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Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon, colleagues.

[English]

Welcome to meeting 22 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development for Tuesday, April 8, 2008.

Before we hear from our witnesses and before I introduce them, we have a little business to attend to. With the Honourable Mr. Wilfert becoming the official critic of defence, we have a few changes, because he was our vice-chair previous to that. So I'm going to open nominations for a vice-chair from the Liberal side.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): It would give me great pleasure to nominate Bernard Patry for the position of vice-chair, if it's agreeable.

The Chair: All right.

Are there any other nominations for that position? If not, we'll close nominations and we'll acclaim Mr. Patry our vice-chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Chair: I think it's good that he isn't here. He doesn't have to give us one of his election speeches. That might have changed our minds.

Certainly he is no stranger to that, being the chair of this committee for many years and serving as vice-chair in the past. We certainly welcome him.

Today we will have a briefing on the recent violent reaction of the Burmese regime and then later we will hear from Oxfam, as part of our study on Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

In the first hour we will hear from the Institut québécois des hautes études internationales, Estelle Dricot, professional researcher in the institute's international peace and security program; from Rights and Democracy, Madame Lévesque, regional officer for Asia; and from the Canadian Friends of Burma, Mr. Htoo, the executive director.

We welcome you here today. Some of you have appeared before our committee before. We welcome you back. For others who may be new, we give a special welcome to you. We look forward to your initial comments. Then we will proceed to the round of questioning.

Mr. Htoo, perhaps you could give us your opening comments, please.

Mr. Tin Maung Htoo (Executive Director, Canadian Friends of Burma): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of Parliament and distinguished guests and observers.

This is a great opportunity for me to share with you what happened in Burma and also the response of the Canadian government to these situations. We all saw what happened in Burma last year in September and the brutalities of the military junta. We still remember the images. The images are still vivid and a reminder to the international community that we have to support the people striking for democracy in Burma.

I think Canada's response to this latest crackdown in September was quite strong. It could be even regarded as the strongest among all nations in terms of its package of measures taken by Canada last year in November. Not only did Canada impose the toughest economic sanctions on the Burmese military junta, but also members of Parliament unanimously supported a motion tabled by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in conferring honorary Canadian citizenship on Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

During the uprising last year in Burma, the support of Canadian citizens was also quite remarkable. In more than a dozen cities across the country, thousands of Canadians came out to the streets and supported monk-led peaceful demonstrations for Burma. Even in the Yukon, 150 people came out in the very cold weather, and the Toronto protests, which drew more than 3,000 people, demonstrated the second-largest gathering in the world after the protest in London, England.

As a representative of an organization working for democracy and human rights in Burma, I'm very delighted to have seen such widespread and tremendous support from Canada and its citizens, government, and Parliament alike. Indeed, I am proud of Canada standing up for its fundamental values of freedom, democracy, and human rights, which have been denied to 56 million people in Burma by its repressive ruler.

While I express my deepest appreciation to the government of Canada for what it has done, especially since September last year, I would also like to request the government take some additional measures to have an impact and make a difference. The first recommendation I would like to make is to set up a task force for the enforcement of the measures imposed last year. Because when we look at the measures, there are a number of measures that are, of course, law right now, but who monitors and who imposes these measures is still a question for us. That's why I strongly ask the government to set up a task force.

One vision that comes to my mind is the government list of individuals to be targeted with these Canadian measures, but that list is not comprehensive. Only 40 people are included on that list. Some people are still missing. When we look at the Australian government's action, I think they have more than 400 people on the list. So we should look into this area of whether we can increase the number of individuals who are connected with the military junta. That is one issue. Probably we can increase the list and compare it to the political prisoners in Burma. In Burma now, more than 1,800 political prisoners still remain in prisons.

• (1540)

That is something I strongly recommend. Also, regarding this first recommendation, we have to look at some existing investments from Canada. For example, Ivanhoe Mines, even though they bought their 50% share of assets on sale, is still, we believe, getting a profit from the operation, because the operation is still ongoing in Burma, and until and unless their assets are bought by a company, they are entitled to receive the profit from the operation in Burma.

The second recommendation I would like to make here is to increase humanitarian aid to 150,000 refugees and half a million internally displaced people inside the country.

Two weeks ago I was at the Thai-Burma border. I visited the most crowded refugee camps on the border, where more than 40,000 people are taking shelter. I was told that 5,000 people are living without food rations. The need is very compelling, and the living situation is so appalling. That's why I strongly urge the government to increase humanitarian aid to those people in need.

I want to put forth another comparison. Canada used to provide a huge amount of aid to Burma before the 1988 democratic uprising, during the time of the socialist government. The amount was \$20 million, and sometimes \$50 million. But now the government provides just \$2 million to those people. That's why I ask you to please consider increasing the humanitarian aid to these people.

The third recommendation I would like to make here is to create a fund of earmarked money to streamline civil society organizations inside and outside the country, because we need to support the democracy movement and to strengthen civil society organizations working in Burma. Without those organizations, it is impossible to continue the journey of the democracy movement in Burma.

When I was in Chiang Mai, Mae Sot in Thailand, I met with members of democratic organizations, and they requested this kind of initiative from the Government of Canada.

The fourth recommendation I would like to make is to designate a senior Canadian official as a special representative to Burma. In

order to discuss government policies and government measures, I think we need a special representative. That person would be assigned to go to meet with many counterparts in counterpart governments—for example European, the United States, Asian countries, China, and India. That's why I strongly recommend the government consider the possibility of having a special representative to Burma.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development again for inviting me to this hearing, and I hope the committee will be able to study the aforementioned recommendations.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now proceed to Madame Dricot.

[Translation]

Ms. Estelle Dricot (Professional Researcher, International Peace and Security Program, Institut québécois des hautes études internationales): Good afternoon. I will be making my presentation in French.

Following the events of September 2007 and the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations in Burma, the United Nations Organization actively tried to find a solution. They tried to adopt resolutions, which are difficult to apply at the moment, including resolutions by the Security Council. In addition, a series of measures were taken nationally, and sanctions were implemented, like the sanctions imposed by Canada which have been broadly accepted and are among the most stringent internationally. I took part in the conference held two weeks ago, where experts from Burma were present. Apparently, the economic sanctions are considered necessary and have been well received, but we should increasingly be thinking about targeting them appropriately. Some individuals or some families in the military should be targeted directly, because at present the people of Burma are undergoing much too much hardship. They have been under sanctions for 20 years, and many feel that they simply cannot bear them any more. It is quite true that sanctions are a good way of putting pressure on the government in power, but we should think about imposing targeted sanctions.

Moreover, participants said at the same time that there should be an increase in humanitarian aid and assistance to reform in order to move towards a democratic transition. I am now coming to the area I really want to focus on, education. Most Burmese who left after the 1988 revolution are now in exile, or jailed inside the country. The number of intellectuals living in Burma is dropping, and in fact is now almost zero. Those living in exile have difficulty in making their voices heard, lack funding, or say they lack support. They do get their message out to some extent, but have no support from governments in the international community. As a result, if there is one thing we should think about doing, it is increasing both financial and technical assistance.

