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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (1550)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon, colleagues. This is meeting number 15 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, on Wednesday, April 29, 2009. Today we continue with our review of key elements of Canadian foreign policy. We are hearing from the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Canadian International Development Agency for their latest updates on the situation in Sri Lanka.

As our first witness in the first hour, we have, from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ken Sunquist, assistant deputy minister and chief trade commissioner; Greg Giokas, acting director general of the Southeast Asia and Oceania Bureau; and Leslie E. Norton, director of the Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Response Group.

From the Canadian International Development Agency, we have Syed Sajjadur Rahman, director general, Asia; and Stephen Salewicz, acting director, International Humanitarian Assistance Directorate.

I will also tell you that we have Melanie Alton, assistant director of planning for the India, Nepal, Sri Lanka division.

On your agenda it doesn't specifically make note of the Sri Lanka issue, but that is certainly why we have called the departments to come to our committee today.

Our intention is that if we have time we will go to committee business. I say that jokingly; we will have time and we will go to committee business at roughly 5:15 p.m. or 5:20 p.m.

Welcome to both departments. Thank you for amalgamating. I think we can all stretch this thing out a little longer rather than cutting off one department at 4:30 p.m. We appreciate you doing that. We also look forward to your comments on it. We apologize for being late, as we had votes in the House of Commons.

I will welcome our first to appear on the agenda, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

[Translation]

Mr. Ken Sunquist (Assistant Deputy Minister (Asia and Africa) and Chief Trade Commissioner, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is truly a pleasure to be here today with old friends and colleagues.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, I'm here to provide you with an update on the current situation in Sri Lanka and the conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. I'll use the acronym LTTE throughout my presentation.

Canada is deeply concerned about the continuing combat operations in the northeast corner of the country and by the dire humanitarian situation, not only for those who are displaced by the conflict but also for those who remain trapped in the conflict zone. Canada is concerned as well about reported increases in civilian casualties.

I appreciate this opportunity because, as you know, although I was supposed to be here today, I was to speak about Africa. In fact, with a small smile on my face, I can say to Mr. Dewar that I was looking at the press comment about Congo calling and whether anyone was listening, and I was going to start my speech with "I'm here on the phone and we're ready to listen." We'll come back to that.

As the chairman mentioned who the team is, let me just say that this is an integrated presentation from the two groups and that we've probably brought more officials than is usual here, for the simple reason that we want to be prepared to answer as many questions as you might have. That's why we have a large group. At the conclusion of my remarks, my colleague will provide insights on humanitarian and development assistance.

Where does one start in a 26-year war? Let me just start in the last month. On April 11, Minister Cannon issued a statement expressing concern about the safety of civilians trapped in the conflict zone. It called on both parties to implement a pause to ensure full, safe, and unhindered access for humanitarian workers to those in need. The Government of Sri Lanka unilaterally put in place such a pause on April 13 and 14. However, the LTTE prevented many civilians from leaving the combat zone.

On April 19, Minister Cannon issued a statement calling on both parties to work toward a rapid political resolution and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. On the same day, he spoke with the UN Secretary-General and raised our humanitarian concerns, which included access to food, water, sanitation, and medical support. He also conveyed Canada's support in responding to the humanitarian crisis. We'll talk about that a little later.

The UN Security Council has voiced deep concerns about Sri Lanka, and on April 22 the UN demanded that the LTTE lay down its arms.

Canada is very concerned about reports of LTTE suicide bombings. Canada calls on the LTTE to allow civilians to leave the territory still under its control and to allow the safe and free movement of civilians under its control. The Government of Canada continues to demand that the LTTE lay down its arms. As you know, Canada listed the LTTE as a terrorist organization under the Criminal Code in 2006.

Since the Sri Lankan military reportedly broke through the LTTE defensive earthworks, many civilians have escaped the conflict area. However, credible reports indicate that ongoing fighting has killed or wounded thousands of civilians, who have only minimal access to medical care. The U.S. State Department reports continued firing from both sides into the conflict zone.

Minister Cannon spoke with the UN Secretary-General, the U.K. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and India's Minister of External Affairs to register our grave concerns about the April 20 resumption by the Sri Lankan military of a ground offensive in the conflict zone and to seek support in ensuring the adoption of a humanitarian pause.

On April 22, Mr. Cannon again spoke with Sri Lanka's Minister of Foreign Affairs to call for a halt to the current offensive in order to allow safe and voluntary movement of civilians from the combat zone and to ensure full, safe, and unhindered access for humanitarian workers to those in need. Minister Cannon expressed our concerns about civilian casualties and stressed the need for UN surveillance of the evacuation of civilians and of the camps for internally displaced persons, the IDPs. Canada has also offered Canadian humanitarian assistance for the displaced persons once their needs have been assessed.

Canada's greatest concern is the safety of civilians still trapped in the conflict zone. However, it remains very difficult to determine how many civilians remain there. The UN estimates some 50,000 to 100,000 are still captive in the conflict zone. We have been calling on both parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law to ensure the safety of civilians, which includes clearly distinguishing civilians from combatants and ensuring that civilians are not attacked.

● (1555)

Canada holds the Government of Sri Lanka to a higher standard for its actions and obligations than it would the terrorist organization it is fighting.

Our high commissioner in Colombo, Angela Bogdan, is continuing Canada's engagement with the Government of Sri Lanka at the highest levels and on the need for assistance to IDPs. Canada and our high commissioner are taking a leadership role. She is chairing meetings of like-minded ambassadors and the United Nations to coordinate our humanitarian efforts and is using her networks to provide information and policy advice. Canada leads the bilateral donor group that includes all countries with aid programs in Sri Lanka. Indeed, the U.K. and French foreign ministers are in Sri Lanka right now, and our high commissioner has just finished a meeting with both of them. The U.K. foreign minister will be speaking to Minister Cannon as quickly as possible, possibly this evening.

Canada supports the co-chairs of the Tokyo Donors Conference on reconstruction and development of Sri Lanka. The co-chairs currently include Norway, Japan, the United States, and the European Union, although the role of Norway is somewhat up in the air. The co-chairs issued a statement on April 26 calling for the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to end hostilities and for UN staff to be allowed into the conflict zone to facilitate relief operations and the evacuation of civilians. Canada calls for the government to show leadership in building the confidence of the people of Sri Lanka, which is necessary to support a lasting peace.

On April 25, Minister Cannon joined his G-8 colleagues in issuing a statement to express our deep concern about the mass civilian casualties and deteriorating humanitarian situation in northern Sri Lanka. The plight of the civilians still trapped by the fighting and who remain at extreme risk from the ongoing hostilities is our primary concern. The ministers strongly condemned the use of civilians as human shields by the LTTE, the killing of civilians, and terrorism in all of its manifestations, and they called on all parties to take all necessary action to avoid further civilian casualties. They support the decision by the UN Secretary-General to dispatch a UN humanitarian assessment team to the no-fire zone. It is time for the conflict to end now. The G-8 foreign ministers support all relevant international efforts to bring about such an end and will keep monitoring closely the situation in Sri Lanka.

The conflict has already caused much suffering over the last 26 years. We want to see it end immediately. Canada has reiterated that this conflict cannot be resolved militarily and continues to call for a new, meaningful, and durable political solution that will address the legitimate aspirations of all the people of Sri Lanka. We will continue to engage with like-minded countries at the highest levels in working for urgent progress to ensure the safety and security of all the people of Sri Lanka.

Canada has joined with the co-chairs, the G-8, the Commonwealth, the EU, and the UN in seeking a lasting peace and reconstruction of the country.

The situation in Sri Lanka remains fluid, and events on the ground are unfolding at a rapid, almost chaotic pace. Humanitarian aid workers are citing increasing problems among the internally displaced persons of overcrowding, malnourishment, lack of transport to move the sick to hospitals, and a shortage of medical personnel.

