



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

SECU • NUMBER 014 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 19, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Thursday, October 19, 2006

•(0910)

[English]

Mr. James Knight (Chief Executive Officer, Federation of Canadian Municipalities): Thank you, Chair.

We appreciate the invitation to be here. I am joined this morning by John Burrett, a senior policy analyst in social development in our organization, and Josh Bates, who works with John.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities is, of course, the representative institution of an association of municipal governments in Canada. We embrace 1,450 local governments, and they comprise 87% of the Canadian population among them. We have very strong participation from Canadian municipalities in all parts of the country.

Of course, we're here to talk about Bill C-12. We want to say at the outset that inasmuch as the bill empowers the federal minister to act in cases of emergency and to increase the capacity of the minister to act, we are strongly in favour.

My comments are really on the municipal role in emergencies. I would invite you to reflect on that and possibly enhance the act in a small way.

Of course, the department has said on its website that the Emergency Management Act in part is to ensure that the federal response to an emergency is coordinated and harmonized with other jurisdictions. In our view, this can't really happen unless municipal governments have some kind of presence in the consideration. Municipal governments are the first responders in cases of emergency. They provide many services, as I will demonstrate, that are critical whenever something goes wrong.

In our view, the bill as currently written will not lead to better coordination across jurisdictions because there's virtually no reference to the municipal order of government. We will suggest how that reference can be made explicit.

I think that because the municipal role is often not recognized at the federal level, we do not benefit from some of the funding that is made available from time to time to improve our emergency capacities. We think this is inappropriate, as I will show, given the things we provide in this area. Frankly, this lack of involvement wastes resources and threatens the well-being of Canadians.

Municipal governments are the first responders in 95% of emergencies in Canada. Municipal governments are generally responsible for police, firefighting, paramedics, public health, which is terribly important, emergency shelters, and other first response capacities.

The threats that we manage are growing, perhaps even exponentially. Of course there is a constant concern about public health and the possibility of pandemics, such as SARS, which I'll talk about later. There are severe weather events driven by climate change, and we seem to have more frequent events. Major accidents and related toxic spills are from time to time also increasing in frequency simply because traffic is increasing exponentially. And of course there is the ever present threat of terrorism.

Cities are also expected to carry most of the burden for security at events such as major conferences and sporting events. In fact, in many cases we own the facilities in which these large events occur.

Finally, it's important to note that we own much of the critical infrastructure: the water supply systems, which I would say are reasonably vulnerable in this country; the waste water systems; in many cases, the electrical supply systems; the transportation networks, bridges, and roads; and the transit systems, which we have seen in other countries are extremely vulnerable. But we are not at the table when decisions are made regarding national emergency management plans and strategies. We're simply not there.

The only reference in Bill C-12 to local authority is that the minister would work with them through the provinces. There's that one mention, but we think it is inadequate.

Failing to acknowledge formally and fully the essential nature of the municipal role in developing and deploying emergency preparedness policy risks perpetuating the current system and does nothing to change the paradigm that has traditionally seen municipal governments and their front-line agencies left out of critical planning and being under-resourced.

From our perspective, the absence of true municipal integration into overall emergency management plans results in a patchwork of guidelines, resources, and expectations that differ province by province, territory by territory, and community by community. We don't believe other orders of government are therefore getting the full picture and taking into consideration the front-line requirements of municipalities.

Our specific suggestion is that, in the preamble to the bill, the Parliament of Canada could recognize the fundamental role of municipal governments in responding to local, national, and international emergencies, and then a coordinated and efficient response to emergencies requires collaboration among all orders of government. This wouldn't be binding in law, but it would be a reference point that would help in the reflection of parliamentarians and service providers, and the minister, in the event that municipal governments were called upon.

We'd be happy to work with the committee or others in suggesting precise wording, and we have delivered to the clerk copies of our June report on emergency planning, which is very substantial. It was prepared for us by external experts, and it outlines in considerable detail many of the issues we would like to raise.

I want to talk about some specific instances to put in concrete terms what we have in mind.

I don't know if many of you were living in Toronto in the 1970s when a railcar filled with chlorine derailed in Mississauga. It was only through the extremely well-organized efforts of the police and fire departments that lives were saved. The entire city was evacuated. A quarter of a million people were evacuated with remarkable speed and remarkable efficiency, a service provided entirely by the regional police and fire departments.

I remind you of the ice storm. Some of you might have been in Ottawa when that terrible event occurred—or in the Eastern Townships or other parts of Quebec, or in Montreal, for that matter. This was a catastrophe of enormous scale, and of course in Ottawa, where I lived, it was the municipal government that was responsible for finding solutions to all sorts of immediate and challenging problems. The Canadian military was deployed, and that was extremely helpful, but that was some days later. Those first few days were utterly critical, and of course it's the municipal government that was there to do what it could.

I remind you of 9/11, not 9/11 in New York, but 9/11 over the Atlantic Ocean. You've all perhaps heard of the efforts of the city of Gander and its mayor to accommodate their equivalent population. Their population doubled in a few hours, and they were able, remarkably, by marshalling all kinds of local resources, not only to care for the stranded travellers but in fact to give them a Newfoundland experience, which was unique. Claude Elliott, the mayor, went on the international circuit, on television and talk shows, and became somewhat of a celebrity.

I remind you, of course, of 9/11 in New York. Again, who was it who emerged as the leader of the city and obviously the person in charge? It was Mayor Giuliani. That was his role.

I'll talk a little bit more about SARS in Toronto. I had the privilege of attending a briefing given by the then public health officer of the City of Toronto, Dr. Sheela Basur. She gave this briefing to a group of U.S. mayors who had come to reflect on the Canadian experience and learn from it what they could.

● (0915)

This crisis was managed by the public health department and the police department of the city of Toronto. There was a federal contribution, which had to do with science and identifying the virus. It was useful. And there was a provincial contribution, which was to pass legislation enhancing the powers of quarantine so we could ensure that the affected individuals would not spread the disease. Of course that entails a great deal of support for the individuals who can't leave their apartments.

The amazing story is that Toronto has the largest public health department in North America—this, I didn't know—with 1,700 public health workers. They were able to take 300 of these workers, give them all the police support they needed, and put them in a

special building. They proceeded to conduct an investigation of where individuals affected with this disease had been over the past month, and then they contacted those they had been in touch with to ensure they were also quarantined. This was an enormous undertaking.

We are very fortunate that this disease hit a city that has such capacity. If it had hit another city—and in the views of the U.S. mayors, any one of their cities—the capacity would not have existed to control this problem.

This is another stellar example of the critical role played by local governments.

We leave you with these thoughts, and we leave you with our broad suggestion. I think you have more detailed written information from us, but I hope this can facilitate our discussion this morning.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Knight.

That presentation, along with some of the things you've raised, will result in questions. As we go through this, your remarks will be clarified.

Thank you very much.

No one else from your group had any other presentations to make, did they?

Mr. James Knight: They're here to answer the difficult questions I can't deal with.

● (0920)

The Chair: All right.

Let us move now to the Canadian Red Cross. Mr. Duplessis, perhaps you could give us your presentation, please.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Pierre Duplessis (Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Red Cross): Good morning, Mr. Chairman and committee members.

On behalf of the Canadian Red Cross, I would like to thank you for allowing us to appear before the Standing Committee on public safety and national security.

My name is Pierre Duplessis and I am the Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Red Cross. With me this morning are my colleagues Don Shropshire, the National Director, Disaster Management, and David Pratt, Advisor and Special Ambassador.

First, I would like to tell you a little about the mandate of the Canadian Red Cross, and then I will be discussing Bill C-12, the Emergency Management Act. The Canadian Red Cross is a not-for-profit organization with a single mandate, to assist public authorities.

We play an important role in all areas of emergency management, namely preparedness, as well as medication, response and recovery.

For that reason, the Canadian Red Cross acts as a liaison between government, civil society and communities. Our efforts worldwide, which may involve the national societies of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, are coordinated in Geneva by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The symbols of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent represent an international movement with 100 million volunteers and members in 185 countries. This movement provides programs and services designed to prevent and relieve human suffering at all times and in all places.