I often say that there may be a forceful way of responding to the situation in Burma—resolutions and sanctions—but there is a more subtle response, dialogue. Unfortunately, dialogue is difficult. We have not succeeded in establishing a dialogue with the government in power. For the moment, we cannot bring together representatives of the government and representatives of the democratic party and ethnic groups around the same table.

I would also like to add a brief personal comment. Here in Canada, we should stop using such terms as "opponents" or "dissidents", and start talking about those who represent the democratic party, which was democratically elected in 1989. That would demonstrate Canada's clear support for Burmese people fighting for democracy. We have to stop seeing them as dissidents.

The forms of subtle response include dialogue and official meetings. We all agree what we need to increase official representation by the international community in Burma, and even that someone from Canada should go to Burma and try to meet with junta, the party in power.

• (1545)

Canada and the international community must join forces to create a transition fund to strengthen education.

There is considerable untapped potential in the people of Burma living in exile throughout the world but also along the international borders and even within the country. I am fully aware that it will be more difficult, but the potential is there to capitalize on. Civil society must be prepared to take charge of the country when the time comes. While it is true that sanctions and resolutions are necessary, civil society must also be prepared to take charge. There is talk to that effect, but not often enough. Aid has always been provided, I want that to be clear, but it is insufficient. Aid in the form of scholarships must be increased, for example, to facilitate access for certain students to universities in Thailand, Australia, and possibly Canada, as Canada did at the time for South Africa. Supporting the media would be another way of assisting civil society, as would recognizing the various associations.

All segments of the population must receive assistance on the education front. We must reach out to the intellectual community, young people, women, ethnic minorities, and help these people so that they can develop. A lack of education has currently been forced on them, and these people are no longer able to defend or organize themselves. While it is true that the reign of terror has made people afraid and they react less, this lack of education is an important factor to consider. In my view, Canada could concentrate specifically on this aspect, in addition to providing humanitarian assistance.

In summary, talking about education also means focussing on policy guidelines: teaching the various groups to better understand their differences so that they can work together more collaboratively; strengthening their ability to negotiate, as we know that lasting solutions do not flow from pure confrontation, but rather from negotiated approaches; and improving the capacity to manage and guide the segments of the population that are suffering.

If we achieve that, we will have an understanding of all segments of the population. I think we have just glimpsed a long-term solution.

When talking about education, we must not forget the monastic schools, which are the only ones in Burma that currently take in civilians. The universities are closed to the public and open only to children from military families. The people have not had universities for 20 years.

I would like to see clear, substantial support as part of this aid. I know that making this kind of commitment means being involved in a long journey requiring significant funding. When making such a commitment, we cannot expect solutions in the short term, but we must, at the same time, consider all steps taken by the Canadian government to date.

• (1550)

And in conclusion, I thank you for your attention.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Dricot.

Madame Lévesque.

[Translation]

Ms. Micheline Lévesque (Regional Officer, Asia, Rights and Democracy): Thank you.

Good afternoon, everyone. I feel quite at home here today. In fact, Rights and Democracy defines democracy as civil society participating in the political world. I think that for Canadian citizens, that happens on parliamentary committees. I must truly thank this committee and the Sub-Committee on Human Rights. Without your help, I do not think that the motion on Burma could have been adopted by the Canadian Parliament in May 2005. It is truly a collaborative undertaking by all members of civil society throughout Canada and parliamentarians of all stripes. Thank you so much. The Canadian Friends of Burma organization is here today. This motion has greatly contributed to encouraging parliamentarians to get more involved in this matter.

As you know, Rights and Democracy was created by the Parliament of Canada. Oddly enough, Burma and our institution have a common history. The act was adopted in 1988. If you recall, that was the year of what is called in English the 8.8.88 uprising, or the revolution of August 8, 1988. People took to the streets to call for elections, and the armed forces responded very violently. In Canada, the act was adopted in 1988, and in 1990, we opened our office in Montreal. In 1990, democratic elections took place in Burma. Our mandate involved promoting the International Bill of Human Rights as well as democracy. That was how we started out. We had a budget, but still no programming. So for us, it was very easy to get involved in Burma.

The elections were held in 1990, and the reaction of the armed forces was to arrest members of Parliament. If you had been in Burma, ladies and gentlemen, you would have been considered criminals. The armed forces started arresting members of Parliament and banned Parliament from sitting. The members held a secret meeting and decided that some of them would have to leave the country. In 1988, the country was completely closed, no one knew anything about Burma. In 1990, Aung San Suu Kyi had not yet won the Nobel peace prize. Eight members therefore decided to leave the country and set up the government in exile. In 1990, Rights and Democracy was the first institution in the world to support this government in exile. Today many governments do support it, but at the time, we were the only one. We owe the establishing of our institution, through which we were able to provide that support, to the Parliament of Canada.

As regards the way to solve the problem with Burma, it is very clear: everyone knows that the solution lies in three-way dialogue. The United Nations has issued 28 resolutions calling for a three-way dialogue between the military regime, the National League for Democracy, which obtained 82% of the seats, and the representatives of the ethnic groups. The problem stems from the fact that the armed forces do not want to negotiate. Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy and the ethnic groups have repeatedly called on the various forms of the military regime to sit down at the negotiating table, and they continue to do so. The military, however, has no reason to agree to negotiate: they have it all. That is why we feel that with these sanctions, the military will end up negotiating, once they have realized that they are losing power and can no longer continue. Then, they will sit down at the table.

We believe that the military junta's policy has always been to gain time, to tell the international community not to worry, that negotiations would take place, but that first, something had to be done, then something else, and so on. These people are not, in fact, interested in dialogue, they will engage in it only if they have no other option. That is why we think Canadian sanctions would be a good way to support three-way dialogue in Burma.

I would like to go back to the motion adopted by the Parliament of Canada in 2005, adopted by you. It states that the committee believes the government should:

(c) provide tangible support to the legitimate authorities in Burma, specifically the government in exile (the National Coalition Government for the Union of Burma) and the Committee Representing the People's Parliament ;

● (1555)

I would like to take a few minutes to explain the mandate of the government in exile and the CRPP, because I do not think that it is clear to everyone.

As I said earlier, the government in exile was created in 1990. It consisted of eight members who left Burma and whose mandate was very clear: as soon as Burma became a democratic country and parliamentarians could take back their seats in Parliament, the government in exile would be dissolved. At the time, there were 8 members of Parliament in exile, now there are about 34. They make up what is called the Members of Parliament Union. They are responsible for electing the government in exile every four years. The government in exile is actually made up of representatives of Aung San Suu Kyi, in other words, the Parliament elected in 1990.