The UN emergency relief coordinator, John Holmes, recently travelled to Sri Lanka on April 26 and 27 to meet with the Government of Sri Lanka representatives, the UN country team, civil society, and the donor community. He also sought to negotiate access for a UN humanitarian assessment team to travel to Sri Lanka's north as well as to the conflict zone. Despite previous assurances by the President of Sri Lanka to the Secretary-General's *chef de cabinet* that access to the conflict zone would be given, Mr. Holmes has been unable to secure such agreement. According to the UN, the government is citing safety and security concerns for the assessment team as a reason to disallow entry into the conflict zone. The UN has also indicated that the Government of Sri Lanka made it clear that the UN must stop making such requests given that they will not be accepted.

There's been an increase of some 40,000 displaced persons over the past few days, bringing the total to more than 160,000 people in camps in northern Sri Lanka, according to the United Nations. Some 10,000 children now suffer from malnutrition and more than 1,500 infants need urgent medical attention.

• (1600)

Access to affected populations by humanitarian organizations remains a key challenge. Despite calls for humanitarian assistance, the Government of Sri Lanka is still not issuing visa requests for replacements of international humanitarian staff.

Mr. Chairman, Canada is actively engaged in responding to the affected populations through our trusted humanitarian partners, such as the Red Cross, the UN agencies, and Canadian NGOs. My colleagues from CIDA will provide more details.

Further, we are in the final stages of our 85-million-dollar tsunami efforts, mostly in the northeast. Our efforts are to, and I put quotes around this, "build back better", so build it back to where it was, but even better.

The future of this beautiful country cannot be foreseen when the present situation is such a shambles, yet long-term efforts towards devolution of power to local areas will be necessary. Our efforts will be to help Sri Lankans reclaim their lives and their land with sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman, we'd be happy to answer any of the committee's questions on the situation in Sri Lanka, but I would first like to turn to my colleague from CIDA for his statement.

Thank you.

• (1605)

The Chair: Welcome, Mr. Rahman, and we look forward to your statement as well.

Dr. Syed Rahman (Director General, Asia, Canadian International Development Agency): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to provide to you today information about Canada's humanitarian and development assistance programs in Sri Lanka. Let me begin with humanitarian assistance provided by CIDA in addressing the plight of the people most affected by the recent conflict.

Humanitarian support has been significant this year. In February 2009, Minister Oda announced a total of \$4.5 million for Canadian humanitarian assistance for conflict-affected people in Sri Lanka. This included \$1.75 million for the International Committee of the Red Cross, \$750,000 to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and \$500,000 each to Oxfam Canada, World Vision, CARE, and Médecins Sans Frontières. An additional \$350,000 of CIDA-funded projects with Médecins Sans Frontières is also operational in the north. Combined, these funds are contributing to the efforts of trusted humanitarian partners to assist up to 250,000 people displaced by the conflict with much needed medical care, emergency shelter, protection, clean water, and sanitation services.

Between October 2008 and January 2009, Canadian funding for the World Food Programme operations has, among other things, helped send 11 convoys into the Vanni region and distribute 10,619 metric tonnes of food assistance via land and sea. In order to monitor the progress of our funded humanitarian partners and to get first-hand understanding of the situation, a CIDA team is now on the ground in Vavuniya, in the north.

Let me now turn to CIDA's longer-term bilateral assistance to Sri Lanka. Canada and Sri Lanka have a long-standing development relationship since the 1950s and since the launch of the Colombo Plan, with a total to date of over \$800 million in Canadian assistance. Over the past 15 years, CIDA's bilateral assistance has helped to address the root causes of the conflict and to mitigate the impact on affected communities. Annual funding levels have been \$5 million to \$6 million. Recently, the focus of the program has been to support economic well-being. The majority of CIDA's projects support productive activities to improve the livelihoods of Sri Lankan youth, women, and vulnerable groups. Other projects aim at reintegrating conflict-affected groups into economic life. Canada has also been active in the area of governance, concentrating on human rights, specifically child rights and language rights.

CIDA's explicit approach is to work through Canadian NGOs and civil society organizations and to maintain a geographic and ethnic balance by supporting projects in the Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim areas of the country. In addition to the bilateral program, CIDA has been providing around \$3 million annually to Canadian organizations working in Sri Lanka. Their programming with local Sri Lankan partners focuses largely on technical training and economic growth for poverty reduction. Finally, during the past five years, CIDA provided additional assistance of \$118.7 million in response to the December 2004 tsunami to fund relief and reconstruction activities.

Mr. Chairman, we'd be happy to answer the committee's questions on Sri Lanka.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to our first round of questioning.

Mr. Kania.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you.

I'm not a member of this committee, so I'm not as well versed on this issue as some of you, perhaps, but really I've come here today to report and to ask questions in terms of what happened yesterday, because yesterday, under the leadership of Ms. Minna, Ms. Minna, Rob Oliphant, and I had a meeting with the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka.

We discussed with him the potential.... I gave an idea to him that he actually said he liked and would speak to his government about. I want to share that with you and see what we can do to try to further it and actually accomplish the number one goal at this stage, which is to save lives. There are other points, obviously, including reconstruction and a long-lasting peace. We all agree with that and we all know that has to be done, but right now we're just talking about saving lives. I realize that some of you may not think this is realistic, but I think we should try. The idea is as follows.

There's a ceasefire on both sides. The government says the Tamil Tigers are keeping the civilians from leaving. I said to the commissioner, fine, let's assume you're right, so let's do something about it. Send in international persons. It doesn't matter what that's under, but I think Canada should take a leadership role. There's no reason why we can't go back to the Lester Pearson days and try to go in, deal with the Tamil Tigers, liberate as many people as possible from that area, and essentially have them come out.

We will then know, through the involvement of the international persons who are on the ground, whether or not the Tamil Tigers are actually holding the people. If they're not, people can come out. If they are, then we will simply get as many people out as we can. But either way, we'll find out what's going on.

As the people come out, they will come out in the form of a funnel so that the government can search for weapons, take care of the people, give them food and shelter, and make sure they're all right in the short term. Assuming this takes place, either we'll see that the people are being held against their will, or they'll be liberated and out of the area, and the combatants would be left. The people who choose not to leave, obviously, would mainly be combatants. At least, that's the assumption.

He said he liked the idea. He said he would speak to his government. Assume for the moment that it's possible. There's no harm in trying when we're talking about lives.

What I would like to know is what Canada can do and what you'd recommend, whether it's the foreign affairs minister or somebody else taking the initiative of dealing with the United Nations, taking an emergency trip there, and formulating an international plan for how long it would take to do that now, so that if they actually say yes two days from now, we would have something in place, as a leader, to fulfill it.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kania.

Mr. Sunquist, would you like to respond?

Mr. Ken Sunquist: Sure, I'll take the first crack at it. Let me preface this by saying that this will be a quick reaction, and I think it obviously requires a lot more discussion with you and others.

First, I think we're all in agreement that the biggest issue is how to save lives. There are two parts to that. There are the lives of those who are already displaced and in the camps, and there are the lives of those in the conflict zone. Any effort that Canada can do, or that even internationally we can do, to bring a pause to the fighting and to get as many civilians out of the area is to be applauded, and we need to do it.

We have our high commissioner and we have the CIDA team on the ground right now. They've been looking at it. It's an assessment mission, in a sense. They're taking a look. As for how long it would take to put in place, I would look to my colleagues to see if anybody would have a better idea than I of how to put something on the ground there.

But clearly the issue is whether the Government of Sri Lanka would accept such a mission. As I mentioned, Minister Cannon has spoken to their foreign minister, three days ago now, I guess. These are issues that can be brought up by our minister and others. The first step is how to get the pause that both sides will accept. The second issue is how to get international groups in there. Up to now, the Government of Sri Lanka has refused on the UN assessment teams going in. That would probably have to be the starting point.

But I take your point on board. I would just ask if anybody else here at the table has any comments they would wish to make. If not, we'd follow up with you.

Mr. Andrew Kania: So I assume you agree that we could certainly contact the government through our government and see if they would accept a tentative agreement. If our government actually instructed you to formulate a plan, if they asked you to start it tonight, how long would it reasonably take to get something done?

•(1615)

Mr. Ken Sunquist: There are several different assessment things.

We have people on the ground right now. In fact, this evening, Colombo time, our high commissioner is meeting with the foreign minister and others. So it's not a case of contacting them; we're in daily contact. The issue is getting their approval that allows us on the ground in the conflict zone. That is the determining factor, because after that, as I said, we do have some people who are there now.

