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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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● (1540)

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Good afternoon. This is a special meeting at a special time for our committee. It's an informal meeting held at the convenience of our guest witness, who was available only to us today, and we're very glad that she was available.

Some our members have had previous commitments with the change in day, but there will be a few more joining us a little later on.

We have as a witness today, Fabienne Hara, who is the vice-president of the International Crisis Group.

We thank you for making the time to present us with your information. As you know, Madam, our committee is reviewing the key elements of Canada's foreign policy, and we're also conducting hearings on the Great Lakes region of Africa, so we look forward to your comments today. I recognize that there will be a briefing on the situation in Sudan to our committee.

After that, we'll also have some time for questions and answers, if that would be all right.

We look forward to your comments.

Ms. Fabienne Hara (Vice-President, Multilateral Affairs, International Crisis Group): Thank you very much, and good afternoon.

My name is Fabienne Hara. I am the vice-president for multilateral affairs of the International Crisis Group. I am based in New York.

I am sure you are familiar with the International Crisis Group. It's an organization focusing on conflict prevention and conflict resolution, covering more than 62 conflicts on the five continents.

We have been covering Sudan for six or seven years now. I was the acting political director of the UN Mission in Sudan in 2006 and 2007. I will speak to you also in that former capacity.

The situation in Sudan is not very stable. Right now there is no real prospect of peace in Darfur. You may have seen recent fighting at the border with Chad and Sudan between Chadian opposition groups and the Chadian army on the one hand, and between Darfur rebel groups and the Government of Sudan on the other. There is of course a lot of debate and polarization over the ICC indictment of President al-Bashir of Sudan.

There has also been a multiplication of tribal security incidents in southern Sudan in the last couple of months. And overall there is no real enthusiasm for the political process that was created by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed by the north and the south in 2005. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement includes a program of reforms, including national elections that are now scheduled for February 2010, and a referendum on the self-determination of southern Sudan, which is scheduled for 2011.

The ICC indictment has of course been welcomed by many in the NGO community, including the International Crisis Group, but it has also brought a certain degree of uncertainty to Sudan politics. With the ICC indictment, with the issue of elections approaching very soon, and with the referendum coming in two years, there is even more uncertainty. In fact, there is a risk of serious destabilization of the whole country or the whole region.

I would also say, as an introductory remark, that the international community has a lot of introspection to do. The three peacekeeping missions dealing with Sudan and Chad: UNMIS in the south, UNAMID in Darfur, and MINURCAT in Chad have been established without proper linkages to political processes. With the exception of the mission in the south, UNMIS, which is supposed to assist with the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, UNAMID and MINURCAT are both missions without political processes or a political framework and therefore no exit strategies at this stage.

I would like to make a few comments about Darfur, the aftermath of the ICC indictment, the expulsion of the 13 international humanitarian organizations, and then a few comments also about the north-south process.

In Darfur, the NGO expulsion has of course affected the livelihood of 1.1 million people. It has also of course affected the planning of the humanitarian operation for the near future, especially now that the rainy season is coming. It was obviously a political response from the government in Khartoum to the ICC indictment. In fact, when John Holmes, the UN humanitarian coordinator, went to Sudan recently he was told that this was a mild response to the ICC indictment. The response, in other words, could have been much worse. It could have involved kicking out diplomats or UN peacekeeping missions, but instead the government decided to go for the expulsion of NGOs.

It has of course created a very hostile security environment for humanitarian organizations. The environment has been hostile for many years. As you know, NGOs have been harassed, UNAMID has been attacked, and there have been many security incidents in the last few months against both the UN and NGOs. And it has also created tensions in the IDP camps. As you know, 2.7 million displaced people are in the camps in Darfur.

● (1545)

The government in Khartoum has also mobilized the international community, the region, against the ICC, to a certain extent successfully, but to a certain extent it has failed to do so, in particular because the expulsion of the NGOs was seen as a mistake by many of the allies of Sudan, including the Arab League and the African Union.

Now what are the prospects for peace in Darfur? I referred to the recent fighting at the border between Sudan and Chad. It is a proxy war. In fact, there has been a proxy war between Sudan and Chad for the last six years, with Chad supporting the Darfur rebels and Sudan supporting the Chadian rebels. This shows no sign of appeasement.