This morning, I would like to stress that the Canadian Red Cross supports the Bill C-12. It provides for the basis of the national emergency management system and will allow the federal government to protect Canadians better.

In our view, it will allow for better coordination between federal institutions and provincial governments and other entities.

We support any initiative designed to establish and straighten leadership and coordination in the area of emergency management in Canada.

[English]

In our view, Bill C-12 confirms the importance of emergency preparedness and planning at every level of government. It confirms the leadership role of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. It demonstrates to Canadians that the federal government is fully engaged with every facet of emergency management, including working with provincial and territorial governments as well as local authorities and other entities, such as the Canadian Red Cross, in Canada's voluntary sector. This role is indeed critical. For instance, the United States government report on Katrina operations released last February focuses mainly on the inability of various levels of government to properly cooperate and coordinate the relief efforts.

Bill C-12 also shows the importance of promoting public awareness and preparedness across the country. Canadians must be responsible for their own safety and the safety of their communities, and they must be properly informed. In fact, the publication known as "World Disasters Report 2005", issued by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, focused on the critical importance of information in disaster preparedness and response. The report showed that people need information as much as water, food, medicine, or shelter. Information can save lives, livelihoods, and resources. It may be the only form of disaster preparedness that the most vulnerable can afford. The right kind of information leads to a deeper understanding of needs and ways to respond.

I would like to discuss specific sections of the bill, raise some issues for future consideration, and suggest some changes. Clause 3, for instance, states:

The Minister is responsible for exercising leadership relating to emergency management in Canada by coordinating, among government institutions and in cooperation with the provinces and other entities, emergency management activities.

The Canadian Red Cross's strategic focus, operational capabilities, and resources make us one of the principal entities in the voluntary sector in emergency management. In fact, I would suggest that the

Canadian Red Cross is a national asset prepared to work very closely with all public authorities. The recent memorandum of understanding I signed with the Minister of Public Safety in May of this year is indicative of a very close and cooperative relationship with the federal government.

Importantly, this memorandum of understanding also makes reference to our status as auxiliary to government. This auxiliary status is not something new. It is an integral part of the legal foundations of Red Cross national societies, and dates back to the first Geneva conference of 1863. It also recognizes our founding statute, the Canadian Red Cross Society Act of 1909, and our letters patent of 1970 that broadened the auxiliary definition.

We are tempted to suggest that the Red Cross and its auxiliary status be included in clause 3 as a means of recognizing the important relationship, and educating and informing Canadians about the role of our organization in emergency management. However, we have recently entered into discussions with several government departments through the Canadian National Committee for Humanitarian Law, for instance, with PSEPC in the potential role of lead department.

Our goal is to better define the auxiliary role within the consultative and legislative initiative, in which it would be possible to see our 1909 statute updated and revised. Consequently, until we have the results of that proposed consultation process, I would suggest that any reference to our auxiliary status in clause 3 might be somewhat premature. At the end of the statute provision initiative, the Government of Canada and this Parliament may wish to include a mention of the Canadian Red Cross Society as auxiliary to government within the Emergency Management Act. This could be accomplished as a consequential amendment within the larger statute provision exercise.

● (0925)

Clause 4 of Bill C-12 lists the many responsibilities of the minister, including his coordination role in providing assistance other than financial assistance to a province, and his role in conducting exercises and providing education and training related to emergency management.

Evidence from the United States' Katrina operations report indicates that this is critical to securing and mobilizing appropriate workforce and materials when facing a large disaster. We would therefore urge the minister to take into consideration the resources available through the Canadian Red Cross and the voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector has an important but currently underutilized place in Canada's response to emergencies. While some voluntary organizations like the Canadian Red Cross have well-established roles in emergency response, a much broader range of organizations can and must make a vital contribution before, during, and after an emergency. We, the Canadian Red Cross, can build this surge capacity in mobilizing volunteers in civil society organizations so that their contribution can be effectively applied and useful to government's response.

Clause 5 states that:

In consultation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister may develop joint emergency management plans with the relevant United States' authorities and, in accordance with those plans, coordinate Canada's response to emergencies in the United States and provide assistance in response to those emergencies.

The U.S. government agency responsible for disaster relief and preparation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, known as FEMA, has a statement of understanding with the American Red Cross that describes each agency's responsibility in case of a disaster, and the Red Cross's role in the national emergency support plan. To help fulfil the Canadian government's commitment, the Canadian Red Cross seeks to conclude a similar agreement with PSEPC so that it may be in a better position to cooperate with its American counterparts in times of emergency.

We would encourage the Minister of Foreign Affairs to establish coordination mechanisms that would take full advantage of the Minister of Public Safety's domestic disaster capabilities to support Canada's response to disaster anywhere in the world. The Canadian Red Cross has an unrivalled domestic and international network from which to draw on human, financial, and material resources, with an extensive capacity to help reunite families who have been torn apart by conflict or disaster. The society can offer the Government of Canada an efficient and direct pipeline to distribute international assistance.

Finally, Mr. Chair, let me briefly discuss subclause 6(3), which states that "A government institution may not respond to a provincial emergency unless the government of the province requests assistance..."

As a humanitarian relief organization, the Canadian Red Cross would like to take this opportunity to emphasize that the primary consideration in determining who responds during an emergency should be informed by the need to safeguard the lives and security of Canadians. Regarding constitutional responsibilities, nothing in the act should preclude the Government of Canada from monitoring and assessing an emergency, and ensuring that all necessary coordination mechanisms are in place for the federal government to support and complement the actions taken by provincial or territorial governments. The humanitarian imperative must always take precedence.

• (0930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for inviting us to present our views. I will be please now answer any questions you may have.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. I am sure there will be questions in regard to it.

Did anybody else have any comments? No? Okay.

We will now go to questions and comments, and we'll begin with the Liberal Party.

Mr. Owen, I believe you have some comments and questions. Go ahead.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Knight, Dr. Duplessis, and your colleagues, especially my former colleague and Minister of National Defence, David Pratt, we're grateful that you're here today. I'd like to underline the importance of your presence and who you represent.

The reality of modern governance is that no level of government can deal with a major issue alone, even if the issue is properly integrated across that government's various departments and branches. A government has to work with its opposite numbers at every level. But good governance goes beyond even governments themselves. It involves the market and the academy. Most important, it involves civil society and the volunteer sector that plays a part in it.

These two organizations perhaps exhibit the best practices of modern governance in this country, from the civil society side, the intergovernmental side, and, with FCM, the intragovernmental side. I thank you for that. I think the importance of your role in governance is best demonstrated by what you're doing in emergency preparedness. One thing about Bill C-12 is that we've changed emergency preparedness to emergency management. I wouldn't want to give that away. With proper precautionary action, we might not have to manage an emergency. With the right planning, we might be able to avoid it, or at least mitigate it.

The hardest dollar for any government to spend is a preventative dollar. It doesn't have the urgency. It doesn't have the public imperative. The work that we're considering and that you prepare yourself to practise is immensely important, but it's also the toughest budget to find dollars for. Risk management is just the likelihood of an occurrence multiplied by its consequences. If it's a small likelihood with catastrophic consequences, we had better pay a lot of attention to it. I know that's what you're speaking to today.

I'd like to consider the natural disaster category and leave terrorism and such aside for a moment. We often think we can't avoid the natural disasters, but we can certainly prepare ourselves to react to them quickly. I want to ask your opinion about the possibility of a specific natural disaster. I want to get the value of your experience on how we might deal with it together. I'm talking about the risk of seismic activity on the west coast of Canada and the United States. Some schools that have not been properly updated are particularly vulnerable. Some of them are brick or plaster and 60 or 70 years old.

We know that a major seismic event is going to happen in the Vancouver-Victoria-Seattle area, and this brings in the international aspect that Dr. Duplessis mentioned. We have dozens of substandard schools for our children, while we are in post-and-beam houses or in modern office buildings that are well protected and able to withstand a major seismic event. Our children are sitting beneath piles of bricks and in buildings that will instantly collapse. It seems to me that this is off the radar screen of our emergency preparedness or management. Could you draw on the experience of each of your organizations and tell us how we should be approaching this situation? This is a disaster waiting to happen.

