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# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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**Chair**

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson**

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## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, June 3, 2008

• (1720)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)):** We'll call this meeting back to order now. Our intention is to have a 5:30 close.

On May 13 we were dealing with Mr. Dewar's motion.

Continue, Mr. Dewar.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be brief.

Since we met last, there has been a change in portfolio for Foreign Affairs. Mr. Emerson is the minister responsible now. We had an opportunity to question Mr. Emerson in the committee of the whole recently and asked a question on the issue of the government's response. He did say they would be forthcoming.

I guess I would just ask that this committee pass this motion to support the government in carrying on with what has been a report that has been promised as a response. It has been over 450 days. It was more than a year ago that the government said it would respond soon.

I think Canadians want to know where this government stands on the report, a groundbreaking report on corporate social responsibility. Both industry and civil society worked very hard on this. I think they should be given a response, and this committee providing this motion to Parliament will not only support those people who worked on this report but also move the file ahead and support the minister in being able to report to Parliament.

So I would ask that members vote on this right now, that we put the vote to the committee so that we can then carry on with other motions, because I know there are many that this committee wants to deal with.

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

Mr. Obhrai, this is motion one. That's the motion we were discussing at the close of the day.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC):** This is the motion that talks about the advisory group report on the national round tables. The motion calls specifically for the government to "adopt" the recommendations. It's giving the direction to the government to adopt the recommendations.

The government has to respond to what the round tables have recommended and which recommendations it accepts and which it doesn't. The government's response will be forthcoming, as Mr. Dewar requested of Minister Emerson during the committee of the

whole. The minister committed to saying that the government would respond to the recommendations.

It's understandable that a fourth party that has never been in government wouldn't understand how governments operate. It has to go through—

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** We understand how governments operate: slowly.

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

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Well, I'm talking about the fourth party.

You have to look at all the recommendations, what will have impact on other laws, what will have impact on other situations, what will have impact on other government policies, and what are the impacts on the government's direction. Hence, it needs the appropriate time to study and analyze these things.

The problem with this motion is that it's asking for an adoption of the recommendations. It is not asking for the government's response. If it were asking for the government's response, we wouldn't have any problem in responding, because the government has said, yes, it will respond. But this is an NDP answer to a report by stating its position, which is to adopt the recommendations.

This may not be the government's position. It may adopt a lot of the recommendations that come forward, but it may not adopt certain other recommendations.

**The Chair:** Okay—

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** What do you mean "Okay"? Let me talk.

**The Chair:** I'm going to ask you a question. Are you saying here that if this had been to have him appear and give us a response to the round tables—

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** No, no, I'm not saying that.

**The Chair:** But you're saying that this says "adopt" them.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** This one is saying "adopt" them. What has happened is that this round table conference—which was, by the way, called by the government—

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Can I clarify something?

**The Chair:** Only if it's on a point of order.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** It is.

This is not a typical report, if you will. This was a consensus report. It's one of those reports that have been put in front of the government to adopt or not.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** No, it has not been put in front of the government to adopt it. It has been put in front of the government for the government to respond to the recommendations so they have time to change it. While it is true that this was a unanimous recommendation, this was a round table conference called by the government to address this issue. But that does not mean that every recommendation has to be accepted. The government needs to study and see how those recommendations come out of the whole thing and impact other laws.

Therefore, again, it's difficult for us to adopt this motion. It's an NDP position that says adopt these recommendations, period, and then table it in Parliament.

Well, excuse me; first let the government give its response, which it will table in Parliament. Then we can discuss and say whether we agree or disagree. The problem with this one here is that it's the NDP telling us what to do. Telling the government, on the one hand, what to do....

I do have the floor, and when I have the floor let me talk.

**The Chair:** Continue, Mr. Obhrai.

Let's give him the courtesy.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** When you have the floor, I don't talk.

**The Chair:** Mr. Obhrai, as I understand from your points, if this motion would have said a "government response" you might have been more apt to support it.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** I would have been more apt to because the minister stated in the committee, to Paul during his question, that he would.

**The Chair:** Would you move an amendment, then, to the suggestion from the honourable member who put the motion forward? Would you move an amendment that the government present the government's response once it is finalized and approved?

•(1725)

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Yes, because that is exactly what the minister stated, that the government will be responding and that we would like the government to respond to this report. Then the government will respond as quickly as possible within the due timeframe. That amendment is fine.