There is also more fighting and military buildup, in fact, on the side of JEM, one of the key Darfur rebel movements, which has recently attacked the Sudanese armed forces in north Darfur. The Sudanese armed forces have retaliated. So there is a lot of violence going on.

Yesterday there was a resumption of the peace talks in Doha, Qatar, between JEM and the Government of Sudan. But in this context, it's difficult to see where the peace talks will go.

It's also important to understand that the aim of such a process is essentially cessation of hostilities or ceasefire, but not exactly an inclusive political process to resolve the situation in Darfur. In fact, there's very little confidence among experts, observers of the situation in Sudan, that this process could lead to an inclusive and sustainable peace in Darfur, in part because JEM represents a certain military capacity but doesn't really represent the Darfuris, and certainly not the 2.7 million IDPs in camps.

So the question then is, what will bring peace to Darfur? This is a question that I believe is now on the table in Washington and elsewhere. The new special envoy for Sudan, Scott Gration, appointed by President Obama, is now, as we speak, looking at an all-Sudan strategy that would include Darfur and the north-south.

On the north-south peace agreement, called the CPA, there are a number of really important questions that I would like to raise today. Of course, there's a lot of political work that has not been done. If we look at the timeframe, the calendar of the CPA, with elections next year and the referendum on self-determination in 2011, some of the important steps that were supposed to be taken have not been taken.

One is, briefly put, the implementation of new laws that would allow democratic freedom. These laws have not been passed. Therefore, the environment for elections will not necessarily be as free and fair as we would have wished.

Secondly, there is a demarcation of the border between the north and the south, a process that is necessary to complete before the elections. That process has not been completed. The status of the three transitional areas at the border between the north and the south —Abyei, southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile—have not been determined.

Finally, and importantly, wealth-sharing arrangements have not been found. When I talk about wealth-sharing arrangements, I talk about oil and water. Oil is in the south in Sudan, but the pipeline exporting that oil is in the north. There is strong economic interdependence between the north and the south. It's the same with water. The Nile flows from the south through the north. There will have to be an arrangement between the north and the south, but also with other countries of the Nile, what we call the Nile countries, about the sharing of the waters.

We have elections coming next year, but we in the International Crisis Group are very concerned about the prospect of elections in this context, in this environment. Let me raise four or five points of concern.

Before I do that, I should say, of course, that elections are part of the CPA. They are a milestone of the CPA. They were supposed to happen in the middle of the interim period, which was six years, and they were supposed to be a rehearsal for the referendum on self-determination. Of course, not having elections would risk derailing the CPA, but to have them is also a problem in the current context.

● (1550)

First of all, the census results, and the census process that's been conducted recently, have been challenged quite significantly. The southerners, in particular, believe that the count of the southern population is not accurate, that it underrepresents the southerners.

The other important question related to the census is who will vote in these elections. Some of the populations in the south, some southerners in the north, some people in the transitional areas at the border between the north and south, and, more importantly, most of the Darfuris have not been counted in the census. So there is a very great risk that large chunks of the population may not vote.

Of course, if you look at the situation in Darfur and the current setup of the camps, the fact that more than a third of the population is in camps and that two-thirds of the population need food assistance from the UN, it's extremely difficult to imagine elections taking place in this environment.

So who will vote in this election is one question.

What this election will achieve is another big question. Certainly in the current context, where the National Congress Party controls all the instruments of power in the north, and the SPLM controls most of the instruments of power in the south, it's very unlikely that these elections will bring democratic transformation. It's more likely that they will confirm the status quo.

But if some important stakeholders, such as the Darfuris, or perhaps even the opposition parties in the north, don't agree with the elections, then it means they will just be partial elections. Therefore, the legitimacy coming out of these elections will not be as much as....

There is also a risk of violence, especially in the south. I've said before that there are lots of tribal incidents these days. The elections could be very divisive in the context of serious ethnic tensions.