● (0935)

Simply to add the international component to it, Seattle faced a similar situation where they did have a major seismic event that just missed Vancouver a number of years ago, but they reacted immediately to evaluate and then stabilize all of those old structures, of which schools only represent, perhaps, the most emotionally and socially tragic potential emergency. But I value your comments on how we might as a country—

The Chair: Thank you very much. You've used up almost all of your time, but we'll give our witnesses a chance to answer.

Who would like to answer first? Mr. Knight.

Mr. James Knight: Thank you. I'll make a brief comment.

We have some experience in cost-shared infrastructure programs dealing with municipal systems, dealing with transportation, and we might want to give consideration to expanding the categories of eligible projects.

Frankly, I'm a little taken aback by your comment. I was not aware that this was a major situation in British Columbia. I was under the impression that much had been done to protect against earthquakes, but apparently that's not the case. Amending the Canada strategic infrastructure program to bring in additional categories where there's clearly a national benefit might be an approach.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Knight.

Dr. Duplessis, do you have a comment?

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: Yes, thank you. I will take the floor first and then pass it on to my colleague, Don Shropshire.

Let me tell you, Mr. Chair, this is a very appropriate question and reflection. Indeed, some infrastructures in Canada are fragile and are vulnerable, and people using those infrastructures as well. We talk about schools, but what about the health care facilities, the long-term-care facilities, etc.? All of these have to bring us to a reflection.

Again, part of the solution is preparedness. We've said it, and I think it is in the minds of Canadians. At the Canadian Red Cross, we think this is very important. To prepare families, it means information to be self-sustainable for at least three days, especially in those areas that are particularly vulnerable. It means exercises in schools, in families, in communities. To us, this is critical.

We were part of the government during the Y2K apprehension, if you will, in circulating information to the Canadian population. And although it was a non-event, we found that very successful and we found that it reassured people. Not only was it focused on Y2K, but

it also gave Canadians the possibility or the mindset to prepare for other similar events.

We do have a lot of experience internationally with earthquakes, be it in India, in Turkey, or in Pakistan, where I was a few months ago, with thousands and thousands of casualties. In Pakistan there were 96,000 deaths and 1.5 million people affected. We know how to run those camps. We know how to liaise with municipalities. Mr. Knight and I have very good colleagues. In all the events that he mentioned, the Red Cross was there helping the municipalities to cope with the disasters.

On 9/11, for instance, 37,000 people were hosted by the Canadian Red Cross, our volunteers, in a matter of a few hours—37,400 people. We came with 4,500 volunteers in a matter of five hours to provide shelter and food to all those people. So we're liaising and we're coordinating with municipalities when the event is happening, but being prepared is the key component of it.

● (0940)

The Chair: Don, would you like to add something to that?

Mr. Don Shropshire (National Director, Disaster Management, Canadian Red Cross): Thank you.

Mr. Owen, your comments about emergency preparedness and preventing a disaster from occurring rather than having to respond we subscribe to fully. One of the things we support about the bill is that the emergency management terminology encompasses a very broad range: from mitigation, to preparedness, to response, to recovery.

On the point you asked about concerning the seismic activity, really this speaks to mitigation. The Red Cross would promote all levels of government—certainly our friends at the local level as well as the provinces and the federal government—looking at a comprehensive review of the risk hazard analysis across Canada, including the seismic threat on the west coast.

In fact, it's close to home for us. We're actually in the process of retrofitting our own building in the Vancouver area because of the seismic threat. It's obviously an expensive process, but it's one that is critical if we're going to reduce the chance of hazards.

On a related note, the Red Cross is also working with all levels of government to promote a program called Quake Safe. And again, Dr. Duplessis spoke to the importance of encouraging Canadians to take some personal responsibility, and communities taking personal responsibility for understanding the risks and also taking steps to try to mitigate those risks by doing things like retrofitting, but also understanding what to do if there is an earthquake.

Lastly, we've also been engaged over the last 15 years or so working very collaboratively with our friends in the American Red Cross when they have had catastrophic disasters, including earthquakes in California.

Over the past 15 years we've had over 5,000 Canadians who have gone to the United States to work on catastrophic disasters. In particular, there were people from the B.C. government and the local municipal governments in the lower mainland who went down to work with the Loma Prieta earthquake in L.A. and also in the San Francisco Bay area. And they brought back many lessons learned that they actually built into their preparedness plans and the national support plan, one of which is the importance of planning this type of mitigation activity to which you've subscribed.

So we fully support what you're promoting and we'd encourage the government to continue to move on that area.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I hope many of the remarks and the questions will tie in with Bill C-12, and suggest improvements and so on. I'd ask the questioners and our witnesses to try to focus in, because that's really the purpose of this meeting, to try to improve the legislation if possible.

Monsieur Ménard, from the Bloc Québécois. Go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Comartin has to be in the House at 10:00 a.m. So I have no objection to trading turns with him.

[English]

The Chair: I think we'd have consent from the committee for that.

Mr. Comartin.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair and Mr. Ménard, for that gracious accommodation.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here.

Let me follow up on the chair's direction. The major problem I have with Bill C-12 is the one you've raised, Mr. Knight, and I think *docteur Duplessis, vous aussi*, in the sense that the bill in two very peripheral areas doesn't seem to bring in the municipal level of government or the significant agencies that actually deal with the problem, particularly at first phase.

It's a reality that we live in a federated country and the question we put to the officials, perhaps more general than this is, was how do you interact. We were given assurances that in fact the interaction is occurring but it's at an informal level—which is perhaps not a strong enough term, but it's certainly not legislatively mandated because it can't be legislatively mandated.

I wonder if you have any suggestions as to how we get around that conundrum. How do we amend this bill to in effect create the formal relationship between a lower level of government directly and the NGOs?

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

Who would like to go first on that?

Dr. Duplessis.

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: Let me maybe turn to French to explain where we stand with this.

[Translation]

When incidences occur, there is cooperation and coordination on the ground. There are people suffering, there are victims, and we must take action. We have absolutely outstanding coordination and cooperation with the municipalities. We are in the process of signing service agreements for municipalities with 125,000 people or more throughout the country. In Quebec, for example, over 140 municipalities have signed agreements with us. That is a significant number, and gives you some idea of the coordination that exists on the ground.

We think it is important that we be officially recognized in the Act as auxiliaries to the public authorities, as is the case in some provinces. In any case, the Act establishing the Red Cross, which was passed by the Parliament of Canada, states that we are auxiliaries to the public authorities. This exceptional capacity, which in English is called *search capacity* and which the government and Canadians need, can only occur if we have agreements, and if we have been working together and if we are prepared.

What we are telling you this morning is that the volunteer sector is important. It should be said that not everyone can offer significant volunteer services. The Red Cross is probably the best placed organization in Canada to coordinate the rest of the volunteer sector as well. We can mobilize 5, 10 or 15 thousand volunteers in a short period of time. That is what we need when the public authorities are overwhelmed. Often, in the first hours of an emergency, the public authorities are overwhelmed.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Knight.

Mr. James Knight: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for the question.

Remarkably, in this area historically there's been a great deal of jurisdictional jealousy. Of all areas where one might hope not to have that, this would be the one. Surely after 9/11.... I listened to a very senior federal official give a speech to a very small group, about twelve of us, on post-9/11 and what it meant for us. You know, there was not a reference whatsoever about anything to do with first response of municipal government. And I was rather shocked. I would have thought....

I can tell you that since then there is a growing and formal engagement—more discussion than before, some involvement, but still at the margins. We think there would be an opportunity to enhance that. There is a group called the senior officials responsible for emergency preparedness that meets from time to time. It would seem reasonable that there be some municipal presence on that—again, informal. It's not that we want to run this thing or that we don't respect provincial jurisdiction—we do. But for purposes of coordination this might be valuable.