These people were elected by the people of Burma, which is not the case with the Tibetan government in exile, for example, which was elected by the diaspora, or Tibetans in exile.

The Committee Representing the People's Parliament or the CRPP, was created in 1998 and is made up of 10 members. The military continues to refuse to say that it does not want to negotiate. For its part, the Committee Representing the People's Parliament has set up 10 committees that form a sort of small Parliament. These 10 committees are already examining legislation, decrees, and the Constitution, in short, things they want to improve once democracy prevails in the country. Naturally, the members of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament have suffered greatly. Some of them have been imprisoned, among other things. They have asked for the support of all parliamentarians throughout the world, and several Parliaments have adopted motions acknowledging the importance of the work being done by the CRPP. The government in exile and the CRPP were both born out of the 1990 elections.

To date, the Canadian government has never supported the government in exile or the CRPP. I have been working with Rights and Democracy for 13 years, and during all those years, Aung San Suu Kyi's representatives, Prime Minister Sein Win, of the government in exile, who is her cousin, has never met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs during any of his visits to Canada. Prime Minister Sein Win's father is the brother of General Aung San, who is the father of Aung San Suu Kyi, who led the country to independence. Both were killed at the same time.

Civil society is, for the most part, in favour of the motions. We sincerely believe that they will weaken the military regime. On the one hand, the military regime must be weakened, and on the other, there must be support for the democratic forces, the legitimate forces, and civil society. As Tin Maung Htoo said earlier, the main problem in Canada is that no funds have been allocated to Burma. Other countries stopped their official development assistance in 1998, which is good, but they allocated this money to the government in exile or to humanitarian aid. As for us, we must constantly knock on doors, be it to try to offer humanitarian assistance, education or scholarships, and so on. We know that officials are aware of the situation. They are looking at how to proceed, based on their funds and rules, but in the meantime, Burma is going nowhere. Rare are the occasions when military regimes allow democratic elections. It is very difficult for us to support our partners in the field and to do what we would like to accomplish.

I want to say that I support my two colleagues. I think that education is crucial. I think I recall that during the apartheid regime in South Africa, Canada had an education fund. It would probably be easier to manage that kind of fund from the border. Be it through humanitarian assistance or the government in exile, it is important to strengthen these institutions.

Thank you.

● (1600)

● (1605)

[English]

The Chair: Merci, Madame Lévesque.

We'll go to our first round and we'll go to Mr. Bagnell, please.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you all for coming.

As you know, I'm the chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Burma. We have about 40 members from all parties in the House and the Senate. I just came back from Burma not long ago and saw how serious it is. One of the leaders I met with was assassinated a couple of weeks later in the same room where we had met.

I'd like to know from Micheline and Tin, first of all, if you support the work we're doing. In particular, the government has done some great things, as you said—both aid and sanctions are very appreciated over there—but there are some more steps now that we've come up with that we'd like the government to take. I'd just like to ask Micheline and Tin if you would support those steps.

One step is we had a press conference not long ago that the political prisoners should be freed and monitored by an independent agency. Other steps: speak out against the sham referendum and election that are coming up starting in May, which the Zaw monks of Ontario and we are working on; lobby China and India and of course Thailand, behind closed doors, on the things they can do—they can do the most, because they have the most economic ties; help the parliamentary federation union of Burma in exile with their constitution, which they asked me for when I was over there, which wouldn't cost much; and help them lobby for a UN political presence in Rangoon.

Foreign aid, of course, as you mentioned, hopefully would be increased. We give hundreds of millions to Darfur, Palestine, and Afghanistan, and we only give \$2 million a year there. The rice has gone up twice since they've done their budget. They're really starving. It's very needed.

We could make recommendations on the horrible labour conditions and any actions we could take on the large dams and pipelines that could be funded by China or Thailand. In Burma it would give all sorts of revenue to the dictatorship.

And finally, we could lobby the ASEAN countries to really help their member friend in Burma.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bagnell.

Mr. Htoo.

Mr. Tin Maung Htoo: Thank you, Mr. Larry Bagnell, for all your questions. There are lots of questions. Probably I can touch on a few of the questions, especially the political prisoner situation.

As far as we know, there are more than 1,800 political prisoners who remain in detention centres, and approximately 700 were arrested during the last uprising in September. Some of them are dying in prison because of torture and others from various forms of brutalities and one especially during interrogation. UN human rights special reporter Mr. Pinheiro pointed out that more than 80 people were killed during the last uprising, but the government only confirmed a little over 30 people.

I was told recently that approximately 1,000 monks are still missing in Burma. One of the monk leaders who was in Quebec City attending the Quebec conference on Burma mentioned that 1,000 monks are still missing in Burma.

This political prisoner issue is a very important issue. Two weeks ago an organization based in Thailand launched a campaign for the release of political prisoners in Burma. They're trying to get more than 800,000 signatures from around the world calling for the release of all political prisoners in Burma.

Another important issue is the referendum—

The Chair: You have to really speed up on the answers, because we have five minutes for the question and answer and I know Madam Lévesque.... Could you just sum up very quickly?

Mr. Tin Maung Htoo: Yes, thank you.

The referendum is a very important one. Lots of people are talking about the role parties should play in this referendum. The referendum is for the draft constitution prepared by the military junta. As far as I know, the majority of people will vote against this constitution, because this is a sham and this is against democratic principles. For example, 25% of the parliamentary seats were taken by the military to be appointed by the commander-in-chief. Plus the commander-in-chief will appoint three cabinet positions—for example, home, defence, and border affairs.

What I can say is this constitution is totally against Canada's democratic principles. But, still, the Government of Canada hasn't taken any position yet on this referendum and this constitution.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Htoo.

Madame Lévesque, do you have some very small answer? Are you all right there?

[Translation]

Ms. Micheline Lévesque: We support all of your actions, Larry. Thank you.

We feel that the role of the parliamentary friends of Burma is very important, and we have good communication with them. We thank them very much for their support.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Bourgeois, it is nice to see you back at the committee. You have five minutes.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I am very happy to see you again. We attended this international forum together. So many things were said that day that I am very happy to see you proposing plans that are already established. Basically, these plans pull together everything that was said during the forum. I'm very happy with that.

First of all, what role does China play with respect to Burma? I want to remind you that I only have five minutes.

Ms. Estelle Dricot: In my humble opinion, China is currently Burma's main political and economic partner, along with Russia, of course. It would be wrong to think that China alone can influence Burma. I think there needs to be joint action by China, India, Russia, and above all ASEAN's partners, since Burma is part of ASEAN. That would be giving China too much importance. Given what is currently happening between China and Tibet, it would probably be time to find a way to negotiate. China cannot deal with Tibet and Burma at the same time.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I asked you that question because everyone says the people must not suffer because of the sanctions imposed on Burma. Now, if we were to lift the sanctions, wouldn't China be inclined to help Burma again and to support the regime?