Finally, will President al-Bashir run in the elections? That's an open question at this stage. At this stage, he is the candidate for the National Congress Party, but he's also an ICC indictee. He has not been tried; therefore nothing can prevent him from running. But it's a question, I think, that we as an international community have to ask ourselves. Should we support the process that would lead to the legitimization of an ICC indictee? There is very little chance that if the NCP organizes the elections, the Government of Sudan will lose them.

So the big question for us now is who will be responsible for doing the political evaluation. Will the Secretary-General of the United Nations go to the Security Council and ask, will these elections happen in a context that is favourable, and should we or should we not support this process? The UN, as some of you may know, has been asked to support the process.

These are the few comments I wanted to make on Darfur and on the north-south issues.

To conclude, I would just say that I think the big question we all have in front of us right now—and I'm glad to see the new special envoy from the U.S. government is trying to address the same question—is how do you connect the pieces? How do you connect Darfur to the national reform program included in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement? Is it possible to connect the two? If there is a peace process in Darfur a year before elections, is it worth it for the Darfuris? Do the elections, in other words, close the door to power-sharing negotiations with the Darfuris? If indeed we insist on power sharing and an inclusive peace process for Darfur, should we postpone the elections, on the other hand?

Anyway, I'm just trying to say that one process will impact the other and that we need to think through what an all-Sudan strategy, a national strategy, would look like. If we don't, it means that the two tracks will continue separately, that there will be a north-south track, and that Darfur will be left without a solution. It could be so for quite some time.

Thank you very much.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Hara.

We'll move into the first round.

Mr. Pearson, for seven minutes.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Ms. Hara, thank you very much for coming. I've been anxious to get an update on the situation there.

As far as south Sudan itself goes, I realize that there has been an awful lot of tribal tension occurring in the last year. I also realize that Salva Kiir is trying to keep a lid on that, because he wants to run for the presidency, with an al-Bashir who's kind of stained as a result of the ICC.

I'm also aware that so much emphasis has been placed on Juba, Rumbek, the development, and so on and so forth, that up in the border areas, which were really the regions hardest hit during the civil war, very little development is taking place. Much of the CPA money never went up there. As far as a lot of the people there go, they hardly even know that Juba exists. Even the civil society leaders who were supposed to come up there don't want to go that far into the north. So what you have there are a number of people, right at the border region, who have just been at war recently, without really much in the way of administrative control, help, or standards.

I wanted to ask you about another thing, as well. I'm also aware that the SPLA was bringing all sorts of IDPs out of south Darfur into north Darfur, especially in the rural east area, the Twic County area, for the census. I understand the reasoning for that, but the problem is that there were not the social services and things like that necessary to house some of these people. I know that in one area there are 130,000 of these people who are settling in, and they've overrun what is available.

I realize that people want to talk about the referendum and the elections that are coming up, but it seems to me it's imploding, kind of on the inside, across regions, across tribes, and even between peoples like the Dinka and Nuer. Is it your sense that we're not paying enough attention to that? As we spend our time focusing on Darfur and the ICC, is the very thing we thought had come together as a result of the CPA now all breaking apart at the seams?

Ms. Fabienne Hara: Thank you very much for your question. It's a very pertinent question.

I would say two things. First of all, the CPA, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, is a recipe to end the war between the north and the south, but it never focused on the south. The south, as we know, has very few institutions. There is no state structure to talk about. So the CPA is definitely not the road map to do state-building in south Sudan. Yet this is exactly what's needed. So the next step should be—in fact, it should start now—to look at south Sudan and try to consolidate institutions in south Sudan. Consolidate the army, consolidate the police, and consolidate the rule of law, and try to establish an authority in Juba that reaches out to the various regions and decentralizes the little power it has.

There is already a plan for decentralization in the south, but it needs to go further. There's no question about that. But it's all being done in a very, very difficult, intense environment. As you know, the SPLM/SPLA has been a guerrilla movement for more than 20 years, and they have to face a number of challenges at the same time. One is to build a state in south Sudan. Another is to transform into a political party. And the third is to resist Khartoum's attempt to destabilize the CPA and to destabilize the south. The international committee has also put a fourth task on their shoulders, which is to help resolve the Darfur process.