Leslie, anybody, do you want to talk about a kind of assessment to move forward?

I would get back to you on that one. You want a really good answer. I need to give that to you.

Mr. Andrew Kania: So the sooner, the better, obviously.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: Oh, yes.

The Chair: We have about 30 seconds. Do you want to just make a statement? We have to leave time in that 30 seconds for them to answer as well.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): I'll try to be as quick as I can.

Just very briefly, Canada has started discussions with Sri Lanka with regard to where we go from here, the political solution of tomorrow, rather than waiting, because the war may end. But the war is only just starting, in a sense, in the sense that there could be ongoing violence. I think the sooner the government takes a stand on where it's going in terms of its evolution, or minority rights, all of that, with its people, and choosing a good cause, it would be great. Is Canada discussing this to see if the Government of Sri Lanka is moving on as fast as possible?

The Chair: In 30 seconds or less.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: The answer is yes. We're looking at the immediate humanitarian issues that have already been raised, but you cannot solve this by short-term steps. The short term is only to make sure that people survive. The long term is what kind of life they're going to live.

At all levels, we have been working with the Government of Sri Lanka. We have been working with moderate Tamils here and elsewhere on exactly that same kind of issue, as to how do you move forward. Given that we know there will never be reconciliation between the two warring groups right now, what kinds of groups can you move forward to? As I put in my comments to start off, it's a devolution of authority of power that has to come.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dorion, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Sunquist, Canada seems to be calling for a new, meaningful and sustainable political solution that will accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the entire population of Sri Lanka.

Can you elaborate, and perhaps even suggest what such a solution might be? Is part of that solution to recognize the right to self-determination for both of Sri Lanka's groups, that is, recognizing their right to decide their own future, regardless of what that decision may be?

Mr. Ken Sunquist: Thank you for the question. But perhaps there is another side to that issue.

[*English*]

You used the word "self-determination"; we believe the situation has gone beyond an internal situation. The nations of the world, the diaspora around the world...many people have an interest in what the future of this country is going to look like. Having said that, we believe there will have to be moves toward a decentralized form of government.

I know that some members of this committee have previously suggested alternatives around federalism, how you engage different peoples. I hope this committee, through your work over the next while in looking at the situation, could look at the political question here as to how peoples can live together in the future.

Whether ethnic or religious, there are a number of different dividing factors in the current country. There are so many issues here. It's birth rates in one part of the country compared to others and people feeling they're going to be overwhelmed. There are issues of rural versus urban. There are issues of prosperity in some regions

and not in others. All of these are going to have to come together in terms of a lasting solution or any one of them could unravel it.

Perhaps on the political solution side it's a question of how we move people from 26 years of warfare to trying to work together for the betterment of their country. That's why I said moderate groups on both sides probably have the key to the future.

I can't say which form of government that should take. I was ambassador in Indonesia when East Timor, Timor-Leste, happened. You could see a country emerging but deciding that they were going to take a different path than anybody else in the region. It may well be that Sri Lanka will choose a path that looks different from the one we would necessarily choose or that others in the region would hope to impose upon them.

You raise a fundamental question, which has to be answered by the Sri Lankans before they can move forward.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Thank you. I gather from your paper that Sri Lanka's government does not seem to be very receptive to our advice. Are sanctions possible, particularly at Commonwealth level?

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Sunquist: I don't think we're at the step of sanctions as yet within the UN or within the Commonwealth, or with anybody. We see a country that is close to ruins, and it is going to need assistance at the other end to get them to the state, as you said in your first question....

While we always look at where you may eventually end up in terms of a public policy issue and a government policy issue, I think it is too soon to say that this is the appropriate action that will get you somewhere.

On the other hand, I have participated in phone calls. The minister has discussed this with his G-8 foreign ministry contacts, and I can tell you they are looking at the whole slate of issues you can do in Sri Lanka, or around the world. While we're not on the UN Security Council, there are discussions ongoing there as well as to what kind of uniform international action will take place. That's why the foreign minister is there. That's why people are travelling there. That's why we are engaging with them on a daily basis, to change behaviour and to look after the civilians.

As you know, we have sanctions in place in several countries of the world because of their political or human rights records, or other records. We've had them in different places at different times.

In this case we want to make sure that before we do anything—I'm not talking about sanctions, I'm talking about before we do things—it's in the best interests of the people who are suffering the most.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Mr. Chair, I have another question for Mr. Rahman, from CIDA.

The Red Cross has asked Canada to significantly increase its aid to Sri Lanka, and, more specifically, to begin by doubling its contribution in the short term.

Will the Canadian government be responding to that request, perhaps through the minister?

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Salewicz (Acting Director, International Humanitarian Assistance Directorate, Canadian International Development Agency): Thank you for your question.

I'm not aware of this specific request. What I can say is that the Canadian response to date, \$1.75 million, is quite significant against the 30 million Swiss francs requested by the International Committee of the Red Cross. My information currently is that the 30 million Swiss francs that they have appealed to the international community for has been close to fully received by them. There have been 100% pledges, just about.

My understanding is there is no funding debt from the ICRC side, so to the extent that you have information about the specific request, I'd be interested. From our understanding, the International Committee of the Red Cross has adequate resources.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dorion.

Mr. Obhrai.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming to give us the government's perspective on the engagement of the Government of Canada on this file.

In these hearings we have heard on many occasions, both from the opposition as well as from the witnesses, the need for Canada to be engaging politically at a very high level. I would like to inform the committee that the Minister of Foreign Affairs will be going to Sri Lanka this weekend to continue that high-level engagement.

A voice: Good.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: With that high-level engagement continuing from here, Canada is heavily involved in this and has outlined a two-point strategy...and the cooperation with others that we are doing. I also want to thank you for meeting and trying to see how quickly we can move forward to address this very strong thing.

Although the fact that another foreign minister was not allowed...I think Canada has enough clout, and the foreign affairs minister will be there this weekend.

I'll now hand it over to my friend here to continue the questions. Thank you.

•(1625)

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Good. Thank you.

Looking at this, we recognize that there are at least two related issues. One is the one my friend just announced, the immediate action as far as what's going on, on the ground. The second is the immediate humanitarian problem in terms of assistance. One of the

calls, understandably and naturally, is to increase our assistance. I would like the CIDA representatives to give us a bit of an update on that, and indeed where we are.

I'm taking a look at some numbers that were provided to me by the department, and under tsunami funding, which of course has nothing to do with this, in 2006-07, the funding was \$13.4 million; the next year it was \$31.7 million; the next year it was \$31.3 million. Those numbers are very substantial, but they obviously skew the humanitarian side.

A country program I have for the same years: \$6.8 million, \$5.9 million, \$4.7 million—that's going down, as it were. Multilateral countries specific: \$5.8 million, \$2.3 million, and then up to \$6.9 million. The totals for those years, by the way, including the \$30 million in 2007-08 and 2008-09, were \$42.3 million and \$45 million.

Money can't solve everything, and we have to make sure that whatever it is we're doing, the resources are achieving what we want them to be achieving. With that table set for you, if you could, I think we would really appreciate understanding (a) how well we know, or whether we know, that the funding has had the effect we were aiming for, and (b) if there were an increase in funding, what level of confidence would we have, or what is in place that will give us a level of confidence, that it could be correctly and astutely used?

Dr. Syed Rahman: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

With respect to funding, in terms of tracking of results, we track results on a normal basis for bilateral CIDA activities, the humanitarian assistance as a result of the tsunami, and we are glad to report and we can give you facts and figures. We are reasonably certain that the tsunami funding has achieved its objectives, particularly in terms of providing funding for reconstruction activities such as housing. So we have been successful. I do not offhand know the exact number of houses that we've built, but the fact is that we have been successful.

In terms of potential possibility of increases, we have to undertake a significant assessment of the facts on the ground before saying it is possible to increase the budget or not increase the budget. The assessment would need to consider scenarios such as absorption capacity of the country on the ground. We would also have to take a look at the environment for possibly providing more aid on the ground. So unless those assessments are made, it is difficult to say whether we can increase or not increase it.