I should note that our organization embraces all of the provincial and territorial municipal associations, so we can bring in that dimension of the provincial interest as well, through those organizations. I think that might be a step in the right direction.

I've already mentioned, of course, the preamble that this might assure officials that they won't lose their jobs if they talk to local governments. There is a perception there that this would be a very negative thing to do.

Those are a couple of thoughts that I'll leave with you.

• (0950)

The Chair: Are there other comments?

Mr. Comartin, do you have any other brief questions?

Mr. Joe Comartin: No, that's all. Well, perhaps I have just a comment.

Let me assure you—and Dr. Duplessis knows this—a number of us parliamentarians were at a conference that he spoke at in the spring in Whistler. It was an international conference, and every single country that came there made the point, Mr. Knight, that you've made, that the first response is always at the local level. So it's key that they have the resources necessary to respond.

The Chair: Thank you.

If there are no other comments, we'll go to the Bloc Québécois and Monsieur Ménard.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My first question will be short and specific. You say, Dr. Duplessis, that you have signed agreements with 140 municipalities in Quebec. Did you sign them with the municipalities or with the MRCs (regional municipalities) in the context of their civil security planning?

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: All I know is that the agreements were signed with the municipalities itself. We target a certain number of individuals.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Are you pleased with the role you have been given under the Quebec legislation as regards civil security?

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: The answer is yes. I am very pleased with the role we have been given, it gives us important recognition.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Perhaps you know this better than me: do other provinces, to your knowledge, have such advanced legislation on the civil side?

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: Not to my knowledge. At the moment, we are working with municipalities in other provinces, particularly Ontario, to do the same sort of thing. As far as I know, there is no similar legislation.

Mr. Serge Ménard: I certainly do not want to criticize you, Mr. Knight, but I am under the impression that you are completely ignoring the Civil Protection Act of Quebec, which was passed in 2001. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. James Knight: We're not critical of any province or provincial framework, and Quebec typically has very advanced

legislation, so we're absolutely not ignoring that. We're making the simple point that you should close the communications loop in this one area. It's really important for information to flow fully among all participants.

I want to underline that we completely respect Quebec jurisdiction. Everything we do in federally-funded programs has to occur under a federal-provincial agreement. There's no discussion about that. I'm talking about full and adequate flow of information. I think that closing this circle could be helpful.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: There seems to be a difference between what you are proposing and what we have done in Quebec. In Quebec, we thought the basis should be the regional municipality rather than the municipality itself, because of the civil protection plan. Under this plan, an inventory is drawn up of the risks and resources. So a plan is applied to this and the Act provides at what point the provincial government must get involved, and so on. In the case of large cities, metropolitan areas form the bases of the plan. For example, Montreal — which is the largest city in Quebec —, its neighbour, Laval — which is the very third largest — and Longueuil — which is the fourth...

Mr. James Knight: It used to be.

Mr. Serge Ménard: ...make up a metropolitan area, and we think the civil protection plan must cover the metropolitan area.

I can see right away that you have no objection to that.

• (0955)

Mr. James Knight: No, not at all, in fact I agree. Quebec is certainly very advanced in this area.

Mr. Serge Ménard: I had the impression that your criticisms with respect to the current system did not take into account the plans that we have prepared in Quebec, which provide for everything, but on a different territorial basis. We think it is more effective, particularly in rural regions, to operate on the basis of the regional municipalities, where the resources of both entities can help out the various municipalities.

[English]

Mr. James Knight: If there was a misunderstanding, I want to say that in my world view,

[Translation]

The MRCs (regional municipalities) are municipalities

[English]

We look at an MRC as a municipality. We view the metropolitan community of Montreal as a municipal institution. In our view of the world, these are all municipal entities.

I understand the importance of MRCs very well, because many of the municipalities within them are extremely small. It's at the level of the MRC that you get enough critical mass of assets to be effective. I understand this, but in my view of the world, MRCs are municipalities. If that wasn't clear, I apologize.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: We also expect that a number of neighbouring MRCs can work together to prepare their civil protection plan.

I would have no objection to having the rest of Canada benefits from a system like ours. My only concern in such a case would be to have some assurance that if federal funds were to be paid out to implement the system, they would be paid to Quebec without any regulations being involved. It is generally acknowledged that since the flood and the ice storm, we had to build something that would meet a greater need in the future.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. That will have to be it.

Are there any further comments on that?

Okay. Thank you, Mr. Ménard.

Mr. James Knight: If you would allow me—

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. James Knight: —I would just make one comment.

There was a bit of a problem with my notes. I did miss a page. I was going to mention Katrina, as well. If ever we had an example of the consequences of poor communication among governments, it was Katrina. It was extraordinary. In fact, we worked with our U.S. friends in the National League of Cities and with the Canadian Red Cross to help deploy Canadian resources, because we had that direct international tie. I use that as an example of why it's important that everyone is in all circles at all times.

The Chair: Thank you.

I just have a question from the chair before I turn it over to the government. Do you feel that Bill C-12 would address the problem you observed during Katrina?

Mr. James Knight: We don't think so. This is our one concern about Bill C-12. It inadequately recognizes the critical role of local governments—MRCs, counties. All forms of local government are not fully recognized. There's just the most fleeting of references, and it seems to us that there is an important communications need here.

When federal policies are being made, those policies are made very far from on-the-ground reality. Very few federal civil servants have any idea about municipal operations. In fact, their training has been that that's something they should not even think about, because it's clearly a provincial jurisdiction. We understand that.

But when dealing particularly with our large urban areas, the complexity of them is so great that it's important that the federal government be given some direct understanding of how things work on the ground at the local level. I think that's one of the benefits that some municipal participation—I mention this specific committee—would bring to the exercise. I think it would be useful to reflect this general point, perhaps in an informal way.

Thank you.

● (1000)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. Maybe we will deal with that more as we go along.

We'll go to Mr. Norlock, from the government side.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Yes. Thank you very much.

Thirty years of policing in smaller-town Ontario was very much a part of my latter years in emergency planning with municipalities, and of course because of our relationship with the province of Ontario. Any experiences, from a policing perspective, where things went on and went awry, were usually a result of information not getting to the people it needed to get to. I understand what you are referring to with regard to information.

That having been said... And I'm not that sensitive about criticism. As I said, those years gave me a pretty thick hide to criticism. In the absence of this current bill... Is what was there before better? That's my first question, because if it was better, then we need to revisit things. If it wasn't better, does this bill start to get the job done? That's number one.

Second, yes, I suspect very strongly that your observations are correct with regard to the extreme sensitivity the Canadian federal government has to jurisdictional responsibilities. I liked your word "jealousies". I have to be very sensitive also to the fact that I'm a member of government, so I guess I should not even have used that word. The fact is that we have a reality. But you are right when you say that the absolute first responsibility is to the welfare of the people of Canada.

I have to now go to the beginning. First, is it better than what was there?

The second question is for both of your organizations. Were you part of the initial planning of Bill C-12? In other words, were you consulted other than being here this morning? If you were, did you express at that time the concerns you've expressed here today?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Who would like to go first?

Mr. Knight.

Mr. James Knight: With respect to your first question, as to whether it's better, the answer is yes, it's better.

I said at the outset that there's a clarity of the role of the federal minister that wasn't there before. It's more comprehensive. It is empowering. We view this as a positive step. We're not saying that the prior bill was better, at all. We support that aspect of the bill completely.

Were we consulted on the details of this bill? No. Generally, we were aware of it, but there was no formal process of any kind that we went through.

The Chair: Dr. Duplessis.

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In answer to your question, we do believe that, yes, it improves the current situation a lot.

I come back to one specific word that was used here, and which is key—the coordination element. If you look at the bill, you see, for instance, in clauses 3 and 4, the word “coordination” is used again and again. In clause 3, it's almost the gist of it, and it's used again in subclause 4.(1), paragraphs (e), (f), and (h). You sense that the aim of the bill will hopefully bring coordination between all levels. That is something we want to underscore.