It's a lot for one government. It's a lot for one new government. Very few people within the SPLM have government experience. I've witnessed that myself. Many, many of the officers actually are illiterate, and they have been absorbed into the administration. It doesn't make the administration particularly efficient.

The other thing I wanted to say is that I think you made a very good point about too much attention being focused on Darfur and not enough on the south. Even when I was at the UN, the message I was really trying to convey to my counterparts in New York was that more political capital and more political investment has to be put into the north-south, because the north-south peace process is the bedrock of peace. It's the only agreement that is holding in Sudan. It's holding Sudan together. If that collapses, they will be returned to war, and the return to war has cost in the last few years in the south as many lives as in Darfur. It has been extremely violent. It will be extremely violent.

You see Sudan now; it's holding together. The ceasefire is by and large maintained. Darfur is allowed to drift away. If the north-south process collapses, there will be no Sudan to talk about. As a UN official said to me recently, Somalia will be like a piece of cake compared to Sudan if Sudan implodes.

● (1600)

Mr. Glen Pearson: I still have some time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You do, sir.

Mr. Glen Pearson: What's of interest to me is that when the CPA was signed there was a strong feeling up in the border regions, which is where a lot of the strife had taken place, that this was kind of the solution that was going to apply to them. They were hearing about oil revenues coming in their direction, teachers, schools being built, and so forth. And I know that many of the CPA donors from the western countries also helped to add to some of that illusion.

What you have now is that the people who are far away regionally, up in the border areas, are looking down at the south and seeing all the development that's happening in Juba, Rumbek, and the other places that I've talked about, and they are now growing resentful of the CPA because it didn't deliver. But they're not only resentful of that, they're resentful of their leadership for not delivering. They're also quite resentful of the fact that Salva Kiir spends a lot of his time in Khartoum. That bothers them as well.

I'm still trying to get an answer to that side of it. It seems to me that regardless of what happens about Darfur, the division in south Sudan between north-south Sudan and the southern part of south Sudan—I'm not including the other regions—is now becoming more and more frayed as the people are not getting their services.

I understand what you're saying, that CPA was never really designed in many ways for that, but they were led to believe that was the case, which is why they supported the CPA in those northern regions. Do you have a view on that?

Ms. Fabienne Hara: I think people supported the CPA for one very simple reason, which was that it would lead to self-determination. Southerners are very much attached to the idea of self-determination, and I think that's the only thing they saw in the CPA. After six years they would have their referendum and they would be free from the northern domination. That's what I think 99% of the southern Sudanese feel.

But you're absolutely right. There is a problem of distribution of income within south Sudan, and there's also a problem of perceived equality and fairness from the Juba government, and there's also an ethnic dimension to it, of course. The SPLM/SPLA is very much seen as Dinka-dominated, dominated by one of the major ethnic groups in south Sudan.

But there are a great many ethnic groups in south Sudan. The big ones and the small ones actually are very resentful of the Dinka rule, which is also another consideration for the election in fact, and this one is more pro-election than anything else. If the SPLM cancels the election or postpones the election or is seen as the party postponing the election, many of the communities in south Sudan will actually see it as a way of consolidating Dinka rule. So they have to, to a certain extent, be seen as going through the motions of an election to be seen as open to challenge, essentially.

The question you ask is very important for all of us. We've just had the same debate on the Congo very recently. How do you build a state in a place like south Sudan? This is perhaps something that should be discussed with the authorities of south Sudan.

We are all focused on 2011. What happens the day after? Even if they get their independence, what happens the morning after the referendum? So far, there's been extremely little debate about this. And perhaps this is something that we, even us as the Crisis Group, should think about.

Mr. Glen Pearson: Thank you, Ms. Hara.

Thank you, Chair.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Pearson. We certainly recognize the interest you have in that area. Thanks for those questions.

Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you very much for your information, Ms. Hara.

We may be getting ahead of ourselves. You mention 2011, although a number of things still need to be done. You said that an election in 2010 and a referendum in 2011 have created a climate of uncertainty. In addition, the indictment issued by the International Criminal Court against the president of Sudan has poured more oil on the fire.