•(1630)

Hon. Jim Abbott: Thank you.

There's so much goodwill on the part of all of the people of Canada, as represented in this multi-party standing committee, that I think it's very important to do everything we can.

I think it's really important to repeat what you said, if I may, to underscore that you have confidence that the funds that have gone up to this point are being wisely used and are accounted for. But in order to simply increase the amount of funding at this point, you would need to have something in place before it would be logical to undertake that.

Dr. Syed Rahman: We would have to undertake significant assessment to do that.

In terms of results, for example, I want to give you a glimmer of one of the bilateral projects we're undertaking in Sri Lanka at this time. It's called a program for rehabilitation through education and training. It's a technical vocational training program. It trains 2,000 unemployed or underemployed Sri Lankans every year, and it works with 50 local partner organizations to strengthen their management and deliver vocational programs. This is simply a glimpse of the types of results we've achieved.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

You still have a couple more minutes, and because we have another minute on that question, I want to ask you—and this is more for our report—does the department know how many of the Sri Lankan diaspora we have here in Canada?

Mr. Ken Sunquist: We use a figure of 250,000, although our colleagues at Canadian immigration use a slightly lower figure. The reason is because immigrants, as opposed to second and third generation...it's a little bit of how you count people. We take the larger figure because we believe the people of Sri Lankan descent would be in the range of 250,000. I believe CIC is using a figure of 160,000 or something like that.

The Chair: And that would be predominantly around 95% Tamil or...? The number would be very high, I would imagine, but do we have any figures?

Mr. Greg Giokas (Acting Director General, South, Southeast Asia and Oceania Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Again, it's hard to know exactly, but it's predominantly Tamil, and we're often talking about 90%.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dewar, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our guests. I look forward to the return call next week or whenever. I appreciate that.

I'm actually delighted to hear that the foreign affairs minister, Minister Cannon, will be going, which is something I've certainly advocated. We know that the foreign affairs minister of France and Britain's Mr. Miliband was there. I was going to ask whether or not we had plans to do that, and that question has been answered through the parliamentary secretary.

The question then is about what message we're sending. One of the concerns that's come from Mr. Miliband and his colleague, as well as the UN, is that when they try to get the Sri Lankan government to cooperate on the ground, their words are falling on deaf ears. We are then in that space where we're really turning up the heat and turning up the volume. We have a government that seems to be turning away from international pressure. That's why I think it was really important that we have our foreign affairs minister show up. We do have the largest diaspora in the world, so we do have a special relationship and therefore a special responsibility to do something here. I'm hopeful that Minister Cannon will be able to do what the others have been attempting to do, and that is to get a ceasefire that allows for a humanitarian corridor to be opened.

Not only is it important to have access for the humanitarian aid.... Obviously, if we commit this aid but we can't get it through, as we heard from the Red Cross, it is a moot point. I think that's the critical piece, getting the access. I don't think there is any disagreement about opening up a humanitarian corridor.

The other piece is a political piece, so maybe to you, Mr. Sunquist—and I'm not sure if you can answer this, but you'll determine that. That is about the ability to tell the Sri Lankan government that if they don't stop what they're doing now and allow media and UN observers in, then they're going to be vulnerable to charges of war crimes. I say that with measure, because right now you have a government that is not allowing the humanitarian corridor to be opened and they're not allowing media in. My point would be, what they are hiding? I'm wondering if the Canadian government has been working with our partners to say that if they're going to be responsible members in the world community, then they have to open up to let the international community in to see what's going on. Otherwise, they're vulnerable here for charges under the Geneva Convention.

• (1635)

Mr. Ken Sunquist: Thank you.

There were seven questions in one there. The first part is that I've expressed Minister Cannon's priorities, which are, number one, a humanitarian pause, which is the same as you have said. You can work on the displaced persons—you can do that—but where people are at risk right now is in what you call the corridor, or the conflict zone, whatever you want to call it. So the first priority is a humanitarian pause, the second is to look after the people who are in that area, and the third one is the IDPs. Then we move to...as Mr. Dorion commented, where do we go from there? What does the future look like? Those are the issues.

In a number of different forums—whether it's at the UN, or, for instance, next week I'm going to be at the Asian Development Bank meetings—we'll be talking about Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and a few others in terms of economic situations. That's not the focus of the meeting, but that's part of the discussion. So there are a number of international forums on how to respond to Sri Lanka and how to make sure they understand the seriousness of what's going on. Coming through that, that's one side of the thing.

The second one is kind of the war crimes, genocide issues. Under international law, there is a very clear and specific definition of what that constitutes. At this time, we don't have sufficient information to determine whether the current conflict meets that definition. However, based on reports from people fleeing the situation, both sides seem to have contravened parts of the government's no-fire zone. The Government of Sri Lanka has not respected its own no-fire zone, and worse, it continues shelling into the zone. They've been asked to stop, but even after this no-fire zone, there was shelling. On the other hand, the LTTE has held civilians captive as human shields, which is prohibited. They have also had suicide bombings. You can't just say, "Well, it's war." It's a situation that both sides have much to answer for, going into the future.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'm glad to hear you say that, because the reports are disturbing. I think some of the testimony that will be taken from people who are victims will determine the next steps. I just hope one of the things our government does—and you don't have to respond to this, it's political—is to say to the government that if it is continuing to do this and the world community is watching, it is going to be susceptible to charges of war crimes.

We know what the other side is doing, but they're not the government. There's a different relationship there with civilians, obviously, and they can be charged as well. But when you're talking about a government you have a relationship with, it's a different equation.

I just want to ask this of CIDA very quickly. We have people on the ground to monitor. I was just curious as to how many people we have on the ground presently. Is that number going to increase?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: We have two people on the ground right now. They're both in Vavuniya, in the north. They're participating in the coordination meetings that are going on right now with the humanitarian actors and providing us with daily updates on the situation. We don't anticipate any increase in that number at this point. Our sense is that they're covering off the information rather well and that they're providing us with an adequate assessment of what the situation is and where the needs are going.

• (1640)

Mr. Ken Sunquist: Mr. Dewar, I might add just a quick comment as well. There are the people from CIDA, from the humanitarian group, who are there. We also have 12 Canada-based staff, and I can assure you there is nothing else they're doing these days but looking at the issue here. That includes the CIDA people who are there on a normal basis; it includes our political officers; it includes everyone. In fact, we have people spread across much of the country, and as the assistant deputy minister responsible, I fear for their safety, because I've got people out there with cellphones and satellite phones trying to report on the situation right now.

The Chair: Mr. Rahman.

Dr. Syed Rahman: We have two permanent CIDA officers stationed in Colombo.

The Chair: One of the questions I would like to ask the department is this. We get all kinds of ideas from a committee like this as to how Canada can respond, how the United Nations can respond, and how different players can respond. Are you monitoring closely what other Commonwealth countries' responses are? What are our numbers compared to Commonwealth countries? Certainly, Great Britain and many of the other countries have a vested interest in this as well.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: The short answer is yes, but it's not just the Commonwealth. As I mentioned in my remarks, we have regular meetings—and I don't mean once a month, I mean once every one or two days now—with our G-8 partners and with the co-chairs, a regular daily kind of update. We're watching resources for humanitarian aid; we're looking at political pressures. I mentioned that the U.K. foreign minister, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, will be talking to Mr. Cannon hopefully tonight or tomorrow morning, depending—Mr. Miliband is on his way back from Sri Lanka. So they're going to talk about what he saw, what they saw—

the French foreign minister as well—so our minister will know as he's going in what kinds of things are happening as well.

This is an age when it's continuous. My colleague, Leslie, is looking at the humanitarian kinds of things we can do there—we can only do these things in partnership with others. There's nothing we can do that just goes by Canada's side, but it is very much an international effort.

The Chair: Has Sri Lanka itself, the Sinhalese government there, made the request for assistance from the international community?

So there has been no request by the government for any type of assistance?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Yes, they've made repeated requests for assistance. They haven't indicated the type of assistance, necessarily, they're looking for. They've given a blanket statement about humanitarian requirements.

I might add, in terms of responses and where we rank as a nation in responding to the humanitarian crisis, that we rank number six in terms of bilateral donors right now. We have been, I think, doing our share on this.

