our system works. The hope, of course, is that their experience would be brought back to Cuba and influence the way the legal system works there. That's an honourable and worthy goal, and I do hope it is met. The difficulty, of course, is that the case of the 75 and of those arrested since that time does not exactly indicate that those exchanges have been successful, in that there were one or two-day trials without representation by recognized lawyers and without any sort of public scrutiny.

These exchanges have been taking place, which is why we have suggested that if Canada is going to continue in this policy there is a wide continuum of what it can do, all the way from an American-style embargo, or worse, to complete engagement with Cuba without any criticism.

If there are no benchmarks by which we can measure our effectiveness.... For instance, if we're not willing to suggest as a benchmark the opening of trials to the public or the representation of offenders by recognized lawyers, or even charges being laid against them, we have no basis on which to either continue those exchanges with judges and lawyers or to let them go.

● (1255)

[*Translation*]

Le président: I shall now give the floor to Ms. Bourgeois from the Bloc Québécois. Welcome to our Committee, Madam.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Chairman. It is very much appreciated.

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I find rather peculiar your requests concerning public statements about the 60 detainees who are presently incarcerated in Cuba.

Have you asked Canada or the U.S. to free the five Cubans who were sentenced to prison? Have you made representations on behalf of those five Cubans who are imprisoned in the United States without any reason? Did you make such representations?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Dijkema: Is the question whether we have done anything regarding the Cuban five, the prisoners in Cuba?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: My question deals with the five Cubans who are jailed in the United States for practically no good reason.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Dijkema: That's a very fine question.

If I may speak, our concern is with the CUTC and the independent trade unionists in Cuba. There may be some improprieties on the part of the United States—I don't know; I have not investigated those. Whether or not the arrest of those five legitimizes the arrest of the 60 or 75, or more, and the continued repression in Cuba is another question. Even if those five were arrested without cause and were being held without charge in the United States—and Madame, I don't know, because I haven't investigated that, because we have no affiliation with them—I don't believe that is grounds for us to stop criticizing Cuba for the arrest and imprisonment of these 60. I think the arrests in the United States are being used by the Cuban government to draw attention away from its rights violations.

Madame, if the United States has acted improperly in this regard, then I would expect other nations to criticize them in this regard. If Parliament wants to form a committee or a subcommittee on the issue, then I believe that's where it should be addressed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I find your request rather peculiar. You should know that there is an American embargo against Cuba.

Do you know that Cuba has not been allowed to trade with the United States for the last 40 years? Are you aware of that situation?

Mr. Brian Dijkema: Yes.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Are you aware that Canada is protecting itself against an American intrusion in its territory? Are you aware of that?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Dijkema: Are you suggesting that the arrest of the—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: No.

I want to say that I find rather peculiar the request you are making today to this Committee. We must not forget that Cuba has been trying to protect itself for the last 40 years. It cannot trade with other nations. Only communist countries and Canada have accepted to help Cuba.

Canada is trading with Cuba. Fortunately, Canada has sent people there with expertise and experience. This has help Cuban people. Cuba has the best doctors in the world and a very good education system. The only thing it doesn't have is money. If the United States lifted their embargo, this might help them.

Maybe you could put pressure on the United States so that they accept to give Cuba some freedom.

● (1300)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Dijkema: Madame, I find this line to be very interesting, because Cuba does trade with countries other than communist countries. It trades with Spain. It trades with numerous countries in Europe and in other places, in Africa.

I agree that the American embargo has been very hard on the Cuban people. Our union's position is not that we are seeking an embargo. Nonetheless, the question is whether the rise of the embargo would result in.... Your line of questioning seems to be implying the embargo is directly tied to the arrest of these 60 people. I find that inconceivable. I'm sorry to be so aggressive, but our union is not in agreement with the American embargo.

Our union's position is that we want the release of 60 people, particularly nine people who are attempting to do something Canadians do here on a regular basis, and that is have independent organizations that stand up for the rights of Cuban people.

If rights are being oppressed and abused by the Cuban government, by its own government, if they want to say the American reasons for that, that's not justifiable. Our position is that the nine need to be released, the 60 need to be released. And the political prisoners of conscience who have been listed by the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, and numerous organizations, including, I may say, trade confederations, the ICFTU, which is typically a more socialist type of body, have also criticized Cuba in this regard.