You also say that, in the last year, the climate of insecurity, even violence, has become stronger and broader. More humanitarian groups working on the ground have had to be withdrawn. The situation is not a very happy one. You also tell us that there is still a lot to be done politically. The agenda is full and there is a lot of uncertainty.

Canada has just put Sudan back on the list of priority countries. In the short term, amounts of money are probably going to be sent, but how are they going to get into the country? How can they be used to set up projects that have a chance of producing quick results, given that the NGOs are not in place? How can we get those people back there and guarantee their safety?

Ms. Fabienne Hara: In the case of Darfur, some negotiations have already been held by the American special envoy, and by John Holmes, with a view to restoring some level of humanitarian assistance and to filling the gaps left by the departure of the 13 international NGOs.

As well, there have been negotiations with the Sudanese government for an assessment to be done jointly by the government and the United Nations. For one thing, these two parallel negotiations have produced a monitoring system that will be at a very high level with the oversight committee that the new agreement has established. That has also produced an agreement for some humanitarian organizations to return. They will not necessarily be the same as the ones that left, or possibly they will be the same, but with different logos. For example, if Oxfam was expelled, it may not be Oxfam GB that will go back, but perhaps Oxfam Spain may be accepted and welcomed.

There is a little progress on that front. Now we shall see what actually happens. We cannot know exactly how the government will react. It is certain that humanitarian assistance, aid for victims of the war, has served political ends. In particular, I would say that the issue was blown out of proportion because the Obama administration was just taking office and it became the starting point for negotiations on other more political and more serious matters such as the indictment against President al-Bashir. It was not exclusively that, but that was part of it.

The first stage of the negotiations will be the longest one. The big question today is where they will lead. Will we or will we not have, as I said earlier, a national strategy for all Sudan, bringing together humanitarian, political and security concerns – peacekeeping and politics, in particular – and Darfur, the east of the country and South Darfur into the same national strategy?

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: You are an expert in conflict prevention and resolution. What is your message to the Canadian government about its priority for rapid action? You talked about investment, but that can take many forms.

Ms. Fabienne Hara: The priority must be political investment, meaning that we must demand that the international response to the crisis in Sudan be strategic. As we said earlier, we must have a political strategy with clear objectives, which has absolutely not been the case up to now. Our response has been to the current situation, especially in Darfur. We have responded significantly to questions of human rights, but we have no political strategy for Sudan as a whole.

The first issue is to know what we want from this government. As we said earlier, the conflict between north and south needs more attention than Darfur. The north-south conflict is really the crux of the issue. Canada has to exert more pressure on the governments in Khartoum and Southern Sudan at the Security Council so that the process stays on track and so that the political work is done before 2010 or 2011.

The next issue is that, in terms of peacekeeping, the three missions presently in the area really have no political mandate, no operational mandate and no coordination mechanisms. For example, there is almost no coordination between the mission in Chad and the one in Darfur, and that is really quite curious.

One of the questions that could be raised might be for the Security Council to demand a joint report from the two missions on the situations in the east of Chad and in Darfur and a joint report on Sudan in general.

At the moment, the way in which problems are being handled is extremely fragmented.

● (1610)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: It is certainly peculiar, given that the two missions are working in parallel, that there has been no international request for reports that could provide an assessment of how they are working together. That is peculiar.

Ms. Fabienne Hara: It is a symptom of the problem.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair? Can I go on all day?

The Chair: Go ahead. In about 22 seconds.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you very much. Do you have anything quick to add?

Ms. Fabienne Hara: Discussions on a strategy are going on.

[*English*]

There is a strategy being discussed right now between the U.S., the Chinese, the French, the U.K., the Arab League, the African Union, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. I don't think Canada participates officially, formally, but this is the time to influence the process. It will be too late in a couple of weeks.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lunney and Mr. Abbott will be splitting their time.

Go ahead, Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm just looking at the numbers here. We know that the UNAMID forces—the 7,400 forces, I gather—that were over there were not overly effective. I gather they're under agreement to ramp up supposedly to 26,000, but they're only partway through achieving that ramp-up, with maybe 15,000 forces there. They don't seem to be significantly better organized at this stage.