The Chair: Has that just been during the last crisis?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Just since January.

The Chair: Since January. All right.

Mr. Dewar made mention of the ramifications in regard to war crimes. Are there any consequences for them that could result from the IMF, the International Monetary Fund, so they could understand, or their supporters could, the consequences of not listening to the counsel of the international community?

Have they asked for any assistance? When I asked about international assistance, I guess I was thinking about the UN, but have they come to the IMF and asked for any assistance?

Dr. Syed Rahman: Not that we know of.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: As I mentioned, I'm going to be at the Asian Development Bank meetings. We've been talking to our colleagues at the World Bank and other places, because all of us are looking at this in terms of what kind of development would be needed over the long term and short term, that is, reconstruction versus humanitarian aid. So we're all looking at that.

Clearly, funds and development will not flow if the situation on the ground precludes that. I'm not sure how you can get more blunt than that.

• (1645)

The Chair: Mr. Rahman.

Dr. Syed Rahman: I understand they're in discussions with the IMF for a loan, but it's not related to the conflict.

The Chair: It's not specific to this, okay.

Dr. Syed Rahman: But it's related to the economic crisis they're in, and I think they're asking for \$1.9 billion. But again, it is unrelated to the conflict; it's more related to the global economic crisis.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is more directed to the foreign affairs department than to CIDA, but thank you very much for the information you've provided.

The saddest thing I find about this whole thing is that we have two whole generations of children who have grown up knowing nothing but conflict. I represent a riding, Newmarket—Aurora, with a growing number of people from both the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities, who are moving into our riding. So I'm concerned, because I am hearing from both sides.

We had representatives from both the Tamil and the Sinhalese communities here, and I received very subjective answers to this question from both sides. So I'm hoping that perhaps you can provide me with something a little bit more objective. We know that a number of years ago, Norway was involved in brokering an agreement that lasted six years. And it is rather ironic now that Norway is the country that is on the outs with Sri Lanka.

I'm wondering if you could give us your opinion of the key elements in that agreement that gave it such "relative"—and I say "relative" in quotation marks—longevity in the course of this action. Is there any possibility that Canada can now be part of a mediation process that might implement some of those elements that were so positive, obviously, for both sides? Is there anything we can do to be the broker now?

Mr. Ken Sunquist: I would hope my colleagues could chip in here, because you're asking for a personal reflection of what we can do.

I had a very good colleague, who was the Norwegian ambassador from Sri Lanka, and he did take me through this process. But it was at a different time, in the sense that there was a stalemate in the fighting—neither side had the upper hand and neither side was under threat of imminent demise—so it was possible to get them talking in third countries. They weren't going to talk in Colombo or in Sri Lanka, and they had a lot of that early discussion in Norway. Norway and the Norwegian foreign service officers who brokered that are to be commended. So for a number of years, Norway kind of focused their aid, development, and political efforts on it and kept both sides talking.

The longevity of the accord was due to there being a stalemate. There were suicide bombings, and there was military, but no one had the upper hand. That all fell apart, of course, when the Sri Lankan military found that the Tigers were now at risk and they were able to smash them fairly quickly.

That's the historical side.

The way forward is clearly around the question of how you get representatives—and that's a good example. I know there are many people around this table who in the last few weeks have met with different groups from Sri Lanka, whether Tamils or Sinhalese. There have been discussions. Our efforts on the ground in Sri Lanka and our efforts here.... Someone made the comment that we have the

single largest diaspora in the world. If you can get the moderates talking together about the betterment of their homelands, whether it's from here or there.... Can Canada do that? I think there has to be receptivity on the other side—which is what happened the first time—and right now it's not there. Hopefully it will be in two weeks' time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brown.

Monsieur Patry, vous avez cinq minutes.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much, gentlemen.

I'll go quite directly to the questions. I have two questions.

We all know that this current Sri Lankan government refuses to discuss any action like a ceasefire until the Tamil Tigers surrender their weapons or lose the war. I really think the current government wants to finish the job, and after that, what's going to happen? That is my question.

You have many IDP camps, and for sure with the IDP camps there will be international aid, and everything will be "fine", if it can be fine in an IDP camp. I visited some in Azerbaijan before. Will these IDP camps be there forever? That's my question.

In a report from last March, the International Institute for Strategic Studies said:

But there is concern over insidious "Sinhalese" as the displaced are resettled, and this may yet stall internationally led relief and reconstruction operations.

This is my concern.

My second concern is this. You said in your statement that CIDA really tried to help find the roots of the problem, and the roots go as far as independence, with the majority and the minority, and vice versa, education, jobs for the Tamils, and things like this. That's the root of the problem. But is there any hope? Are there any discussions? International aid should be subjected, in a sense, to a certain devolution for the Tamil population and relief for the Tamil population.

That's my question. *Merci.*

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Sunquist.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: That's a difficult question, but it is absolutely key, because I think for any conflict you find anywhere in the world, if years later people are still situated in IDP camps, you haven't solved the problem. So in fact that's where our efforts are.

Beyond the immediate concerns, we have to find out where we're going from there.

I'll let Leslie Norton, perhaps, from our international group comment.

Ms. Leslie E. Norton (Director, Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Response Group (IRH-GHA), Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Perhaps I'll just add a few comments.

A few months ago we heard murmurs from the government about these camps becoming welfare camps, suggesting that they were going to be more permanent. But I think there's been a lot of pressure put on the government to say that this is not the solution, or not the solution the international community would support.

With regard to the IDP camps now, currently, with the conflict under way, the needs of the IDPs are being met by the actors. There are many humanitarian actors on the ground outside the conflict zone who are trying to meet the needs of the IDPs. They're currently putting up 1,000 tents per day. There's a great influx of people, and there are some challenges currently in the coordination of the humanitarian response, but they're working through the coordination challenges.

One of the big challenges that remain is the standards. There are minimum standards—we call them the sphere standards—and they're standards about the amount of water per day and the size of the shelter. Currently we're trying to ensure that the standards are being met. We also understand that the military is quite present in the camps. The fact that we do have international people on the ground and we are getting this information, I think, does add to our ability to pressure the government.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I have another very quick question.

Is the Sri Lankan situation discussed within the Commonwealth body? We don't have any answer about this. Is the Commonwealth ready to take any action, or looking at any action against the government, if nothing is done after the end of the conflict?

Mr. Ken Sunquist: Yes. The discussions involve a number of Commonwealth countries. The first part of it is true, a number are willing to participate to do different things. On the Commonwealth as an institution secretariat, I don't know the answer, but I can find out and get back to you through the clerk.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Lunney and Mr. Goldring on a split—that's not much time each.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Thank you very much.

It is important to be said that we have people coming to committee and suggestions being made—why doesn't Canada just move in and do this and do that and make demands? I think you said it very well in your report here when you said the government is citing safety and security in the conflict zone, that the UN has indicated that the Government of Sri Lanka has made it clear that the UN must stop making such requests, given that they will not be accepted. We can only do what the government will allow, short of invading the country.

Having said that, we appreciate what we have been doing in trying to engage with Sri Lanka and to help the Tamils and those officials who are on the ground right now in difficult circumstances.

My question really comes from Mr. Patry's perspective here. We have heard from some of the witnesses about “Sinhalisation”, if you want to call it that. With the changes in the state religion to make it Buddhism and the changes in educational requirements, which make it harder for people who aren't primarily Sinhalese speakers to get

into higher education, to get government jobs, and so on, do we have a plan or some expertise through CIDA, through our development agencies, to break through some of these challenges and help restructure the government afterwards, or to encourage it with the kinds of steps that would be helpful in engaging a more comprehensive society that would allow everybody to participate?

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rahman.

Dr. Syed Rahman: One of the things CIDA has been doing is to balance its assistance. We've maintained that distinct geographic and ethnic balance by supporting projects in Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim areas of the region, so we are, in effect, active in the north and the east as well as in the centre. That's been a deliberate attempt.