That would be my response.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: To conclude, Sir, when I heard Madam earlier, saying that the situation might improve if there were changes, particularly—

We know that Fidel Castro is ill and aging, but in Cuba there are also people that are very sensible, just like Fidel Castro. You just need to think of Ricardo Alarcón who is a very logical man. Just think about the government and the members of Parliament who represent the people and who defend their freedom. They want their people to progress. There is also the solution they recently found: while no one wanted to help them, they however succeeded in buying goods from certain countries. They want to be helped.

I understand that people are imprisoned, but before coming here to speak about human rights, maybe you should consider that if that government had received more help in the last 40 years, it wouldn't have to watch carefully everything that happens in the country in order to protect itself.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Do you want to answer?

[*English*]

Ms. Christina Warren: Just very quickly.

I think the point is, though, that we have to look at today and the future and not the past. The embargo is in place. One can criticize it in many ways. I would like to see it gone. However, what does one do about it?

It would be useful for Canada to work with the international community, including the United States. The United States would be receptive to a thaw of U.S. policy if Cuba were to make certain moves—for instance, releasing political prisoners. You're not going to get everything at once, but at least some incremental movement in the right direction. Canada should be working actively on that.

The Chair: Merci.

We're going to pass now to Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you very much for coming.

I am curious to know this. You talked about a big carrot and we talked about Canada's re-engagement policy that is now being criticized. I personally would look at these as two separate issues. For example, on the imprisonment of the trade unionists and all those guys, yes, that is the right way for us to protest and to say this is not acceptable. That is breaching human rights on the issues of free speech and what we in Canada have as core values. On freedom of speech, it is the right thing to talk to the Cubans about it and tell them we are protesting.

Now let's go to the second aspect of that, which is the engagement policy and the embargo of the U.S. by isolating Cuba, and Fidel Castro being in power for 40 years and nobody could do anything for 40 years to get him out. I'm curious to know this. If we go on the route that you're saying, how much of your NGO is engaged in Cuba itself? If we become tough in Cuba, the NGOs will probably not be allowed to come in. The NGOs are the best hope the people of Cuba have for furthering their life within the context of the lack of freedom. If we carry on.... I would like to hear your experience, as you're an NGO. How much are you involved in Cuban life?

Forget the government aspect. I've just talked about the government and what we want to do. But as civil Canadian societies, how much are you involved in day-to-day Cuban life? What will then happen is that you would be *persona non grata* in Cuba and you won't be able to go there. It would be a case of how good of an engagement can we do. Where is the point, from your perspective, not from the political aspect of a political prisoner, but from your point of view? Where do you want to go so hard that the engagement process falls off and NGOs are unable to enter to make any change in that country?

● (1305)

Mr. Ian De Waard (Regional Director, CLAC Ottawa, Christian Labour Association of Canada): I can only speak from our own experiences as a trade union that's affiliated with the international trade union movement. We're already being denied at the door. Our colleagues from this organization and other organizations in Europe have been turned back upon arrival. We can't get in now, and I suspect that's the experience of other organizations like ours, be it in the trade union movement or otherwise. I don't know if that problem would be created. I think it already exists in many ways.

To pick up on where you started, it's important that we acknowledge and recognize Canada's very good relationship with Cuba already, with Cuba's people and Cuba as a nation. We've done incredible things there and have the potential to do great things. I think we need to start with the fact that we have that good relationship. And with Mr. Castro and his cohorts, as we would with other organizations in which we have a fraternal relationship, we should gently call them to account on the areas where they've been in stark violation of rights, such as the nine and the 60 that are still in prison, as Canada once did in 1997, if I'm not mistaken, when Mr. Chrétien publicly called Mr. Castro to account, as you would a good friend. That's the kind of relationship that we have with Cuba.

It's important that Canada maintain that relationship. We're not asking that Canada remove itself from Cuba. We think that an American-style embargo would be a deplorable place to end up at in terms of Canada's relationship. Nonetheless, we have a good relationship, and as we continue to trade with Cuba, as we continue to provide federal investment, we can leverage that money in some respects, as a good partner can, to say we will continue on this relationship, but we can set in place some benchmarks, some goals that Cuba will achieve if it wants to continue to receive the amount of money and trade that Canada has been providing for 30 years.