Ms. Estelle Dricot: I want to clarify right away that the sanctions must not be lifted, they must be maintained. What I meant was that the sanctions must be targeted, and there is a way to do that. For example, we could target the military's bank accounts that everyone knows about and that are abroad and welcomed openly by Singapore. There are ways to target the sanctions. As Ms. Lévesque said, we must continue along these lines. The sanctions target the government and the junta, but we must not forget to support the people not only in a humanitarian way, but also morally. The people of Burma must not feel they are fighting this battle on their own. It is the responsibility of the international community to help them help themselves. That was clearly stated at the forum. From the sanitary and social perspective, I think there was a highly common approach. We must do them both.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Bourgeois.

We'll go to the government side. But just before we go to Mr. Goldring, I want to follow up on that. The United States has come forward with sanctions against Burma and we see other countries that have come forward with sanctions, and right away China and India fill the void. They may not recognize those sanctions. So do we really gain? Are these sanctions more than just a feel-good thing for the country that imposes them, when right away China and India respond to negate the effect that the sanctions may have?

• (1615)

[Translation]

Ms. Micheline Lévesque: The Burmese population is oppressed by a military dictatorship. Sanctions are often applied to new investments and not the old ones. For instance, notably, there is Total Elf Fina, as well as all the other foreign companies that still operate in Burma. No company in Burma is entirely independent from the military regime. Most foreign investments take the shape of joint ventures with the military regime.

Some Burmese people told me that there was a good side to the sanctions because they at least ensured that there was some food left for the people. They explained that since sanctions were imposed on imports and exports, they have been able to buy fish and shrimp. Previously, the military regime exported everything. At least, food is cheaper now and they can even afford to eat fish.

If I understand correctly what Estelle means by targeted sanctions, they apply to individuals. This does not mean that sanctions like those that were approved by the Canadian government should be

maintained. This is very good, and we think that it should go even further.

On the other hand, the manufacturing sector in Burma is very small. The population lives mainly in rural areas. The military regime is criticizing the sanctions. In my opinion, this is clear evidence that they are directly affected by them. If they are killing monks in the street, do you think that they would defend ordinary people?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Goldring, please pose your question, and the witness can answer later.

Mr. Peter Goldring: All right. Thank you very much.

And certainly Canada is to be commended for acting quickly and putting sanctions in place and making a positive indication on the international community. But along the line of the sanctions, you had mentioned, Tin, that there are 40 on the list for Canada and 400 on the list from Australia. Does that mean that there are more businesses, or does that mean that there's more of a complexity on the Australian list? That was one question.

The second question that I'd like to ask relates to the border areas, where there has been a lot of strife and trouble, and that seems to be where the military gets its licence, you might say, to be more militarily in the country as a form of governing because of the strife along those border areas. Is there any hope or is there any sense or feeling that there may be a more moderate faction of the military coming down that might have more sensitivity and more of a sense that they're willing to look at reforms? We all know that military regimes have been in place for longer periods of time, and they do change. So is there any sense that there can be change there as an interim step, to encourage democracy?

Mr. Tin Maung Htoo: Thank you very much.

The list compiled by the Australian government includes the names of individuals who are targeted, who are related to the militaries, including the military leaders. The list is 417 people. It's only names, not entities. When we look at the Canadian list, there are only 40 people, and there are 44 entities, like some businesses and companies close to the military. So what I was trying to say was we can increase; we have a role to increase the list to even some individuals related to the military who are now living in Canada, for example in British Columbia and Toronto. I know a few individuals who are close to the military, like some cabinet ministers, and that's why we would need a task force, like a committee of the whole, to look into what we can do in terms of this enforcement for these measures.

On the second question, Micheline, can you answer?

[Translation]

Ms. Micheline Lévesque: Regarding the possibility that some of the military leaders might be more flexible, let us take, for instance, Khin Nyunt who was, at the time, considered to be more democratic than the others. Now he, too, is under house arrest. I think that even the military people are unhappy. Many military persons are caught up in the system and we know that quite a few of them would change sides if they had the will to do so and if they knew that the democratic forces would prevail. In 1988, some military people put down their arms and joined with the demonstrators. You know what happened after that. There's torture, and perhaps there is even worse. When a military man crosses over to the democratic forces, he is considered a traitor.

Among other current events, they are moving the capital city. The military regime decided to move the capital into the forest at Pyinmana. We know that the very high ranking military persons are very unhappy with this, because their families live in Rangoon. They have to travel, it complicates their lives, and they are very unhappy. Members of the forces are not happy with shooting at monks, after all, they too are Buddhists. They do not like that.

There were demonstrations because the military leaders decided, overnight, to increase the price of fuel, petroleum, gasoline and oil. Prices went up two, three or four-fold overnight. They did this because they are in difficulty. General Than Shwe's daughter got married. I do not know if you have seen the pictures, but they had diamonds. The military people have a very expensive lifestyle. It is difficult for all the upper ranks to stay at that level.

The Burmese people believe that the revolution is not over, that people will once again take to the streets and that this time, the military will be on their side. This is what they are hoping for. Even the military people are unhappy, and as soon as they believe that they can join up with the democratic forces, they will do so.

• (1620)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Unfortunately, the chair took some of the member's time, so he's basically out of time. Sorry about that, Peter.

We'll move to Mr. Dewar, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our guests for being here today, and thank you for the work that you've done on this issue.

I would agree with the comments that were made about civil society really being critical in making us aware of what the concerns were in Burma, because it was so hard to find out what was going on after the crackdown. And to that, just before the crackdown in September, there was actually a meeting here in Ottawa around what could happen in Burma.

I'm glad you mentioned the motion that was passed in 2005 by the Parliament of the day. One of the points that was made was to support the democracy movement. I know, having spoken with people who were at the meetings in Ottawa, they really thought

Canada was well placed to host both the democracy players' movement and resource it. That's something I just want to repeat for the record, that I think people should know Canada can do that. We can host, if you will, the disparate groups, bring them here to Canada and provide a place for them.

I know that everyone is aware that there's a problem in Burma, but we are hopeful that one day democracy will return and the people who are elected will take their rightful place.

I want to ask you about the SEMA measures that Canada has taken, the Special Economic Measures Act, which we all pushed the government to do, and they did. When the bureaucrats came to committee, they weren't able to tell us how many companies were affected by this. They did say—and this is not their fault, this is just the way it worked—that it was only going to affect future investments, so existing investments weren't going to be touched by this.

Do you have any information you can share with the committee as to what you know about Canadian investments that presently exist? I'd really like to know a little more about the Canada Pension Plan and if you're aware of investments presently that Canada has through the Canada Pension Plan, because that affects everyday Canadians, and most Canadians would be shocked to know that they might still have investments in Burma through their pension plan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Htoo.