**The Chair:** So do you want to move your amendment?

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Mr. Dewar, are you ready for an amendment?

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I'm always ready.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** I will put forward a friendly amendment.

**The Chair:** You will have to read it a little more clearly, Deepak.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Well, I have to read it myself first, as he has just brought it to my attention that he is willing to....

**The Chair:** It's in the spirit of cooperation with the NDP.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** It is in the spirit of cooperation. I am very much cooperative here, as usual.

It would read as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2)

—blah, blah, blah—

**An hon. member:** That's on the record, by the way, "blah, blah, blah".

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Oh, oh!

We have to redo this by removing "adopt" in terms of what the government must do.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Here is a very simple amendment for you to propose: that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development report to the House the government's—

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Response.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** —response to the National Roundtables on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Industry in Developing Countries.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Yes, and let's just put "in a reasonable time".

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Can you define that for me, before I get...?

**The Chair:** Okay, I think what we have here is the NDP and the government working together for a friendly amendment, so it may work out. Let's not give up total hope here.

Go ahead, Mr. Dewar.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Put simply, pursuant to the standing order, etc., the government announce its proposals for the implementation of the advisory group's report to the national—

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** No, it's a response. It's a response to the advisory—

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Okay, so the government announces its response—

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** In a reasonable time—right?—

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Right.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** —to the round tables—

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** For me, before the House rises.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Right.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** The advisory group report....

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Yes.

Is that all right? Did you get it?

**The Chair:** That sounds good to me. I'm going to have the clerk read it back here.

Listen carefully, because we may then move to a vote on the amendment.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall):** It would read:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and International Development report to the House that the Government announce its response in a reasonable time to the Advisory Group Report: National Roundtables on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Industry in Developing Countries.

**The Chair:** Are you all right with that, Paul?

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** There's something wrong in it, but I don't know what.

**The Chair:** Okay. Read it one more time for Madame Barbot and all of us.

**The Clerk:** It would say that the government announce its response in a reasonable time to the advisory group....

Or maybe it should say that the committee “recommends” that the government announce its response...?

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** Or “provides its response in a reasonable time”.

• (1730)

**The Chair:** Madame Barbot.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Mr. Chairman, you may recall that I tabled an identical motion calling on the minister to appear once he has given us his answer. This motion has already been passed. Consequently, I see no need to ask the government once again to give us its answer so that we can report it back to the House.

[English]

**The Chair:** Is the motion in order or is it a duplicate motion? It's been deemed in order, so I take it that it's different.

**The Clerk:** Before it was amended it was different. Now it's essentially the same as Madame Barbot's.

**The Chair:** All right. That doesn't mean we can't pass this one as well.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** No, it says the same thing.

[English]

**The Clerk:** The difference, I believe, is that this one is asking that we report it to the House.

**The Chair:** According to the clerk, the difference in this motion is that we have the responsibility of reporting it back to the House, which wasn't part of your motion. I think you can still claim victory if this motion passes. But now you've won, Mr. Dewar's won, and Mr. Obhrai's won, because we will report it back to the House.

Mr. Patry.

**Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** It says the government should provide its response in a reasonable time. It has had since March 29, 2007, to provide a response. It has been 16 months. That doesn't mean anything. It should say before the end of the session, period. If we want to do something we need that line. In a reasonable time...he's got all this time. We're going to look stupid.

**The Chair:** I can tell you this: Minister Emerson that night said that this was coming. I mean, it's going to come fairly soon, I understand.

**Mr. Bernard Patry:** It should come before the end of this session.

**The Chair:** The minister probably hasn't disclosed when he's going to do it, but it will be coming in a timely fashion.

Mr. Dewar.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I think Mr. Patry has a good point. There has been a compromise from my side to not be prescriptive to the motion. It's open-ended to say the government provide their response, and we're simply being reasonable here. As I mentioned

before, it's been more than 450 days. Last year they said it would be in a month or so, and here we are this time, this year.

So I think it's reasonable to say that the government provide its response before the end of the session. If they say they can't provide it, and here's why, fine. But I don't understand. There is a compromise here and we're getting somewhere, so why doesn't the government side want to provide a general timeline? We're not saying next Wednesday; we're saying by the end of the session. It's totally reasonable.

**The Chair:** All right. The problem is this: we have an amendment on the floor. I guess it's kind of iffy. It's Mr. Obhrai's amendment, although you helped him wordsmith it. Now you're wanting to change that amendment. But we're in the midst of debating what the clerk has read back as the motion we're going to amend.