The second thing is that there's a sort of black hole, if you will, which is called the “other entities”. I think it should be better defined. That's our point. I think there's a huge surge capacity that is needed. Our sector is there, and it should be recognized formally.

Were we consulted, Mr. Chair? The answer is no...not at the outset, and not at the drafting stage. We were not consulted.

The Chair: Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Rick Norlock: I would go back to Mr. Knight and his observation that municipalities have to be recognized. I did read your submission last night. I must admit that I could only devote about an hour and a half to it. I'm being frank and honest. We get a tremendous amount to read. But I did go through it.

One of the recurring themes, of course, is funding. Everyone has a limitation with regard to funding. I suspect very strongly that sometimes the drafters of legislation.... Of course you've observed by now that I'm new at this game, so I'm not afraid to take chances. Everybody has their hand out for more money. The money comes from one person—the very person who pays municipal and provincial taxes. Whether it's in the province of Quebec, Ontario, or anywhere else, the money all comes from the same pockets.

But once again, if safety is the primary responsibility, we shouldn't shy away from that. We have to make sure there's coordination. In my observation, it's not always about the money. It's about how you use the money, and it's about how you use the existing resources to get the maximum outputs.

That brings me to the most important part, and the one theme I keep stressing at this committee. When we hear from people and organizations, specifically policing organizations, they don't always have the information. You don't always have the best idea from inside your organization. You have sister organizations throughout Canada and the world who have gone through what you have gone through, and they have what we commonly refer to as “best practices”.

I'm sure you're going to be consulted. I'm going to work hard to see that you are. What you've said here of course is part of the consultative process to improvements to Bill C-12. So I'm sure the minister is going to hear what you have said this morning.

But have you engaged in best practices with other countries? You mentioned Hurricane Katrina. Would you be prepared to give information to this group as to what you've observed from other communities with respect to that?

This question is also for the Red Cross.

•(1005)

The Chair: Okay, that will probably have to be your final question.

Mr. James Knight: On the question about resources, this area is the fastest-growing municipal expenditure. It's ahead of any other areas. It's currently 17% of our budget, but it's growing exponentially because there are so many new dimensions to this problem.

Safety includes the terrorism threat. You'll remember there were a number of arrests in Brampton in June; these were heavily managed by the local police forces, so there's something....

I'm sure you weren't thinking about terrorism when you were a police officer, but now this is a big part of the policing responsibility. Where should the money come from on that file? When Toronto deployed 1,000 people to contain a potential threat to North America in the SARS crisis, should the people who pay property tax in Toronto have borne that burden, or should it have rested somewhere else?

I don't have the answers to these questions, but I do know that municipal budgets are stretched to the extreme. It's very difficult to increase property taxes; you're just defeated. That's what happens. The candidate who promises not to increase taxes wins the election.

Taxes that grow with the economy are so much more powerful as a revenue source, but we don't have access to those as a municipal government, so if municipal police forces are to focus on terrorism, if municipal public health authorities are to deal with SARS, if the cities are to have the capacity to react to a toxic spill, it costs money—and frankly, they're not going to be able to pay for it very well. It's just a reality. I know there's only one taxpayer, but let me tell you—GST and income tax grow a lot faster than property tax, and that's our problem.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Duplessis is next.

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me speak very candidly here and bring maybe some good news. By that I mean there are three aspects, three facets I would like to explore when you say the money. In fact, it's an important aspect.

First, when the Red Cross is asked to jump into operations we bring volunteers. This is usually at no cost for municipal, provincial, or federal governments. We can, as I said, deploy thousands of volunteers. I can go through figures for the ice storm, the Saguenay flood, the blackout in Ontario, for SARS, and for Badger, the little municipality in Newfoundland where people felt frozen after the flooding. Indeed, volunteers went in from adjacent provinces and from Newfoundland. So that's something that is not costly, if you will. It is a cost for us to prepare the volunteers.

The second facet or interesting aspect—and Badger is another example—is that the generosity of the Canadian public is just outstanding. To support those communities, we can bring forward some money through the generosity of Canadians. In the case of Badger, if my memory serves me rightly, we raised about \$1.5 million to \$2 million. This is incredible for a small municipality of 800 people.

The third aspect is are we working for free? The answer is no. Do we need money? The answer is yes. We need money to prepare and train our volunteers to have this capacity to respond. This is the unknown part of the story. The difficult aspect is that Canadians want to see our being able to respond, but there's no money for that. For this we need support.

So good news. And also, if you want, not bad news but a reality check: I think the message here, in line with the preparedness aspect, is that if you want the civil society organizations to be able to respond, you also have to let them be prepared and provide them with the minimal resources to be able to operate.

About the best practices—absolutely, absolutely. We are 185 Red Cross and Red Crescents in the world. We are learning from each other, and Canada is in the forefront of those leaders. This is just fabulous to be able to count on that pool of resources and expertise. We debrief each time there's something happening. The Canadian Red Cross is active in 40 different countries in the world and we exchange information. We also exchange our people.

Iain Logan, a Canadian from Alberta, is one of the top persons in disaster management and is often requested by the International Red Cross to assist. So I think we should be proud of that.

Lastly, Mr. Chair, with your permission, I would like to come back to the comment were we consulted on the bill. The answer was no, and the answer is still no. I just want to nuance what I said previously.

Through the different contacts we have with the different departments of the Canadian government and through the International Law Commission we were indeed in contact and we knew what was happening. Although it was not formal consultation, we were put into the loop a bit. Were we formally asked to assist? The answer is no.

•(1010)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move to our next round and we'll begin with Mr. Holland of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Thank you so much.

Thank you again for appearing today.

I have a couple of things. First, it goes to show you that assumptions are a dangerous thing. Before Mr. Norlock had asked this question, I was assuming that both of you had been consulted in the lead-up to Bill C-12 and its development. I'm deeply concerned that you were not.

Mr. Duplessis, I understand you're giving a somewhat nuanced no. But by the same token, it sounds more that you were just made aware

in sort of a general context that it was happening and sort of maybe in an ancillary way engaged. That concerns me, and it certainly concerns me that FCM wasn't engaged there.

If I can, I'm going to start specifically on the legislation with FCM. I'm a bit surprised by what you're asking for, in that you're not asking for more in this process. A reference to some kind of engagement with municipalities might be a start, but I'm surprised you're not asking for more, and I'll explain why.

In developing this bill or dealing with it, municipalities are first responders. Municipalities are the ones—as a municipal councillor, I know—who play an enormous role in the success of responding to an emergency, and as the ones who are on the ground and closest to the emergency and understand it best, they need to be resourced and they need to be tied into what's happening. Oftentimes they have the best understanding of what needs to occur.

You referenced the fact, or at least I thought you did, Mr. Knight, that you're looking for a seat at the table. I'm wondering what form that would take. How could we ensure that this happens, and then how can we ensure that in fact you're included in the dialogue?

I often think that if you're just having discussions between the province and the federal government, there's a lot of extremely important information and local knowledge that is being left out of the loop. If you're not at the table, important considerations are going to be missed and important needs of municipalities will be ignored, in terms of the resources and infrastructure that they require.

I don't know if you want to comment on that.

•(1015)

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Knight, or someone from the FCM.

Mr. James Knight: Mr. Burrett will comment on that opportunity.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Burrett.

Mr. John Burrett (Senior Manager, Social Policy, Federation of Canadian Municipalities): Thanks very much for that.

With regard to us and how much or what we're asking for, here we're trying to respond to the specifics of the bill. We have many recommendations—many very specific things that we are looking to fix, to put it that way. Our report details them, and we have probably 40 recommendations that we wouldn't want to take you through today. They're about coordination, funding, responsibilities, and training and exercises. There are a whole lot of things that, as I think you understand, we would be coming to the Government of Canada and the provinces and territories to amend or fix. That's why we want to be at the table. So the question here is being at the table.

What does a table look like? The really big table that we feel we need to have a formal role at would be that of the senior officials responsible for emergency management. That's where the senior officials of the provinces, territories, and the Government of Canada come together to really make those decisions, and we want to be at the table when the decisions are being made.