On the answer to the question of whether it would be possible to do so, the one thing I can say is we continue to monitor the scenario, and then, depending upon how the whole government construct evolves and how the sectoral construct evolves—we hope with colleagues in Foreign Affairs—over time we'll have to make a judgment. But at this time it's a difficult judgment to make because we don't have enough information on the path this might take for us to ascertain exactly what's being done.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: If I could just quickly add, I did say they asked us not to make any further requests. That doesn't mean we're not going to. It's clear from our perspective that that is the first priority. The UN humanitarian chair was there. He did not get access. We will continue. The French and British foreign secretaries raised that issue. Mr. Cannon has raised it in the past and will raise it again. It's an ongoing issue that we have to resolve.

Please don't take it that just because they said we can't do it, that is the final line.

Mr. James Lunney: We heard that from other witnesses.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: There is a misapprehension. There are a number of moderate Tamils in the Government of Sri Lanka right now, so it's not as though it's a clean divide of people based on religious or ethnic groups. There are ministers and there are different people. We can find people to work with who want the best for the people of the country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Goldring, go ahead. You have a minute.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): You mentioned earlier moderate Tamils, which would obviously distinguish them from hard-line Tamils. One of the difficulties here seems to be the intractability of the hard-line Tamils, I believe, in their request for self-determination. That self-determination has been given several different descriptions, but in reality it seems to be that they want a separate country as opposed to having some autonomy in their regions.

We were discussing the difference between a humanitarian pause and a ceasefire. In the past agreements that created somewhat of a ceasefire, were they also given any kind of unrealistic expectations that perhaps self-determination was going to be one point of the consultations and then that was not going to happen? Is that not one of the major reasons that now the Government of Sri Lanka is really taking a pretty firm line on it? If that is the one request they cannot go without, they really have no other choice because they will not allow that separation or self-determination.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: I'm not aware that previous pauses, ceasefires, whatever term you want to use.... The word "ceasefire" has been utilized by the LTTE. The word humanitarian "pause" is the one the UN has used because it got away from one side or the other.

Mr. Peter Goldring: What's the difference?

• (1700)

Mr. Ken Sunquist: I'm not sure there's a big difference except that one side uses one word and nobody else wants to use it.

The issue was that the government saw a "ceasefire" as a chance for the LTTE to re-arm and re-equip. A humanitarian pause was all around the issue of what's happening to the civilians, and if our primary issue is civilians, that's what we're into.

On your question on self-determination, I'm not aware that even in the long-running ceasefire for six years, brokered by the Norwegians, there was ever any offer on the table for self-determination. I think what happened was there was a gentlemen's agreement that neither side was going to move forward and do anything to upset the apple cart. So in fact it was a self-determination issue at that point. But I don't think there was ever anything in writing on that. Somebody could prove me wrong on that one.

The Chair: We'll come back to you.

Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I may, I would like to put my questions to the CIDA people.

In your presentation, you said that humanitarian support to NGOs currently on the ground increased significantly this year. A number of witnesses have told the committee that Canada, among others, should increase its aid. Others have even said that the government should simplify CIDA procedures to get the money to its destination quicker and to kick-start small-scale projects.

If CIDA has only two people on the ground, how are the projects to help those most in need being coordinated in the short term? In the medium term, what can CIDA do to help resolve the deeper causes of the current conflict?

I also have a question for Mr. Sunquist. In a media release, the Minister of Foreign Affairs refers to our High Commissioner in Colombo, Angela Bogdan, whom he reportedly instructed to continue Canada's engagement with the Sri Lankan government on the need for assistance to displaced persons. Could you provide more details on Ms. Bogdan's role and on the instructions she has been given, and relate them to what CIDA has done on the ground?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Deschamps.

Dr. Rahman.

Dr. Syed Rahman: On the question of delivery of the program, the two people who are on the ground facilitate delivery, but the major delivery of humanitarian assistance programs is done by our partners, by organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Oxfam Canada, World Vision, CARE Canada, or Médecins Sans Frontières. They're the ones who actually deliver the programs for us on the ground.

In terms of procedures, we have considerably simplified the procedures in terms of providing humanitarian assistance. I am going to ask my colleague, Stephen, to just mention what these processes are.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Thank you.

Indeed, on the humanitarian side, our program is set up specifically to allow for rapid response. We can respond within 12 to 24 hours to provide funding to our partners. However, the procedures are put in place to ensure that we are funding our trusted partners, those that are adhering to the humanitarian principles so key to responding impartially and neutrally to the challenges of a conflict zone and that also have the proper security background so that they ensure the security of their workers.

Our procedures are very streamlined and allow for a very rapid response. We continue to monitor the situation and assess needs. The people on the ground assist us with that. They are part of the coordination meetings that are going on with the UN and with NGOs. We are also in contact with our partners, our donors, and are continually in contact with NGOs on the ground to ensure the needs are continuously being met and continuously understood.

I should emphasize that the response we did in February was in anticipation of the current crisis. The contingency planning in place at that time was suggesting that such an event would happen. We put the funding in place to allow the international actors on the ground there to respond quickly. They've been able to stockpile and to develop a response plan as a result.

• (1705)

The Chair: Mr. Dorion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Mr. Chair, I would like to finish what I was saying on the subject a little earlier.

Susan Johnson, the Director General of the Red Cross, who appeared before this committee on March 23, said that the Canadian government had responded to the request from the International Committee of the Red Cross by contributing \$1.75 million to date.

She also said: What I was saying in my remarks was that, given the gravity of the situation, and given that the International Committee [of the Red Cross] is the only humanitarian organization with access to the conflict area, it would be appropriate for the Canadian government to consider doubling its contribution to the International Red Cross at this time.

This is the request from the Red Cross that I was referring to earlier.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dorion.

Is there a response?

Dr. Syed Rahman: The only thing we can say is that we have provided humanitarian assistance beyond that going to the International Red Cross. As we said, in February 2009, Minister Oda announced \$4.5 million, which went through various other partners, all of whom are trusted and, we believe, fully capable of delivering humanitarian assistance programs on the ground.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sunquist.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: I have a very quick comment.

Mr. Dorion, I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to respond to your question. I believe the IDRC is the only NGO currently in the conflict zone, and several of our partners are in the IDP camps. So in working with the partners, you are absolutely right in who we can deal with.

I thought I should just add two quick comments. You asked about Angela Bogdan's role as our ambassador or high commissioner. She is chairing the donors group of all the countries who have development programs there. She is working with the UN to make sure that the partners can get into the camps and that we know what's needed. She's meeting with the Government of Sri Lanka on a daily basis to promote visas for our people so they're able to get in. She's meeting with them to try to develop the programs moving forward. Angela is doing a very good job.

I couldn't respond to Mr. Goldring quickly enough. There's one other thing. We are doing a lot of things on the ground there. In fact, on March 31, before it all fell apart, we held a conference on pluralism in Colombo. We're trying to bring civil society together and we're trying to bring non-governmental actors together to look beyond the set pieces of government and to where we can move for the future.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sunquist.

I have one other question before I go back to Mr. Goldring here and then to Mr. Dewar.

Although CIDA has two people on the ground, do we have any idea as to how many Canadians are helping deliver that? I know that Oxfam Canada, and certainly the International Red Cross, are there, but I'm talking specifically about Canadian NGOs or delivery agents for Canadian aid. How many Canadians are there cooperating with CIDA or the foreign affairs department in delivering this aid?

Dr. Syed Rahman: Mr. Chair, do you mean in terms of the actual number of Canadians?

The Chair: Yes, right, approximately. Would there be an estimate?

Dr. Syed Rahman: We don't have an estimate of how many Canadians are on the ground. We know the organizations that are there, but we would be happy to find that out for you.

The Chair: Sometimes we can leave here.... I know the foreign affairs department must know how many Canadians are there, but we get this idea of only having two CIDA agents. We have all these groups that we work with, and I guess that's my question. Is there an estimate of the number of Canadians delivering aid?

Ms. Norton.

Ms. Leslie E. Norton: I just want to say that it's our understanding that there are no Canadians caught in the conflict zone, if you're asking about—you're not asking on the consular. There are Canadian NGOs there, but we have to remember that in the UN there are many Canadians, but they are carrying UN passports; they don't identify themselves as being Canadian.