Are we ready for the question on Mr. Obhrai's amended motion?

**An hon. member:** Friendly.

**The Chair:** Yes, friendly amendment.

I'll read this again:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development recommend to the House that the Government provide its response in a reasonable time to the Advisory Group Report: National Roundtables on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Industry in Developing Countries.

We will vote on the amendment.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Just so it is clear to everyone, if we pass the amendment, we then go to the question, and that could be amended. That is just to be clear to everyone—hint, hint.

**The Chair:** Yes, and I'll be clear to everyone too: that would become a debatable motion, and our time is up. So I want to pass this amendment so that at least we can come back to the full motion on the next day.

We will vote on Mr. Obhrai's friendly amendment to the motion.

(Amendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** Now our time is up. It's 5:30. Can we resume debate...?

• (1735)

**Hon. Bob Rae:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Mr. Rae, on a point of order.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** There are two issues. First, if we want to finish considering this, we could extend our time. I do want to get to this NAFTAgate thing. I want to talk about my motion at some point.

**The Chair:** Today?

**Hon. Bob Rae:** It can be whenever you want. Today would be better.

**The Chair:** All right.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Let's finish this motion first.

**The Chair:** We've accepted the amendment. Are we ready to vote for the motion as amended?

Okay, the motion is carried....

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** No, no, Mr. Chair, just to be fair here, I think there was some confusion.

**The Chair:** Then let's back up.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Yes.

I think there was a desire to amend that amended motion, simply to change the timeline, as you all know. And that's perfectly fine.

**The Chair:** All right, except this then becomes a debatable motion.

What's the amendment, then?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** The amendment calls for us to report back before the end of the session.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Barbot has made the suggestion that we include "by the end of the session".

**An hon. member:** Which session?

**The Chair:** That's a very good point. The session may end in December. The session doesn't necessarily end in June.

**An hon. member:** We could say "before the House rises for the summer".

**The Chair:** That may not be reasonable, then, so that goes against the whole spirit of the—

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Then the government should simply respond that this is not possible, Mr. Chairman. I don't understand. This committee always acts as if the government was present and answering our questions. We're not asking for an immediate answer. We pass the motions that we want to pass. The government can always argue that it is not prepared to provide a response at this time, or it can say nothing at all. That is precisely what it has been doing for the past year, as far as this matter is concerned. Don't tell me that this motion is out of order.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Well, the point is that when we've just passed an amendment that says we'll provide a response in a reasonable time, and now we say that a reasonable time, by the way, is within two weeks—

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Mr. Chairman, before we adopted the motion, Mr. Dewar clearly said that we would adopt it and amend it. That's what he said.

[*English*]

**Hon. Bob Rae:** This is crazy. We either vote it up or down. Let's just get on with it. It just doesn't make sense.

**The Chair:** That's the point. I think Mr. Emerson the other night was very clear that he is willing to come, and he wants to. And he will respond. There will be a response. The government has said that they will then go along with that.

I don't know what timeline the new minister has on this, but I can tell you, he was very clear that he was willing to do this, and he is. But now we're saying a reasonable time, for us, is two weeks. I think that's beyond—

I know you're saying it goes back a year.

**Mr. Bernard Patry:** Put in brackets, "two weeks". That's fine.

**The Chair:** Well, no, but that's what you're saying.

I will now entertain the vote on the amendment. If you want to go with Madame Barbot's amendment, we will vote, but we will not be voting on the motion today. Our times are up. So we either have a vote on Madame Barbot's amendment, including "by the end of the session", or we—

Mr. Goldring.

• (1740)

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** By the end of the session? There can be an election, too. There can be any number of things that could interfere with it. Why would we be materially changing the entire motion by putting a time dating into it? I think that's a material change that takes much more time for debate than what we can allow right here in the next minute or two.

**Mr. Bernard Patry:** The session may be over next week.

**The Chair:** Order, please.

This is what I'm going to rule here: we will vote on her amendment. We will not vote on the main motion tonight, because our time is 10 minutes over.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Mr. Chairman, I'll withdraw the amendment.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Are you withdrawing your amendment?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Yes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** All right.

(Amendment withdrawn)

**The Chair:** So now we're voting on the motion as amended by Mr. Obhrai.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you, folks.

The meeting is adjourned.







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