Now, there have been questions asked of the officials at SOREM and the ministers as to whether or not that's on. Our understanding is that from some provinces the answer has been yes and from other provinces the answer has been no, which was sufficient to prevent it at this time. But we would still like to have a formal role, along with the provincial and territorial municipal associations at that table. That would be the forum.

In the meantime, we'd like progress towards that. We have been invited to sit on the domestic group on emergency preparedness. That's relatively informal, but it's a good step. But it's not a decision-making body, so to proceed to SOREM would be the goal.

The Chair: Okay. Does anybody else have a comment on that?

Just a brief comment, Mr. Holland.

Mr. Mark Holland: I don't have time, and I have a number of issues for the Red Cross, but I know we're going to have subsequent rounds.

Quickly on that point, Mr. Knight, I understand you're making a particular request to be referenced in the beginning. I wanted to underscore this because I'm aware there are other recommendations there, and I didn't want anybody to come away thinking that a simple reference in the preamble would suffice, because in my opinion it won't. One change that has to occur here is to inject an appropriate role for municipalities into this bill to ensure that they have their rightful seat at the table and are contributing to that dialogue.

I know that I'm out of time, and I have additional questions for the Red Cross. I'll wait for subsequent rounds.

The Chair: Is there any response to that?

We'll move to the Bloc and Monsieur Ménard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: It is probably the only point we do not see eye to eye on.

I would like to check one thing with you. A great deal was said about hurricane Katrina, which I found quite interesting. However, one fundamental fact remains: people knew that the levees would not withstand the force of any hurricane with a rating superior to a category 3. We knew that a category 5 hurricane was approaching. In the end, a category 4 hurricane struck. The levees were bound to brake. The authorities knew which neighbourhoods would be flooded if there were to be a breach in the levees. So, five days ahead of time they knew which neighbourhoods would be flooded. The local authorities should then have ordered an evacuation.

The same thing probably applies to the United States, but in Canada, we generally find that when an evacuation order is issued, 85 per cent of people will take it upon themselves to find other accommodations. If they have a secondary residence, they will go there, or they may go and stay with friends or family members living

some distance away from their home. So, the authorities are left with 15 per cent of people who cannot move.

They knew that in New Orleans, yet they didn't react. So the higher authorities found themselves with an absolutely horrific situation to manage. I see that that is more or less your opinion as well. Basically, they didn't have the courage to issue an evacuation order. They were living in a dream world, believing that the hurricane was going to lose some of its intensity and not be as powerful as predicted by meteorologists. So, they didn't have the courage to issue an evacuation order.

I realize, Mr. Duplessis, that you sometimes get the impression, and perhaps that is what your position requires you to have, that the local authorities won't always have the skills nor the political courage to make the necessary decisions, and that, therefore, these decisions should be made at a higher level within government.

Nonetheless, over 95 per cent of events requiring the use of public safety forces are local in nature. I would add that over 95 per cent of events could be properly managed within a given province. I think that it is important for provinces to recognize the role of municipalities and of the Red Cross, along with that of other organizations like the Red Cross which offer emergency assistance. At the very least, that is the case for well-organized provinces.

The federal government is there to deal with major events, like the explosion of a nuclear bomb, terrorist's attacks, outbreaks, etc. So it isn't much. In this regard, I don't quite see what municipalities can do, although I know that in Quebec there are three emergency response teams dealing with bacteriological, nuclear, or chemical attacks.

This is why, Mr. Knight, Quebec is hesitant to support your position. Our system is ready, but we remain worried, in Quebec. You can see why Quebec is more worried than other provinces, because the federal government intervenes in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Certainly, when there is an emergency, there is full cooperation. The army's cooperation has been exemplary in Quebec, and I imagine the same would occur in the future. In my opinion, that is already well established in current legislation, and there is no need to give the municipalities any other responsibilities.

Would you have any comments to make on that?

• (1020)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any comments from anyone?

Mr. James Knight: I don't disagree. Quebec is very well organized. It's had some very tough experiences. These have been studied, lessons have been learned, and effective things have been done.

Obviously, we have greatly different capacities in different parts of the country. Some provinces don't have the depth and haven't behaved, I think, as thoroughly as Quebec has behaved.

We don't propose that anyone's jurisdiction be minimized at all. We think a full circle of communication on this particular file could be beneficial.

With all respect to the Government of Quebec, they don't operate at the municipal level. They are not a municipality. They're a provincial authority.

I think having an informal voice from your province, if you like, represented at the table perhaps by the Union de municipalités du Québec or by the Fédération Québécoise des Municipalités, could be useful. Everyone would then more fully understand the roles and functions of everyone else. When the Government of Canada is making decisions, they'd get some grassroots input.

That's basically our view on this, but there's no question that we fully respect Quebec's jurisdiction.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Duplessis, you had a comment as well.

• (1025)

[Translation]

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I have two comments to make. First of all, it is not up to me to criticize the response to Katrina. The American authorities have debated the issue at length, and it is up to them to judge. The Red Cross is a neutral organization which steers clear of any involvement in religious, political, ethnic or other debates. We maintain absolute neutrality and seek out access to victims wherever they may be. That is fundamental to us.

However, in the best of cases, even when we are well prepared, even when we are prescient, the first hours are always chaotic. Indeed, evacuations involve traffic jams and people who cannot move on their own needing assistance. It is complex, and the first hours are critical in order for things to run smoothly.

That is why I say that all possible resources need to be made available, including knowledgeable people who have experience. We believe that the Red Cross fulfils that role and that we have proven that on many occasions in Canada, in all provinces, and specifically in Quebec.

That thing said, we are not here to engage in a debate on areas of jurisdiction. It is not within the mandate of the Red Cross. We do however understand that countries need to manage their affairs based on certain areas of jurisdiction, and we respect that.

We would like to remind the committee of one thing. When there are people suffering, when things go wrong or off the rails, victims come first. We must ensure that all levels of government work together and have a common purpose. We hope that is reflected within the spirit of the Bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go over to the government side. Mr. Hawn, please.

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

Thank you all for joining us.

I have a question first for the Red Cross.

Dr. Duplessis, you mentioned an MOU with Minister Day. Are aspects of that MOU covered in Bill C-12? Are there aspects that should be covered in Bill C-12? Are there aspects that are in conflict with anything in Bill C-12?

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: Mr. Chair, can I defer to my colleague?

Don, do you want to speak to that?

Mr. Don Shropshire: There are many aspects of the MOU we signed with the minister that are certainly covered in Bill C-12.

The operation of it is the part we're now working on with the minister's staff, to look at how we can actually prepare it, put boots on the ground, and make sure there's the search capacity we spoke to. But certainly all of the different aspects, from mitigation through to the recovery aspects, are covered within the bill and within the memorandum of understanding.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: So it's almost a translation of Bill C-12 into a regulatory or at least an operational framework. That's the objective of it.

Mr. Don Shropshire: That's correct, an operational framework.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Is there anything that is in conflict with Bill C-12, or is it all marching along?

Mr. Don Shropshire: No. It's moving along very well.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Are we talking about the same thing, an agreement between the Red Cross and PSEPC? That was mentioned earlier. Is that the same document we're talking about?

Mr. Don Shropshire: Yes.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: With respect to the Red Cross and PSEPC, and the whole of FEMA, Canada COM, and NORTHCOM, there's a huge interaction there. How comfortable are you about how that is developing—positively, negatively, too slowly, whatever?

Mr. Don Shropshire: I think the thing that keeps me awake at night is that you never know when that next disaster is going to be arriving, whether it's a pandemic or whether it's going to be another earthquake or whatever. So the speed is something that we're going to continue to push until we get agreements in place. There's goodwill on both sides, but the faster we can get agreements in place, the better I'll sleep.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Is there an area that's slowing it down more than others?

Mr. Don Shropshire: No, it's in process now. But really what we want to focus on now is the development of an operational capacity that we can use to support governments. It's all levels of government.