Mr. Tin Maung Htoo: There are some Canadian companies still working in Burma—for instance, the Canadian helicopter company CHC. That company is providing helicopter services to Total and Unocal, the two Chinese companies providing all the technique and all the expertise for the natural gas pipelines. The gas is now currently being sent to Thailand. In that operation, the Canadian company CHC, which is based in Vancouver, is providing helicopter services.

Another one, of course, is Ivanhoe Mines. Even though they said that since early last year they had divested their assets, we believe they are still getting the profit from the operation, because the operation is still going on.

There are a few other small companies. For example, TransCanada is based in Calgary. The company has shown its interest in providing some kind of technical expertise for the transportation of natural gas from Burma to India, but we are still working on that issue. We are not sure whether this company has any operation or any technical work in that area.

Of course, CPP is the biggest issue. As far as we've studied it, CPP holds more than \$1 billion worth of shares with companies linked to Burma. I brought some information, but it wasn't translated, so I wasn't able to address it with you.

For example, CPP has shares with Ivanhoe Mines in the amount of \$67 million. CPP also holds investment with TransCanada in the amount of \$152 million and \$17 million with the Canadian helicopter corporation CHC. They hold \$263 million with Unocal, currently under Chevron—Chevron acquired Unocal a year ago, I believe—\$254 million with Power Corporation, and \$304 million with Total, a French energy company. This Total and Chevron-Unocal natural gas operation, I read today in the latest news, provided \$2.7 billion to the military junta last year.

In that sense, the investment of CPP-IB—the investment board—is not socially responsible. The government and the standing committee should study what.... You can make a regulation. We know everybody contributes to CPP. There are 17 million Canadians—working people, including members of Parliament—who are contributing premiums to CPP, but in a way, we are indirectly supporting oppression, a repression in Burma, by contributing our premiums.

This is a very appalling situation. I strongly suggest the committee study this issue.

• (1625)

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

That will conclude our meeting on Burma.

Mr. Rae, do you have a comment or a quick...?

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): The only comment I wanted to make is that I thought the original submission Mr. Htoo made was very reasonable and very practical. I think the ideas he's suggested with respect to trying to monitor and focus and get some attention paid in an organized way are very practical suggestions, and I hope we will be able to move forward on them.

Frankly, the sanctions issue is more complicated.

[Translation]

We must understand that the economy is very complicated and that things are closely interconnected. This is why we must watch it very closely.

How can we practically provide humanitarian aid? It is crucial for us to help the democratic movement in a concrete way. Besides, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should set up a centre for studying the situation.

I believe that these ideas are important. I congratulate you for your work.

• (1630)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

As Mr. Rae has suggested, we thank you for your recommendations and all of you for your pointed recommendations on what the Canadian government can do and also what has to be done internationally to help bring about democracy and change and human rights and all those other things that go with it in Burma.

I may also just add that because our time has been fairly limited, if you would like to enlarge on any of the questions that have been posed today, certainly we would encourage you to make your

submissions to our committee. They will be put on the record and we would appreciate that. Your experience and expertise dealing with Asia and Burma is very obvious, so we would look forward to any further response you may have.

We will suspend for one minute and then we will welcome our next guests. Mr. Waldman from Oxfam International will be coming in. We'll just take one minute to suspend.

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(Pause)

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• (1635)

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

In our second hour we are continuing a bit of an update, I guess, on our study of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. We have Mr. Matt Waldman, Afghanistan policy adviser from Oxfam International. And we hope to have some time for committee business as well, so bear that in mind.

Welcome, Mr. Waldman. You have ten minutes and then we'll go into the questioning fairly quickly.

Mr. Matt Waldman (Afghanistan Policy Adviser, Oxfam International): I'll speak in English, if I may.

I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me to speak. I'd like to just talk for a few minutes, firstly, about the background to the situation in Afghanistan and then address briefly three issues—rural development, aid effectiveness, and peace-building at a local level.

I think it's clear there has been progress in Afghanistan in terms of development, but we need to recognize that it has been slow and that there is a long way to go. The current levels of development in Afghanistan are comparable to sub-Saharan Africa, and the progress that has been made is being jeopardized by increasing insecurity. Last year there were 8,000 deaths as a result of the conflict, which is double the number of the previous year. Violent incidents were up by about 30% to 35%.

So why are we in this situation? Well, I think there was probably a failure of the international community to appreciate the extent of the destruction caused by over two decades of war. Before the wars, Afghanistan was one of the poorest countries in the world. Afterwards, there was widespread and desperate poverty.

The response after the international intervention in 2001 was to provide a light footprint, relatively limited aid compared to other countries who have come through conflict, and a top-down approach where national institutions were created, but it was done from the top down. Communities have only recently seen results from the international intervention across the country.

I would like to address the key issue of rural development. We think this is the priority issue in Afghanistan today. It is clear when you go to communities that things still are very difficult in rural areas as opposed to urban areas, which have seen some progress. In one community I was in recently of 260 families, 45 children died over the winter due to preventable causes; 12 women died in pregnancy or childbirth.

So what should be done to address rural development? There needs to be sub-national governance reform. We need to build the state at a local level, because at a local level the state has very limited presence or no presence at all. There need to be more resources directed to communities themselves, who can then lead the development process, and we can build civil society at a local level as well.

To address aid effectiveness, very briefly, in terms of the volume of aid, it has been insufficient. According to the Afghan government, \$25 billion of aid has been pledged and only \$15 billion delivered. When we look at the comparison of military spending to development spending, we see that the American military alone is spending over \$100 million a day, and aid spending has averaged about \$7 million a day. Too much aid is supply-driven, prescriptive, rather than being needs-based and addressing demand. It's been centralized and urban and has not been evenly distributed. Indeed, we believe that's one of the reasons why insecurity has spread. Not enough aid has gone to build the government, particularly at local levels. Some major donors put the vast majority of their aid around the government, rather than trying to build the government, especially at local levels. Of course there are challenges of corruption, but there are means of dealing with those.

• (1640)

Efficiency is another major problem. A lot of the aid money is going to major contractors and to consultants. We accept that contractors and consultants will be required in the reconstruction process, but it's no reason not to rigorously assess whether they are providing value for money.

Finally, on transparency and accountability, there is not enough transparency. If there were, we could identify clearly the bad practices and try to put them right, which is why we are advocating for full transparency—indicators of aid effectiveness that apply to all donors and measure all the key aspects of aid, such as impact, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, accountability, and the use of Afghan resources. There is clearly a need for increased coordination as well. Finally, we believe that a commission should be established to measure aid effectiveness.

Turning to the last key issue, peace-building at the local level, most of the measures to bring peace to Afghanistan have either been military or they have been at a high level or target-limited. We believe that you cannot impose peace from above. It is essential to try to build it from below.