The Chair: I think Mr. Sorenson wanted to split his time, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: All I'm saying to you here is there is a limit to how far we go to ensure what you're talking about, a good relationship, a good friend. We don't want a good friend to turn into a negative side, where we lose the overall objective of helping the people of Cuba.

● (1310)

The Chair: Mr. Sorenson, do you want to come in on this, so you get in within your seven minutes?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: I have one quick question, following up on what you said.

You just mentioned that Canada has had good relationships, that we have been active in trade, that we have developed some markets there or are involved in trade, and you want to continue what we've done. But Madam Warren said that what we have to pull out is the golden carrot with Cuba; we have to have this golden carrot. If we're already doing well, how much gold and how much carrot? How much more would we have to do?

I'm not a big believer that just throwing money at the problem is ever going to solve it. In countries like that, where governments have, it would seem, very little appreciation for the civil society there, I'm not certain that Canada really gets bang for the buck, do we?

It's easy to come here and say "Bring out the golden carrot", but what are you talking about? Are you talking about doubling what we've done?

Ms. Christina Warren: I'm talking about mobilizing support internationally—let's say, with the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank, and with other countries, like Spain—see how one can try to mobilize support to put a package together. I don't mean just money, because part of the golden carrot can be technical expertise, but basically to provide that security and suggest that there's a better way forward and we will help. Canada doesn't necessarily have to pay for all of this itself, but to work with others to make this contribution.

As to other parts of the golden carrot, there are so many issues, such as the question of outstanding properties originally confiscated from the United States. This can be part of the golden carrot as well in terms of trying to resolve these issues now, have some plan in place to make people on the island feel secure about the potential for the future.

Mr. Brian Dijkema: The carrot is important, but we also have to realize here that there are 75 or more people in jail, and the question is whether or not a large, continuing investment in Cuba, which we have been doing for a large number of years, is going to be the thing that works. So what we're looking for is that we're not necessarily suggesting bringing out the stick, but we have to realize that there need to be both ends, and if certain things like rights are going to be violated on a regular basis, we need to know as Canadians, and we need to know as organizations that are trying to hold our government accountable for its policies, when we're going to start speaking out and start taking action against regular violations of rights.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: What specifically would our dollars buy? What specifically are our dollars buying right now? They're not buying respect for independent organizations or human rights in Cuba.

The Chair: We're going to end that round there.

Mr. Marston.

By the way, I'm an equal-opportunity softie. Everybody has been going over time.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Being a democratic socialist might set the tone for a bit of this. First of all, I agree with a lot of the things you've said. I come out of the Canadian trade union movement myself.

I think part of the problem we have today is that these good folks have come here talking about a specific issue and they've stumbled into us discussing the broader issue of our policy. I think that has put them in an awkward position.

Just as a quick question, how many of you have been to Cuba, have actually visited?

Mr. Brian Dijkema: I would be very interested to see if I could get into the country. The reason is because—

● (1315)

Mr. Wayne Marston: I want to carry on, so I'm asking a specific yes or no question.

Mr. Brian Dijkema: I know, but it needs a full response. Our affiliated unions sent people in, and they were not allowed in. Now, I have criticized the government, but—

Mr. Wayne Marston: Excuse me. I have a purpose to my question. I don't want to be combative with you, but I have a purpose.

Could you answer, please, so I understand a little better?

Mr. Brian Dijkema: I've not been to Cuba.

Mr. Ian De Waard: I've not been to Cuba.

Ms. Christina Warren: I've been four times; one of those times was for at least a month.

Mr. Wayne Marston: I'm not meaning to demean your position; I want to make a point.

I've been to Cuba four times. I disagree with the totalitarian nature of how that country functions, even though—

I'm talking on the broader issue now of Canada's good relations with Cuba. My wife is a nurse. Each time we visit, we take medical supplies and school supplies. One of the things I think helped build the foundation that supported Castro in the first place was the American embargo. The American embargo stole the future of those people, to a great degree. In fact, I understand Bill Clinton, towards the end of his tenure, was going to try to lift the embargo. I'm not sure why he didn't.