Dr. Duplessis mentioned that the Red Cross, through the Canadian Red Cross Society Act, serves as an auxiliary to the public authorities—that is, at the federal level, the provincial level, and also at the municipal level—and it's critical that we have agreements in place.

In this one particular part of the act, with respect to the Americans, we have a special role to play and we've demonstrated that over the last two decades. We mobilize a lot of people to respond when there are catastrophic events. We need to make sure that mutual aid agreement is in place.

The act specifically talks about the need for collaboration with our friends to the south in the United States. We would agree that this type of collaboration is entirely warranted and we think we have something to offer in terms of making sure that mutual aid agreement can be strengthened through the work of the Red Cross on both sides of the border.

• (1030)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

Mr. Knight, you talked about as an example the chlorine leak in Mississauga and how the evacuation had to be carried out by the local authorities, and so on. The impression I got was that you felt that there was something inadequate or wrong about that.

The other impression I got from that, then, was that you would have liked more federal assets there to deal with it at the first responder level. Was that an incorrect impression?

Mr. James Knight: I think so. These things happen suddenly and they have to be dealt with immediately. There's no sense waiting for the army, because that would take too long. I wasn't being negative at all about the federal contribution there. I was just saying that the reality is that when these things happen, it's the local folks who deal with it, and that's really important.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Precisely, and that's the way it should be.

Mr. James Knight: Yes, it's the way it should be.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: So you're not looking to transfer federal assets to municipalities and dilute the availability of federal assets at the federal level.

Mr. James Knight: I think we have to be aware, as I said a moment ago, that municipal governments have a very limited ability to invest in this area. What will be the future threats of terrorism, and will municipal police forces be adequate to deal with them?

It seems that they did a reasonable job with the assistance of the RCMP in Brampton, but what if they weren't paying attention because of inadequate resources? We have to be aware of the acute resource limitation at the municipal level. I'm not saying other governments don't have resource challenges, but they're more acute, clearly, at the municipal level and it shouldn't be assumed that all the new threats we're experiencing can be dealt with as effectively. It would be inappropriate of us to think that some other city would be equipped to manage SARS as Toronto did, because they had unique resources. As I said, we were lucky in that case.

So we have to be aware. There's this great reliance on the first response and municipal capacity. There are resources being spent by the Government of Canada in these broad areas, but they're definitely not being spent on local capacity at all. That's not where the resource is when they're minor contributions. You just have to be aware that something may happen and the local capacity may not be there.

The Chair: Just a brief comment.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I have a very quick question for either one.

We talked about Bill C-12 and consultation. Bill C-12 was born of, I guess, Bill C-78, a predecessor bill that died on the order paper. I ask this out of ignorance because I wasn't around then, but what are the similarities or differences between Bill C-78 and Bill C-12? Is it really just finishing up business that was started previously?

Sorry, I didn't mean for it to be a long question.

The Chair: Dr. Duplessis.

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: Let's say we didn't track the differences, to be honest. One thing, we were not mentioned specifically and we were not even recognized at the time. To us, that is important. Otherwise, we're in a vacuum. A piecemeal approach with an MOU with PSEPC, maybe with the Department of Foreign Affairs, and with this and with that will not create and give a sense that there is a presence that is recognized.

If you will allow, Mr. Chair, I'll pass it to Mr. David Pratt, simply to give you a sense that we need to be identified; otherwise, this issue of coordination will not happen. This is what we think.

Mr. David Pratt (Advisor and Special Ambassador, Canadian Red Cross): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to address the issue of the auxiliary-to-government role, because that is really the crux of where we stand as an organization. We recoil—I guess that's the best word to use—from being described as another NGO within the voluntary sector, because we do have this special relationship. However, the auxiliary-to-government relationship is not one that's very well understood, even within the Red Cross movement, let alone government.

We have been trying over the course of the last few years to raise the profile of this particular issue for the Red Cross. We've been encouraged to do that, as well, by the international Red Cross movement. When we look at our statute, for instance, which Dr. Duplessis made reference to—it goes back to 1909, and our letters patent go back to 1970—there's really a pressing need to update our legislation to bring it into the 21st century, to say nothing of the 20th century, and to really make some changes that would recognize this special relationship.

In this regard, I have to say that the reception from PSEPC at this point is actually very encouraging, especially over the last couple of months since they've been aware of this initiative we've been pursuing. They've been very, very attentive to our needs and they understand our concerns about the auxiliary-to-government role, not just as it relates to PSEPC—because actually we would see PSEPC as the lead department in this—but within the broader range of relationships that we have with the Government of Canada. It's not only our relationship with PSEPC that's important; we have a relationship with DND, CIDA, Foreign Affairs, even Industry Canada, and with Transport Canada in terms of water safety, etc.

There's a larger relationship here that we're trying to keep our eyes on. And to the extent that we would like to see ourselves recognized in the legislation—clause 3—as auxiliary to government, we're not prepared to push that at this point, because these discussions are ongoing. We certainly hope they'll produce a better understanding within the Government of Canada of the auxiliary role, and that at the end of the day we will see some changes.

I have to emphasize as well, on this conversation we have with PSEPC in terms of the consultation process, that even though it probably wasn't a formal one in connection with Bill C-12, there's a constant conversation going on between the department and the Canadian Red Cross. Mr. Shropshire is part of the disaster group for emergency management. He co-chairs that group with an assistant deputy minister. So there are some very high-level contacts that take place. I can tell you without hesitation that people at the Red Cross are in contact with PSEPC almost on a daily basis.

• (1035)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: The consultation is a process.

Mr. David Pratt: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other brief comments?

Mr. Dhaliwal, beginning the third round, please.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to welcome the representatives from FCM as well as from the Red Cross. I would like to commend the Red Cross for all the good work they're doing worldwide and also the importance FCM plays in correlating with different areas of the government.

My constituency is next door to the port and also the border, and I see a lot of traffic moving. When it comes to emergency preparedness, the very first thing we see is that the municipalities are the first responders to a situation. The way I look at it here, because I'm filling in for another member, is that I'm getting conflicting signals here, that all you're looking for is simply recognition, not more than that.

Mr. Burrett had 40 suggestions; I think they're in here. I think we need to have a comprehensive plan—and not only a comprehensive plan, but in fact the resources in place in those municipalities that are, in particular, next door to the border or the ports that are most dangerous. I don't think it should only be a coordination of the recognition, and I'm very surprised that the axiom wasn't even taken into account when we brought this forward.

Do you have any comments about this? How should we put the efforts into this legislation so that it's not only recognition but in fact the resources in place?

The Chair: Who would like to respond?

Mr. Burrett? Go ahead.

Mr. John Burrett: Thank you.

To respond similarly to what I said on the previous question, I'll say we would love to have a more explicit recognition in the legislation concerning the municipal role—amenable to all parties, and keeping in mind questions of jurisdiction, and trying not to create more difficulties. We absolutely would like to have a more explicit role.

Hence the target of the senior officials responsible for emergency management venue: it's not a political table; it's a deputy ministers'

kind of table. It's officials to officials, and yet in a very senior and decision-making kind of capacity. That's why we have that target.

I should stop there, before I contradict myself. It's something we would like to see, by all means.

• (1040)

Mr. James Knight: I should say on border issues that there is another important discussion going on concerning border infrastructure. We had that discussion with the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities about investing in our border infrastructure, which is clearly inadequate. That's another discussion we're having; we're very aware of the border challenges.

The Chair: Mr. Dhaliwal, do you have any follow-up?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: If we look at all the ports, they are monitored by the local first responders, but I don't think they are well equipped with the resources they need. That's what I think we should be focusing on, besides the explicit recognition.

Mr. James Knight: There is a heavy reliance on local police for border security, and frankly they're not particularly well equipped to do it. This is for us a whole other important discussion, certainly related to this legislation, but related to other issues as well.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal.

We'll go to Mr. Duplessis. Go ahead, please.

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: I would like to take this opportunity... If someone were to ask me, "Would you go for more?", the answer is yes.