Insecurity in Afghanistan often has local causes. Indeed, Afghanistan is an incredibly local society, and very often development security depends on variations of circumstances at a local level. We think that community peace-building is an essential measure for achieving peace nationally, and where it has been undertaken in Afghanistan it has made a major difference to levels of security.

That concludes my short presentation. I think perhaps it's more productive for us to discuss the individual issues you'd like to raise.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your words.

We'll move to the first round. Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Merci.

I read your long report, not all of it, but a big portion. I have two questions.

I think rural development is quite important. As you mentioned, it's mainly around Kabul. I've been in Germany and have discussed it with my German counterparts, and they're doing their aid totally differently. It seems to start from the local area and talking with tribal chiefs, and after that it goes to the local government and then it goes to the province. They achieve much better results than what we're doing right now. The problem we're facing right now in Kandahar is because of the insecurity. The German area is much more secure in the northeast, in the Tajik area.

In Kandahar, is it possible at the present time to start to do PRT? With the new motion that was passed in the House of Commons on March 13, after February 2009 we're supposed to end the combat mission of our army, but we're supposed to do PRT. Is it possible? Is it something that could be achieved, to do some aid after February 2009 in the Kandahar region?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Waldman.

Mr. Matt Waldman: Thank you.

I am pleased to hear that there are donors that are seeking to promote development from a local level and build it up from there. I think that is the right approach. I should say I think CIDA is doing a good job in Afghanistan. Of course there are some areas where we would press for some changes, but in fact probably the most valuable role for CIDA will be influencing other donors.

We think that the PRTs, the provincial reconstruction teams, have been misused. The mandate of PRTs is very clear, and that is to create a stable and secure environment in which development can take place. We believe that they should adhere to that mandate as far as possible. We accept now that given that over the last few years PRTs have been engaging in development activities in providing assistance, it may be necessary for them to continue to do so to an extent. But we think the urgent priority is for support for civilian-led development processes, and that is why we are pleased that support has been provided to the national solidarity program in Kandahar. And of course, if possible, support should be provided to building the government at a local level. That is why sub-national governance reforms are also important, so that entities of the state at that level are clear about what they're doing.

Of course civil society organizations have a role too, and it's important to boost their contribution. So to answer your question, yes, I think there certainly are opportunities for new means of promoting development in Kandahar. It will always be difficult, but the ultimate objective should be to try to promote and strengthen civilian-led means of promoting development.

•(1645)

The Chair: You have a little more time, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I can share my time with some of my colleagues if they want to ask questions.

The Chair: Very quickly.

Mr. Bernard Patry: You say to build at local levels, but people living in Afghanistan have been living at a tribal level, not for centuries, but for millions of years, for so many years. We're not going to change them. We cannot bring our type of democracy. You put an election on a local level and they're going to elect the same leader. It's not going to change with an election or no election, in a sense.

But my question is how can we bring more resources to the community? A few months ago I saw a video from Helmand province—the next province, where the Brits are—and it was shocking to see the people with nothing at all. It was the winter-time, and I saw bare feet. How can we be sure that we can help, in a certain sense, to bring in some food at the community level until we have the time to build a society, to bring irrigation, to help them in any field? How can we help them right now?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Matt Waldman: I think you made a very pertinent observation there, that we cannot seek to create the same kinds of societies and governments that we have in western countries. I think it is possible to deliver aid in rural areas, and there are examples of where that has happened.

Going back to one or two of the points I made, I think there needs to be a clear system of sub-national governance, so the state is functioning well at a sub-national level. I think that's crucial.

I think getting resources out to communities themselves has proven to be effective, such as through the national solidarity program and other national programs, and we should attempt to build that and strengthen those kinds of programs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame Deschamps.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon. I attentively read the report on the consolidation of community peace in Afghanistan. Oxfam began to operate in Afghanistan more than 20 years ago. I also see that you recently made a survey on security by consulting 500 persons in 6 provinces. This is probably what gives rise to what you are now proposing in the way of setting up a national strategy. You also refer to the fact that the NGOs currently on the ground have already launched peace-building programs in various places, two of which are located in Afghanistan.

I'd like to know how society participates in this kind of program. We intend to prepare this society to restore its own order, as a stakeholder in the settlement of various conflicts. How can the Canadian government intervene? Earlier, you mentioned transparency, and I would like you to elaborate on that subject. Funding is

also an issue. I think that an increase in financial humanitarian aid could pave the way to programs like this one and be helpful to peace-building.

I have put many questions to you. I will let you answer them one by one.

•(1650)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Deschamps.

Go ahead, Mr. Waldman.

Mr. Matt Waldman: Thank you very much for those questions.

Peace-building reflects the nature of Afghan society. I think it is one of the most communal and tribal societies in the world, and peace-building works at that level. It works with families and communities.

I think it's clear from the experience we have working with peace-building organizations that they have a very significant effect, a very significant impact, on the communities where they work, and I think it's also important to recognize that sometimes the frictions and disputes that exist at a local level feed into the wider conflict and are sometimes exploited by those who are engaged in the conflict—criminal groups and militant groups—to further their own ends, but of course it has its own benefit, which is bringing greater peace to communities.

As you rightly pointed out, we are calling for a national strategy, because although around a dozen or more organizations engaged in peace-building work endorsed our report, they have limited resources and of course affect only a limited number of communities. The people who work in these organizations ask me why this did not happen five years ago, why there was not a comprehensive plan to work at a local level. They understand the nature of Afghan society and how important it is to have peace at that level.

We are calling for a national strategy and we hope and believe that the Canadian government could give strong support to that. Of course there'll need to be some financial support; if CIDA contributed, that would lead the way and encourage other donors to do likewise. I think there is real potential here for a very positive program that would bring very real benefits to communities who are, in some cases, suffering from significant levels of insecurity and violence.

That's what I would say about the peace-building program.

On transparency, some donors are better than others, but what we want to see is comprehensive transparency. Indeed, the Afghanistan Compact calls on donors and commits them to be transparent with all aid information. They are yet to live up to that commitment; we believe a commission tasked with monitoring aid could encourage them to do so and could ensure that such information is collated, analyzed, and assessed, and then there could be indicators of how well donors are doing. If we can't clearly identify the bad practices, we won't be able to put them right.

I think it's in everybody's interest to have a commission of this kind to assess what's going wrong and how we can improve the delivery of aid.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waldman.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Thank you very much.

Mr. Waldman, at the beginning of the summary it says that existing measures to promote peace in Afghanistan are not succeeding. You made a comment about the United States putting \$100 million a day into the military and \$7 million a day into aid. I'll use the example of Haiti, because hopefully we can look forward to a reversal of some of that. We were spending \$100 million a year in Haiti on 500 soldiers and all the military equipment, but it was absolutely essential to bring the security around. Today the Prime Minister has visited the country, and it's such a secure place that he's able to visit Cité Soleil in unarmoured vehicles. My point is that \$100 million a year is now going directly into the aid of the country, and it's having good results.