I visited a hospital down there. I've seen some of the good things they have. The crucial problem is their short supply of everything, which takes me to your golden handshake. I understand your reaction, because Canada tends to put money into a number of places. It goes to some governments, and that's it; it never reaches the people.

We were sitting here a few minutes ago talking about a country that killed 1.2 million Tibetans and that their human rights record is this long. Take us back to where we're at with good friends in Cuba. I believe Canada has many good friends who we've invested in there.

The reality is, the golden carrot you suggested is probably the way to start to go. But it's about finding a way to sustain that dialogue, to maintain those friendships we've had for so many years, and as well to keep an eye on the human rights you refer to. I support you when you say we have to do something about that.

I don't really have a question.

The Chair: Very sneaky, Mr. Marston.

I think Mr. Silva wanted one more crack at this, then we might round it up. We have committee business, and we only have 15 minutes.

Mr. Mario Silva: Maybe I can start by saying that I have been to Cuba. I was there three years ago, and I'm not sure I would want to go back, actually. I would say that I quite agree that the embargo is a major problem, and I've always opposed the embargo. I also think that the Cuban community in Miami has probably done more damage than good with their statements and their actions.

However, you still can't get away from the fact that it's a military dictatorship. There are still no civil liberties, no freedom of the press, religions are still suppressed, homosexuals are still arrested, and there are incredible violations of human rights. You can't blame all that on the embargo. Yes, there is an embargo, and it's an unfair embargo, I agree. But they've also gotten massive subsidies because of their alliances with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. They trained their armies and sent them overseas, particularly to African countries, where they're fighting in a lot of different wars as paid mercenaries, if you want to call them that.

They've aligned themselves now with Chavez, which is fine; they got the new money that they needed. But they also have other investments from other countries, including Spain, which is heavily invested in Cuba. So you can't say poor, poor Cuba is being terribly economically deprived because the U.S. won't deal with them. They have many other allies who have invested massive amounts of money into that country.

The reality doesn't change the fact that it's still a dictatorship. And I don't know of any dictatorship around the world that has not abused the human rights of its people.

How can we talk about and somehow be apologetic and excuse a government and a regime when it's arresting people, when it's putting them in jail for the fact that they're speaking out and want to organize or exercise the very basic human rights they have under all the conventions of the UN, which we have signed and are a part of? We say we uphold and believe in those doctrines and believe in those resolutions we put forward at the UN, but in Cuba we're going to stand back because, oh well, the embargo. Give me a break.

I was there three years ago. I was lucky, or unlucky, to be sick. Because I was sick for two weeks, I had an opportunity to meet a lot of people in that society, including medical doctors. One thing that always came across was that they are scared. They won't speak publicly, but when they go into your room and you meet with them in private, they are scared. They ask whether you have any news back home, any magazines, because they can't get magazines in Cuba. So it is a repressive society, and I left there with a very negative taste in my mouth about the country.

I was going there, like most Canadians who go there, to enjoy a vacation on a beach. If you spend your time on a beach and you see the resorts, you think everything is wonderful. But when you get to meet people and they want to be open and expressive with you, as they were with me—which I was quite surprised by—you learn about a different reality.

You cannot use the word “embargo” as an excuse for human rights violations. That, to me, is really appalling.

● (1320)

The Chair: I'll take that as a statement as well. We'll terminate it there. I know we will have an opportunity to continue this discussion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bourgeois, all members of Parliament are always welcomed in our Committee.

[*English*]

We'll have to call it to an end there, because we have committee business to attend to.

I'd like to thank our witnesses very much for this very enlightening session.

We'll now move to committee business. We don't need to go in camera, do we? No. Okay.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. St-Hilaire, I believe that you have a motion to put.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Yes, Mr. Chairman. My motion follows our last meeting when Mr. Charles Burton came as a witness. I do not know if it can be put to a vote today.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Oui, ca va*. You've given notice of motion.

[*Translation*]

It is okay.