As well, in the ICRC, because they are an impartial, independent, neutral organization, people will say they are with the ICRC, not Canadian. Or they might be carrying dual passports. Again, it's very difficult for us to tell. It would be a real challenge to get a number, but we can try.

● (1710)

The Chair: Even with Oxfam Canada, if they're one of the delivery agents, they must know if they have 20 or 10 or whatever. If we can get that information, that would be appreciated.

I think Mr. Goldring has a quick question. We'll then go to Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Peter Goldring: One of the studies we were recently working on was a democratic development study and what types of initiatives the Canadian government might possibly be in, and it certainly sounds like there'd be a lot of follow-up work here on the encouragement of human rights, democratic values, and good governance.

I have a quick question on the conflict zone area. I know your guesstimation of how many captives are in there was 50,000 to 100,000. That's a pretty broad guesstimation. But would you have some kind of a guesstimation of the number of combatants who would be in the area the government is facing? Is that guesstimation varying, improving, or decreasing? Could you give us some kind of idea?

Mr. Ken Sunquist: The short answer is that we do not have that.

It's like the question of how many people are in there. The UN claims it could be towards 100,000. The Government of Sri Lanka says it might be down to 50,000 because people are managing to escape. That's why we use the range of 50,000 to 100,000. The military have said in the past what they thought the size of the Tiger army—if you want to call it that—was, and presumably it's been decimated in the last few weeks. As for what they're down to, I haven't seen anything in our intelligence or any other efforts. Sorry.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, please.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ken, one of the main questions that has come out from the hearings we had.... And I would like to tell you that whatever anybody wants to say, it did become a partisan hearing depending on what version was used—either the Tamil version or the Sinhalese version.

The question came up—you already alluded to it, it was put to you—as to what kind of a carrot and stick can we use on the Government of Sri Lanka at this given time to....

I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mine went off earlier.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: It's the Prime Minister calling on my cellphone telling me to ask a good question.

Mr. Bernard Patry: We don't need questions; we need answers.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I don't give answers, as you know.

You're grappling with this. If you want to use aid as a carrot, or, as many have suggested, stop IMF funding and all those things, we would probably lose whatever influence we have in trying to come to a final solution, which is the reconciliation process we are talking about.

What do you think would be a good carrot and stick approach that would tell the Sri Lankan government there is an angle here if they don't do this? I think there is some kind of thinking in the committee that when we finally issue a report it will have something along those lines. But I don't think that's a good idea, because it would have a negative effect.

Would you like to give your view on that? I'm putting you on the hot seat. Is there a hot seat? I don't think so.

Mr. Ken Sunquist: There's a deep freeze.

Thank you for the question.

Let me go back to a standing committee I attended not that long ago where we were talking about corporate social responsibility in Sudan. Somebody asked a very specific question and said we were all concerned about a certain Canadian company that was operating in Sudan. Canadian values and ethics said that company should leave, and they eventually did leave. Were the people of Sudan better off because the Canadian company left? We looked at who bought them out, and you'd probably say they were better off with the Canadian company there.

I'm not going to make that argument now. I'm just saying the answer to your carrot-and-stick question can be very difficult.

There's a question of short-term humanitarian issues. The Government of Sri Lanka cannot cope with 160,000 people in IDP camps. It will be a mass disaster unless the international community contributes to that.

I guess you could say, from a stick side, "We wash our hands of you, a plague on you", and walk away. But as you said, I think we would lose any ability to influence any future behaviour, and it would be at a cost to the people who are there.

In the short term we clearly have to be there to help the people who are at risk. In the longer term, things like the IMF are part of the economic downturn of the world. How do we get the world back in business so there is some long-term prosperity for people in Sri Lanka? There are some short-term carrots that are designed to ensure that in the longer term, Sri Lanka as a country is once again a partner with us, as opposed to a country with which we have ongoing problems dealing with people.

That doesn't answer your question, Mr. Obhrai, but it gets to the sense that the public policy we use right now must reflect Canadian values and ethics, and sometimes that will be at odds with what we want to do right now. Right now we want to stop the fighting. How do you do it? That's the issue.

•(1715)

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

Thank you to both departments, Mr. Rahman from CIDA and Mr. Sunquist from Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

•(1715)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1720)

The Chair: Welcome back. We're going to move into committee business.

The first item on the agenda is the report from the steering committee. As you know, our steering committee met on Tuesday, April 28, 2009, and we considered the business of this committee. Hopefully you've had a chance to go through the steering committee report.

I would ask for a couple of amendments to be made to it. The first thing I'm told is that the Library of Parliament has never been in the habit of giving a legal opinion, but they will give a legal analysis. Could we amend the first recommendation to say, "That the committee request a legal opinion from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and a legal analysis from the Library of Parliament...?"

Is everyone all right with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Good.

The other point is that on May 27 we were going to begin our consideration of Bill C-300. We've now been instructed that the minister cannot appear on May 25, but could be here on May 27. In our recommendations we could just exchange those dates, so consideration of Bill C-300 could start on May 25 and the minister could appear on May 27, if that is all right with the committee.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Good. Are there any other points?

Go ahead, Mr. Abbott, please.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, I've taken a look at this and I've had consultation with my friend Mr. Obhrai. I understand that he was not in favour of item 4 as written, and I can understand why. I'm taking a look at items 1, 2, and 3, which we should have in hand before we get to item 4.

I would appeal to the logic of my colleagues on the other side. There is no other value in my intervention other than the fact that if we go to item 4, which is that we would be dealing with Mr. Dewar's motion on April 29, we would be dealing with it in the same vacuum that we have currently, which was what I was trying to discuss on Monday.

If we get items 1, 2, and 3, we could then have a logical, cogent discussion based on fact and be able to arrive at the highest-value conclusion on Mr. Dewar's motion.

I realize that I'm likely not going to be getting Mr. Dewar's acceptance of this motion, but I would propose, whatever the parliamentary procedure is here, that Mr. Dewar's motion be dealt with immediately upon receipt of the information from items 1, 2, and 3. In other words, if we received that information on May 5, we could deal with it immediately. If we received it on May 3, we could deal with it immediately.

This is not to delay it, but simply to say that we have to have the information before we can have a cogent and responsible discussion.

The Chair: Okay. It sounds like a logical suggestion, but there are two motions here, remember. The first motion is that we move his motion to the front.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Yes.

The Chair: That's so that we don't have to continually go through the debate as to whether we should pre-empt all these other motions.

The first motion is to move it to the front. In fairness to what we have here, moving it to the top of the agenda is not the same as dealing with this motion right now.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Okay. I'm trying to make this suggestion in as helpful a way as I possibly can. My suggestion is that we move it to April 29, on the understanding that the content of the motion would be dealt with upon receipt of items 1, 2, and 3.

The Chair: Again, I think the reason for Mr. Dewar's motion is to move his other motion to the front, so that it can be dealt with fairly soon. I would question how long it's going to take to get some of this information. It could be days and it could be weeks.

Hon. Jim Abbott: The point is, why are we asking for it? If we're not potentially going to be using the information, why are we asking for it?

The Chair: Again, this report hasn't been passed yet.

Hon. Jim Abbott: I understand. All I'm saying is that for item 4, I haven't conferred with my colleagues, but I don't see any difficulty. If, technically, we're moving the motion to the front in order of precedence, so that it can be dealt with, then that is the decision that is made. But the caveat is that it be dealt with upon receipt of the information so that we can have a responsible discussion.

• (1725)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: With respect, we had a fairly fulsome discussion. These points, 1 through 3, are related but not central to the motion I've put forward. It's a very simple proposal in front of the committee. Mr. Obhrai is moving an amendment and I would speak against it—at least, I guess that's what he's attempting to do. I just don't see the logic therein. We have a committee report. It asks for the motion to be dealt with ahead.... You're basically trying to kill the motion. I don't really think that's in order, in terms of the way he's presented it; therefore, I don't think it should be accepted.

Unless there are any other suggestions, we should move to accept the report, as amended, based on the amendments you made, Chair, the four items based on suggestions, etc.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I want a clarification from Paul. Are you saying you are accepting what Mr. Abbott said?

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, of course not. The chair made amendments on the library and the opinion. I'm sure you were listening carefully. I'm simply saying, let's pass this report as amended by the chair.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Right, so it goes only to your point of view.