I look at some of the results from Afghanistan and, in spite of the large military equipment, there are 19,000 community development projects, 530 elected councils. There are many, many of these, with 700,000 children in school, and many millions of girls in school too. It looks like there has been quite a bit done on this, while recognizing that there is always more that can be done.

Looking optimistically toward the future, would you not think that once the area has become more secure, this aid money can then be directed more effectively into moving this direction of government's improvement and democracy's improvement quicker?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Waldman.

Mr. Matt Waldman: I think it's clear that there is a lot of work that needs to be done to improve security. Indeed some of the spending by the international community is to build Afghan security forces, and that of course is correct. We are saying we need to recognize the extent of the destruction of the wars and how far we have to go to tackle poverty and create stability. Still, one in five children dies before the age of five. Their life expectancy is around 43. It has one of the highest levels of maternal mortality in the world. So conditions are still very bad.

If we want to achieve stability and security, we believe that reducing poverty will be an essential element of that strategy. I believe there is increasing recognition of that. I think we need to recognize that insecurity and persistent poverty are linked. Given the circumstances in southern Afghanistan, and the history—the illiteracy, extremism, and other factors, including corruption in the government and disproportionate force by international forces—in conditions of extreme poverty, people may join the militants.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Your organization has been there for twenty years. Would you not say that there have been great strides and improvements made over those twenty years? By all accounts, it looks like there are many successes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Waldman.

Mr. Matt Waldman: I would certainly agree that there have been significant strides forward in a number of areas, but I think it is important to recognize that in many areas of Afghanistan—and we tried to demonstrate this in our report—there are still areas of very severe poverty. In those conditions we may find that individuals are joining the militants, or growing poppies. We're saying that those gaps need to be addressed. There have been improvements, but we can certainly do a lot more with the funds coming into Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waldman.

We'll sum it up with Mr. Dewar, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'll be very quick.

I've had the benefit of reading the report from Oxfam, and I thank you for it. I'm assuming it has been submitted to our researchers. Thank you for your work.

You talk about peace-building having to be at the local level, and that there are ways to do it. The *jurgas* is one way. Where's the UN's role in this, and can the UN play a role in this at all?

Mr. Matt Waldman: I think the UN may have a role in this. I'm not exactly sure what that would be; perhaps they could help facilitate the development of a strategy. We believe it should be led by civil society so that it retains a high degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the population who would be participating. Certainly the UN could promote and encourage and help to facilitate it, and its offices in the provinces and regions could give support to any program that was implemented.

• (1700)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Waldman. I would invite you to submit any other comments that you have.

I'll tell you a little story. I had three workers in my offices, one in Ottawa and two back in my riding. Each one of them called me and asked if I wanted the Oxfam report printed, and I said yes. And somehow all three of them printed it, and I think each copy is about this thick. I have three copies of the report, but no, I only read it once. It is fairly comprehensive. We appreciate that.

Because of the short timelines that we have here, I know I cut you off, and I apologize for that. If you have anything that you would like to add, it will be put on the record. We would appreciate it, and we would welcome you to do so. Thank you very much.

We'll suspend for one minute. We'll move to committee business. We have a number of issues we want to quickly deal with. Mr. Dewar has a motion that he would like brought forward on the Radarsat, and we will then look at filling in a couple more timelines.

We'll suspend for one minute.

• _____ (Pause) _____
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The Chair: We'll call this meeting back to order. We'll move into committee business. We are public.

Madame Deschamps, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I would like to follow-up on the motion tabled by Ms. Barbot last week regarding the Khadr affair. Since the agenda has not been set, after the recommendation, the possibility of calling witnesses, I—

[English]

The Chair: We certainly will welcome those witnesses. We are inviting people to bring witnesses on the Khadr motion forward. Can we deal with that as soon as we're done with Mr. Dewar's motion?

Mr. Dewar, you're concerned about the witnesses.

Madame Deschamps, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I looked at the calendar and I saw some dates that we can reserve for sittings right away.

[English]

The Chair: But we need to ask the parties to bring forward witnesses. We do have a witness list, but we don't want to cut it short. Today, with regard to Burma, we felt that maybe we moved a little too quickly, and we've had to invite back. So we're inviting all parties—the government and the opposition—to submit their witness lists as quickly as possible, and then we will look at inserting the Khadr issue as soon as possible.

We're going to move to Mr. Dewar. Mr. Dewar has brought forward a motion to bring his motion forward.

• (1705)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Exactly. To start things off, Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to move a motion that we bring to the front of our business agenda the motion that I have at the bottom, so that we can discuss it. I guess, to start things off, I need to move a motion to discuss and hopefully pass my motion. I would leave that with you.

The Chair: Mr. Dewar has now moved that we bring his motion forward to discuss it. It is one of the two that was mentioned as being time-sensitive. The government has an extension, but we wanted to do it before the 15th, I think, or whatever the date was there. So are we in favour of discussing Mr. Dewar's motion now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I think the motion is in front of everyone. Because of time constraints, I won't get into a long introduction. I would just like to say that the reason I brought it forward was to have this committee study the responsibilities and the various issues around the government's dealing with the sensitive issue of Radarsat 2. We know there are responsibilities for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and we simply wanted to have a study on that so that we could discuss this at committee and hopefully bring forward some recommendations to the House.

I'll leave it at that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I'd like to propose an amendment to the motion, if I might. I think it's been discussed, but an amendment to that would read as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and given the relation of the Remote Sensing Space Systems Act, that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development immediately undertake a study of the consequences of the proposed sale of the space division of MacDonald, Dettwiler and Associates (MDA) to U.S.-based ATK....

And following that it reads the same as the original motion to the very end.

The Chair: Have you spoken to Mr. Dewar about this amendment?

Mr. Paul Dewar: It was brought to me before, Mr. Chair.

Essentially, for everyone else's concern, the change mentioned by Mr. Goldring, or I guess the presumption that we've come out of this with, is to do more of a study. I guess that's the intention.

I'm fine with that. I simply want to make sure that this committee studies the issue. So I'm in favour, and I'm happy to accept the amendment to my motion.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Further to that, it is also before the industry committee for study.

The Chair: Yes.

Can I have a copy of the amendment? Thank you.

Has the explanation from both members satisfied you in terms of the reason for the amendment?

Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Yes. I agree with the motion, there's no doubt about it. But if we're doing a study, we just cannot do a report for April 16. That's the only problem I have with the motion.

I agree with our doing a study, no problem. We're 100% behind both the amendment and the motion itself. But there's no way to do it with only one day left before April 15. This coming Thursday we're already booked. We cannot have witnesses. For next Tuesday, we have what was previously referred to the subcommittee.

So we just cannot do it for April 16. We cannot do a report on the same day we have the witnesses.

The Chair: I don't think the idea here is to stretch this on into a long study. It is something where there would be a report, but it could be done very quickly in a resolution.