[*English*]

I'll read the motion:

[*Translation*]

> That the Sub-committee on International Human Rights requests a copy of the original preliminary version of the report prepared by Professor Charles Burton, based on Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade letter of Agreement Number 12800 CB of August 1, 2005, on the *Assessment of the Canada-China Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue*.

[*English*]

Is there debate?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Chairman, I think when we looked at this motion that came forward out of the testimony of Professor Burton, we understood that we wanted to get the body of what his report talked about. We wanted to understand the intricacies of his report.

The fact that there was a classified and an unclassified report was frustrating to some, because I think we have an idea that there are massive amounts of hidden information here that the committee should know.

From what we have heard, there is information that has been blotted out—basically names of people in the report who, when they gave information, gave it with the idea that they were giving it confidentially. That is the part that is blotted out. That's why they gave their information; they gave it with that understanding.

As far as trying to keep consistent with the Access to Information Act is concerned, I think the government has honoured their wishes and others' by making sure that names and some of those types of particulars were left out of the report.

Only a small amount of information was excluded from the public report, and its exclusion in no way alters the report or changes or hides any assessment that's provided in the report by Professor Burton.

So I think this motion certainly is in order, but when you begin to ask for classified information, you're taking a major step. I know that what you can do down the road is hurt the whole process by going to people who say, “Yes, we can disclose some information, but we'd rather our names not be in there.” In quoting, they put the name in with the understanding that it stays classified. Now, if we ask that it be unclassified, those people will not disclose in the future.

So I would not support the motion. We've already been told that it's such minimal amounts that are blotted out.

● (1325)

The Chair: Let me reply. The context here is not explicit in the motion. Perhaps Madame St-Hilaire would accept a friendly amendment.

It was my understanding that we discussed receiving this document in camera, not rendering it public, but considering it in camera, in order to be sensitive to the issues Mr. Sorenson raised.

Is that correct? Is it possible for us to review the document in camera and not take court documents out of the committee meeting?

Mrs. Angela Crandall (Procedural Clerk): It depends as well on the level of confidentiality. The committee may not get access to it, depending on the level—

The Chair: So we could request it, but depending on the level of confidentiality attached to it, they may, on national security grounds, not grant access to it.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I understand this report is public already, that only small portions—

I would like to know from Madame why she is having difficulties with the report that has been released. Why does she want the full report to come out, knowing and understanding the fact that, as my colleague said, in a lot of classified areas people will have given their names? Maybe we will get a better understanding of what she is trying to achieve here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Mr. Chairman, I believe that it would be important to correct some facts about what happened at the last Sub-committee meeting.

In fact, Mr. Burton came to present us a report which was not the original version. It seems that some people, maybe sitting here, have seen it. It was not what Mr. Burton presented to us. Furthermore, Mr. Burton agreed to let the members of the Sub-committee have access to his report. Some parts of it seem to have been deleted by the government. If it is classified, we might discuss it *in camera*.

We want to study the important issue of human rights in China and Mr. Burton has done some important research on that subject. However, if we do not have access to all the information, it seems to me that some people are exercising a form of control, which worries me. That information might not be important, but its absence will keep bothering us during the meeting. This is why we should solve that issue immediately.

Mr. Burton didn't have any objection. In fact, Mr. Obhrai, with respect, this report is not public. If you have it, you should distribute copies to your friends, because I don't have it.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to put the question, simply because I think we know what the positions are here and we're running out of time.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We will now discuss the next committee—

I'm sorry, where are we in the schedule next week?

Mr. Marcus Pistor (Committee Researcher): Next week is the break week. There's a list of witnesses that was circulated for comments. The first would be for the meeting in two weeks and the second for the meeting in three weeks.

The Chair: All right. We discussed at the last meeting continuing in the direction of the Chinese study, and we have a potential witness list.

I'm not going to read out all the names of the groups, but if people have groups they would like to have invited for this study, I would ask you to submit those to the clerk. The clerk or our researcher, Marcus, could circulate these names and you could identify if you have any objections. So I think we can work on it on that basis rather than get into a lengthy seminar here on all the different groups.

Obviously Falun Gong has asked for an appearance, and presumably that will—

Mr. Marcus Pistor: They're on the list.

The Chair: They'll be persistent, I'm sure.

All right, I'll adjourn the meeting. Thank you.

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