Is it my turn to speak?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: We are discussing this committee report to be adopted by us here—the steering committee report. Mr. Dewar has already stated that he accepts your amendment because that fits into his political calendar, but he won't accept this other one because it doesn't fit into this particular calendar. However, from our political calendar, coming into this whole issue, that is what Mr. Abbott has said.

The Chair: All right....

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: No, no, I haven't finished.

The Chair: Please continue. We're waiting with bated breath.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, this is the full committee. That's why you're here. We had this debate in the steering committee, where there were only five of us, to bring this thing to the full committee. Now the full committee has the opportunity to listen to what was discussed. That is why we are saying this issue....

The central point, Mr. Chair, was that we do not have information that would actually make us feel that there was value in adopting Mr. Dewar's motion, except for Mr. Dewar himself, because that's his political ploy. He wants to put it out there. The point we are having difficulty with here is, where does this fit? Does this motion fit into this study motion over here that was put by Mr. Dewar, that pursuant to Standing Order blah, blah, blah, we invite Jim Judd to come here and...?

Mr. James Lunney: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. My version doesn't read that way.

The Chair: Continue, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I was getting serious about it.

Would that motion fit under that study? That would be the most appropriate place to have that motion fit.

The Chair: It may or it may not.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Well, I'm not asking for your opinion; I'm telling you mine. Thank you.

Therefore, honestly, this is the area where this motion should fit. But the problem we have is that we, as my good friend Jim here said, have not been to the steering committee and seen the recommendations of the steering committee. It would make great common sense, as Mr. Patry suggested, for us to first look at the selections made at the steering committee, which are numbers 1, 2, and 3 there, and get that information before we even proceed to number 4.

The problem with number 4 is that it is so open-ended. When do you want him? Do you want him now? Do you want him next week? Do you want him to be part of the study? What do you want him to do?

Let me tell you how bad it is. And I want this to be on the record. This is on the record, right?

• (1730)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Just a point of order, Chair, through you to the parliamentary secretary. We haven't passed the steering committee report yet, so I don't think making references about who did what and when is in order until the actual steering committee report is passed. Is that correct? I might be wrong here, and if I am, then correct me.

The Chair: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Paul Dewar: So I would just caution—

The Chair: I should maybe have brought that caution forward. You see it in the report, but what happens in that meeting is in camera so we can't disclose it, although we did invite every member to be at that steering committee—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Well, I do take that rebuke as being legitimate. That's fine. I do accept that. I shouldn't have mentioned that.

A voice: Did you request that in camera?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Yes, it was in camera, so let me just get off the in camera part.

The point I'm trying to make, so that the amendment my friend Jim has made will be reflected in this report, is that he has a right to amend, as you have amended others.

The Chair: Oh, absolutely.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: So he is seeking the amendment, which Mr. Dewar has declined to accept. We know he has declined to accept it because it doesn't fit into his particular agenda. I'm talking on that point.

Mr. Chair, I've alluded—and I want my colleagues on the other side to know that 'm trying to break this coalition that is building up on the other side. I thought the coalition was dead, but you guys are having your—

The Chair: Anyway—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: No, I'm not finished. What do you mean, “anyway”?

The Chair: Well, you're just about finished.

Just continue on the point. Do you want to make a motion, then, that we adopt the—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: But you are cutting off my debate.

The Chair: I'm trying to keep you relevant.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: But why are you cutting off my debate?

The Chair: Continue.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: How long do I have left to debate?

The Chair: You have a little longer.

We need a motion. Are you debating or are you making a motion or what?

Hon. Jim Abbott: I will make a motion, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: We have to vote as to whether or not we're going to accept the report as it is.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Which motion are you moving?

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's the motion to adopt this report recommended by the chair.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: No, but he's put an amendment through.

The Chair: No, he hasn't put an amendment.

Hon. Jim Abbott: I haven't, and I'm prepared to.

The Chair: He has not put an amendment. He has made a suggestion, so really I have heard no amendment, I have heard no motion, and I'm ready to hear a motion.

Mr. Abbott, please.

Hon. Jim Abbott: I propose that clause 4 be amended as follows. After the word “with”, add “immediately upon receipt of information requested in clauses 1, 2, and 3”. So it would then read:

That Paul Dewar's motion concerning Abousifian Abdelrazik be moved to the top of the agenda under Committee Business and dealt with immediately upon receipt of the information requested in clauses 1, 2, and 3.

• (1735)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: That makes complete sense.

The Chair: We have heard the amendment to the steering committee report. Madam Brown seconds it. I'm going to say that we have already accepted the other amendments to the report, because it seems there was a consensus to that.

You've heard Mr. Abbott's amendment to the committee report.

(Amendment negatived)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Chair, I'd like to move this report as amended by you.

The Chair: All right. We have a motion to accept the report as amended by the chair. My amendment was that the department is going to come on May 27 instead of May 25.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: That's totally illogical.

The Chair: Seeing no debate, I'll call the vote on Mr. Dewar's motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: All right. I think we're at the stage now where we've accepted this report.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I just want to know, Chair, having accepted this report, if we are going to then move to this motion.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: No, this is for tomorrow's debate.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'm not going to be here tomorrow.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: That's your problem, not mine.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Are you going to be here tomorrow?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Oh, damn right I'll be here.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Well, the committee is not meeting tomorrow, but that's another question, I guess. You can show up.

The Chair: We've already gone five minutes over time.

Mr. Paul Dewar: What I wanted to know from you is if, according to this motion, it will be moved to the top of the agenda and be dealt with on Wednesday, April 29.

The Chair: No. My assumption now is that it is at the top of the agenda and will be moved as soon as you ask it to be. Not now, though, because—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: —we've gone past the hour.

An hon. member: I have an objection to that.

The Chair: No, because we've now passed the—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: What did you pass?

The Chair: We passed the steering committee report.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: What did the motion say?

The Chair: That Mr. Dewar's motion—

Mr. Paul Dewar: —be dealt with on Wednesday, April 29.

The Chair: No, no.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Yes, that's what we said.

Mr. Paul Dewar: That's what it says.

He agrees with me!

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: That may be fine, but—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: So what are you trying to change it to?

Ms. Lois Brown: Let's have a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, I have the floor right now.

I'm saying to you that we have this motion in front of us. We haven't had a motion to adjourn, so right now, according to this agenda, we have the motion that I've put forward in front of us. Now, I'm not sure if we can just put it forward and debate it and pass it. I think we've debated it. The question is whether the other side wants to have a vote on this.

I'm going to do the following, Chair. According to this report we've just adopted, this motion is now in front of us. So I'd like to call the question on that motion.

The Chair: No, we won't call the question on it—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Why not?

The Chair: —without debate. You can call for the question, but this is a debatable motion.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Absolutely, it is. So I'm asking—

The Chair: You have the prerogative to call—

Mr. Paul Dewar: That's what I'm doing, through you, Chair.

The Chair: All right. So you want to deal with it today?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Yes, well, it's in front of us. It's live.

The Chair: He's moved a motion. We now call for debate on this motion.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: That motion talks about April 29, tomorrow. What motion has he moved?

The Chair: That's today.

Hon. Jim Abbott: I want to be on the speakers list for this.

The Chair: All right, we can do that, then, if you so choose.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I was just asking to call the question. I didn't ask for...

The Chair: It's a debatable motion, so there will definitely be debate on it. We have a choice. You can either ask for debate on this now or we can adjourn and it will be first on the committee business next time.

• (1740)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Through you, Chair, to the clerk, at what time on Monday will that be?

The Chair: At 5:15 p.m.

Mr. Paul Dewar: What is our agenda on Monday?

Ms. Angela Crandall (Procedural Clerk, Committees Directorate, House of Commons): A draft report on Sri Lanka.

Mr. Bernard Patry: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...that we have scheduled one today.

The Chair: I wasn't going to go without passing the steering report.

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, that's fine.

The Chair: That's passed, so we're now moving into debate, unless Mr. Dewar wishes to defer to Monday.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Instead of having delay, I will defer.

The Chair: Thank you.

He has deferred.

The meeting is adjourned.

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