Who else wants to speak?

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you to Mr. Patry for his question. It's an excellent one.

The intention of this motion is simply to have particularly government witnesses and others to explain what the remote sensing act is about and how it relates to this file so that this committee can understand it and then make a recommendation. That's the intention. We would have, essentially in one meeting, the witnesses from the government and anyone else we think is relevant to guide us, and that would be done.

To underline the point that it is time-sensitive, April 22 is actually the deadline for the government to decide whether or not this sale goes through.

• (1710)

Hon. Bob Rae: We're going to be in our break then.

Mr. Paul Dewar: That's why we need to do this before April 16. And I think the calendar is open for this as well.

The Chair: Correct.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I believe the timing for this might be more appropriately set by the steering committee. I'll leave that on the table.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Yes, granted. Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any other debate on the motion? If not, are we ready for the question...?

Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Can we keep the two hours? Mr. Dewar talked about government, but we could have some other witnesses coming from outside government also. We just have one hour. Can we keep next Tuesday at two hours?

The Chair: I think that was what we had planned a little bit. The department usually doesn't show up with other witnesses. So they would come for one, and then the other witnesses would be invited for the other hour.

Mr. Bernard Patry: That would be fine.

The Chair: Are there any other questions?

Mr. Lebel.

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): I don't think we'll have a complete two hours for discussion before leaving for the week break. We will not have it, not at all. We need to keep some time—maybe an hour and a half, maybe an hour and 45 minutes—to discuss this together. We have to do that job before deciding.

The Chair: That's a very good point. The steering committee or whatever will take a look at all of that.

Is there any other debate on this?

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Just for clarification, are we voting on the amendment, or has it been accepted as an amendment and we're voting on the main motion?

The Chair: Do we have a consensus on the amendment?

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's fine. It was a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albrecht.

Madame Deschamps.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: The Bloc would like to introduce a very and brief amendment, please. Without actually reading it out, I can tell you that after "au plus tard le 16 avril 2008 un rapport", we would strike out the words "assorti de recommandations".

[English]

The Chair: So you have another amendment to the motion, and this is putting the date on it?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: This is after the date. I'm talking about Mr. Dewar's motion.

[English]

The Chair: It's on the Radarsat. Yes, you've got it. Can you repeat that again?

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: After "au plus tard le 16 avril 2008 un rapport", we would strike out "assorti de recommandations". We want to strike out "assorti de recommandations". As there is little time left before the deadline, we want a brief report.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, I think that's all right. I think that's wordsmithing.

Are we all in favour of that?

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: On a point of clarity, we did agree that the setting of the timing for this would be by the steering committee?

The Chair: Yes, it will be the 15th, I think, or whatever the date is there.

All right. Thank you for bringing that up. I appreciate that. The French and English will correspond there, so we'll make that correction.

All in favour of Madame Deschamps's amendment?

Monsieur Lebel.

We want to get to the motion before the bells start ringing.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Lebel: I have a question. If I understand correctly, Ms. Deschamps said that after the date of April 16, she would strike out the remainder of the paragraph, and not only the part about—

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: We strike out "assorti de recommandations".

Mr. Denis Lebel: And we keep all the rest. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

We're all in favour of Madame Deschamps's amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

•(1715)

The Chair: Now, is there any debate on Mr. Dewar's motion in its entirety, or can we call the question? I don't want to cut debate short, ever.

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

The Chair: Thank you. We've accomplished that.

Now, is it the will of the committee to fill in that date of April 15? One thing I should report is that the steering committee for the subcommittee on human rights met today, and they will hear from the delegation from the Philippines. That opens on April 15.

I will make the motion that we study the Radarsat for the full two hours on April 15. Are we in favour of that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. That leaves April 17 open. Madame Barbot is not going to be here that day, and we want to get our witness lists in. We're wondering if it would be possible to take the first look at the China report and get that done on that day. It wouldn't be done, but to get to that when Madame Barbot is here for her motion. Are we all right with that? It's just to give our group here the opportunity to get what we need for that.

Madame Deschamps.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I do not see why we could not begin on April 17, because we have already handed in our list of witnesses. Moreover, one of the witnesses can come only on April 17.

[English]

The Chair: We want to give some time for the other parties to put in witnesses as well. We have a very small witness list that had been taken from the.... I think we got some witnesses from the subcommittee, but we've always allowed parties to submit witness lists. This is trying to get that one day and get the China report, which we're looking at in a way, to kickstart it so we can.... It's mainly so our clerks can invite the witnesses for all the other things and do their planning.

Mr. Lebel.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Lebel: I need a point of information, Mr. Chairman. During the last discussion of the Khadr file, it was proposed that we would hear Mr. Khadr's lawyers at the outset. At the time, I emphasized that I wanted to hear the international experts before hearing the lawyers.

How do we stand with regard to this?

[English]

At the last meeting we talked about Mr. Khadr's lawyers. I said I'd prefer to have international experts before Mr. Khadr's lawyers come.

[Translation]

How do we stand?

[English]

The Chair: Yes. It's to hear from more than just Mr. Khadr's lawyers. There are international experts. There are all kinds of....

Madame Deschamps.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: The order of the witnesses is not important. Whether we hear the experts first, or Mr. Khadr's lawyers first, we will take their testimony into account. Someone insisted that we should invite Mr. Khadr's lawyer. However, he is available only on April 17. Think that it is very important for our study to invite Mr. Khadr's lawyer on April 17.

[English]

The Chair: We have no information that they're only available on a certain date. If we invite people, we hope they would make themselves available at any date. That's part of what this committee is about.

There's been no information as to availability of witnesses. We send out witness lists, and it's not based only on the one day that committee members say they can be here. We try to invite people....

Madame Bourgeois.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Chairman, could you confirm this information by Thursday? Perhaps we should show some flexibility. Mr. Khadr's lawyer is extremely important because he was not able to see his client or to be present during the entire trial. We must find out what stopped him from attending the trial.

[English]

The Chair: But my point is that our clerk has not contacted any witnesses, on any of them. All we have heard from is the subcommittee.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: And the information—

[English]

The Chair: Yes, from the subcommittee.

We will invite Khadr's lawyers, and he has lots of them. And we would want to make certain....

Can I ask the committee whether we can go ahead with China. I think that's what we were trying to get done here.

•(1720)

Mr. Bernard Patry: Either one for me is okay.

But I think the motion was really for the lawyer of Mr. Khadr. If the only date he can.... We can decide on this coming Thursday, just to be sure they're going to come.

The Chair: Yes. Our clerk hasn't heard anything about who's available on what days; we haven't contacted them.

Mr. Bernard Patry: That's because we didn't have the motion first. We can just talk with them.

But we agree—either one is okay for us.

The Chair: All right, so we'll talk then. And I'll have our clerk check on those.

The meeting is adjourned.

Thank you.

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