And what would it mean? First and foremost, I think it's recognition, and I hope the message here is clear with the committee, that in due time it is important that a strong signal be given to us that "Yes, you're entitled to act" and "Yes, we count on you", because for us the machinery is immediately different. We feel responsibility. We feel it now, but it's more in doubt; it's inactive. That's the message.

And if you were to say, "Okay, what more is there?", to come back to what I said earlier, we need to build that capacity; we need to build up those volunteers being trained to be able to deploy. We need also some infrastructure and some materials—pre-positioning of materiel, for instance—to make sure that when an event happens we are able to go for it.

If you were to ask whether we could make a suggestion around—I don't know—maybe paragraph (m) of clause 4, or somewhere in that area, where we're going from establishing policies and programs to conducting exercises, if in between we could strengthen the funding for those entities, including the Canadian Red Cross and local governments, I think it might be appreciated, and it would send a signal that preparedness is extremely important and that capacity in the sector is also expected.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacKenzie, please.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank the guests for being here today.

Perhaps the federation people understand the sensitivity of the bill. I think—this is for my colleague—one of the changes that occurred in this bill from the previous bill was in trying to recognize the sensitivities that exist in some of the provincial jurisdictions with respect to what is seen to be the federal government's intrusion into their area. It certainly has different ramifications, depending where you are.

The other thing is that the federal government recognizes there may be shortcoming in some provinces, but it's not our responsibility to necessarily have some sort of heavy hand or to mandate that they all come to the same level. I think the intent of the bill was to try to weave that area.

This is to the federation. Mr. Owen talked about “mitigating circumstances”. Often we go back to Katrina. My understanding is that there may have been original federal plans to mitigate what might have been a future situation, but where the money perhaps didn't go to repair the levees. Had the levees held, Katrina would not have been the catastrophic scenario it was. This might point to the problem with the federal government's being involved at the municipal level without follow-up to as what's happening to the funds. I wonder whether you have any comments on that scenario.

• (1045)

Mr. James Knight: The levees were built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and they were fully aware that they were not necessarily secure. I'm not aware that the City of New Orleans is taking any action on that matter. From their general behaviour, I would suggest or think they are not.

I agree with Mr. Ménard that they were woefully unprepared. They made every possible mistake, as did everyone else who came in the wake of those mistakes, because other mistakes were perpetuated. I can only say that if the City of New Orleans had access to the information about their levees, they might have acted differently.

Who knows? It just speaks to the need for integrated communications all around. When people who discuss these possibilities are gathered together, it's important to have everyone there, even if it's in an informal fashion. The knowledge that the levees were at great risk might have caused the city to prepare better. However, they might not have been at the federal table, because they have the same issues with that in the U.S. that we do. I'm just saying that in this one area, it's so important that everyone has all the information.

I hope that's a helpful response to your question.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I just wonder if the Red Cross knows your role—and it's an important role. How does it fit in with other groups, like the Mennonite Central Relief Committee and some others? Do you work together?

Mr. Don Shropshire: Yes, we do. We work very closely with the other members of the voluntary sector. There are a number of mechanisms, but for any of the national relief organizations that wish to make a contribution, we have guidelines for cooperation that spell out how we work together. Groups like the one that was referred to several times, the disaster group on emergency management, are also represented.

As recently as last year, the Red Cross was responsible for chairing a group of voluntary sector organizations to try to build the overall capacity of the voluntary sector. We're recognizing that although there are a number of us who have a commitment to this area—it's certainly our central mandate—we as a sector need to build overall capacity to respond to something like a catastrophic earthquake in B.C., an ice storm in Quebec, or pandemic influenza.

So there is very close working collaboration, and that's recognized both by public safety, public health, and by other non-governmental organizations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKenzie.

I think everyone has now had an opportunity to ask a question. If there are no other pressing questions, I would invite you to make any final comments. If there is anything that you feel needs to be clarified, I welcome you to do that.

Madame Bonsant has a brief question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): I have a question, Mr. Chairman.

I have not said much, because I am not aware of the legislation surrounding Bill C-12. However, I can tell you about my experience during the 1998 ice storm.

I was city councillor at the time, in a municipality that did not wait for the go-ahead from either the provincial nor the federal government in order to declare a state of emergency. The first people to be contacted were instinctively the police, even before 911 emergency services. Second, came city council.

During that time, we responded by developing emergency measures for the city. We then extended the measures to larger cities, because in my riding, some municipalities have a population of 112 citizens. The locals know where water treatment facilities are. We received tons of phone calls from volunteers wanting to offer their services. We did not have to go running after them; they were there. The only help we receive from the federal government came from the Armed Forces, that told us they could provide us with small cots if need be, that these cots were available.

My question is for Mr. Knight. We did not wait for help from either the provincial nor the federal government, so what are cities outside of Quebec waiting for to develop emergency response systems, why do they need legislation to force their hand?

• (1050)

[*English*]

Mr. James Knight: Thank you for the question.

I don't think they're waiting at all. I talked about what happened in Mississauga. They were ready and they did extremely well. I talked about what happened in Gander, and they handled it extremely well. I'm only suggesting that the capacity is strained and that it's important that everyone be aware of everyone else's resources.

In the scheme of things, these were not huge events. They were very large events. They weren't vastly catastrophic like Katrina was vastly catastrophic. The resources of all are necessary in that sort of a circumstance.

What if a tanker car full of chlorine were to disintegrate in the middle of Toronto? That would be very difficult, and I think the resources of all would ultimately be needed. Perhaps that's a bad example, but that's what municipal governments do.

You were a municipal councillor. You know that you get the call. It's not your member of the National Assembly and it's not your MP who gets the call. They're hundreds of miles away, or perhaps thousands. It's you, and you will react and you will do all you can.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ménard, I will recognize you as long as it's not too long. I'd like to give our witnesses just a moment if they have any wrap-up comments.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: They will not regret it. I would be remiss not to point out the invaluable role played by the Red Cross.

Even if that is not recognized in any federal legislation, it seems to me that the Red Cross already has an international reputation. One thing is for sure, it has volunteers which are trained to deal with emergencies. In times of crises, that is what is most important. The Red Cross is always well prepared. I know that they have a truck full of cots, and other trucks filled with other supplies. It is an exceptional organization, in my opinion, even if that is not formally recognized in legislation.

This is a testimony to our appreciation for the work of the Red Cross, something we have felt every time we have dealt with this organization. It is known the world over, when disaster strikes the Red Cross is expected, and when it gets involved, people are never disappointed.

Certainly, this is the best tribute anyone can pay to the Red Cross, and it goes far beyond any piece of legislation, from any province or any country, it is the appreciation felt by all of humanity.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

If you have any wrap-up comments, you are welcome to make them at this point. Does anybody want to make any summary statement?

Mr. Duplessis.

Dr. Pierre Duplessis: Mr. Chair, I just have a few words.

I'd like to thank the committee once again. I thank Monsieur Ménard for his comments. We're proud to know that we are

recognized by a law of the federal government so that we have an existence. We are a legal organization. We want to go further with that, to increase our links with the different departments in the federal government and also at all levels of government, municipal included, because for us that is important. We just want to reiterate the fact that in due time we hope to be absolutely included in that.

[*Translation*]

The fact that our organization would be included in the legislation gives us a legal mandate, which takes precedence over all smaller agreements, which may be very important, but incomplete or fragmented within each service.

Once again, I would like to repeat my thanks in French.

I thank you, Mr. Ménard, for the comments you have made which we appreciate and which I will share with the staff and volunteers from the Canadian Red Cross.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Knight.

Mr. James Knight: Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you to all members of the committee.

[*English*]

It was a good discussion. Obviously we're trying to find a path. It's not the easiest path on occasion, but I want to thank Mr. MacKenzie for recognizing the realities that we face. I think he was sensitive to our effort and how it's not necessarily simple to go forward.

I thought the discussion was very useful, and I thank you very much for the invitation.

• (1055)

The Chair: I'd like to thank our witnesses for coming here today.

If you have any additional comments as you review what's happened and what has been said here today, we invite you to write to us or contact the government. Everybody around this table would like this bill to be the best possible.

Again, thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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

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

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.