As my first question, are you aware of whether the increased forces are making any difference at this juncture?

My second question is on behalf of the people in those camps who are very vulnerable to those Janjaweed forces and so on. I guess AMID used to withdraw to their bases at night, leaving people unprotected during the night. Is that still the case in Sudan?

I have a third question before I turn it over to my colleague. In the February 2009 justice and equality movement, one of the rebel groups signed a declaration of intent, I gather, with the Sudanese government. I wondered whether, to your knowledge, this agreement was a positive sign. Were there any signs of encouragement that this was reducing the conflict in the area, or had hopes of contributing to more stability?

Ms. Fabienne Hara: Thank you very much.

Your first question was about UNAMID. About 13,000 peacekeepers have been deployed, out of about 20,000. They still lack very critical equipment. For instance, there has been this debate about helicopters being sent to UNAMID to make it an effective protection force. They need to be mobile, highly mobile, and to be highly mobile they need helicopters. Yet for the last few years they've been asking for helicopters and no countries have come forward. Recently Ethiopia has volunteered a few helicopters, but it's nowhere near enough. So that's from the protection point of view.

Are they making a difference? According to the last report of the Secretary-General on UNAMID, they are doing what they can to protect the IDPs. They have a very strong mandate, but they're also under attack themselves. There's a multiplication of armed groups in Darfur. Patrols of UNAMID have been attacked many times. The number of incidents in recent months has been unbelievable. Compounds of NGOs, compounds of the UN, have been looted or burned. Humanitarian workers have been kidnapped.

So it's a very insecure environment for both the UN mission and the humanitarian actors. Unfortunately, this is the result of fragmentation in Darfur, the multiplication of armed groups, and also political agendas, obviously. But it's not only the political agenda from the Government of Sudan; there's also a lot of banditry, a lot of criminal activity. As I said earlier, without the political process, there will be no prospect for an exit strategy, and the difference they can make on the ground will be only marginal.

On the agreement with JEM in February 2009, yes, it was called a goodwill agreement. The agreement was essentially about an exchange of prisoners of war. But after the 4th of March, when President al-Bashir was indicted by the ICC, the Government of Sudan expelled 13 organizations and JEM suspended negotiation. They just resumed yesterday, officially, but as I said at the very beginning of the meeting, there's been a lot of fighting in north Darfur. JEM has attacked and taken possession—although this is challenged by government spokesmen—of one of the cities in north Darfur.

In this environment, it's unlikely that the peace talks will go anywhere soon. They may eventually, but not immediately.

● (1615)

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

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

Thank you very much for your expert opinion.

I'd like to briefly explore the issue of oil. First, I wonder if you could express to us your opinion on the impact of oil revenue on the—I guess this will be a play on words—"fuelling" of the ability of all the players to continue all of the bad stuff that's going on.

Secondly, I'd like to key in on the exodus of Talisman. I'm just curious; obviously oil has continued to be pumped, but what change, if any, positive or negative, has happened post-Talisman?

Ms. Fabienne Hara: Thank you.

Oil is a subject of discussion everywhere in Sudan, but it's the most difficult subject because there's very little information coming out. It's not a very transparent business.

Right now the economy is governed by the wealth-sharing agreement, which is part of the comprehensive peace agreement. This basically says that the income from oil pumped in Sudan, particularly in south Sudan, will be shared 50-50 between the north and the south. Most of the oil is in the south, but it is exported through the north.

Recently the prices have come down, which have caused an economic crisis both in the north and in the south. That's significant because it means that the government will have even less capacity to render the services to the population that they do now.

In the last few years, especially after the end of the year 2000, a lot of new investors have come to south Sudan, including China, India, and Malaysia. They are not the exclusive actors of the oil business or oil economy, but they are the main ones. China, in particular, has come under a lot of pressure for its role in supporting the Government of Sudan, mainly because they have an oil deal. It is true that China has protected, shielded, the Government of Sudan from the most robust resolution on the Security Council for a certain time. But they have also changed gears to a certain extent. They have reacted to pressure and they have started actively encouraging the Government of Sudan to stabilize Darfur. They are the ones who actually gained consent from the Government of Sudan for the deployment of the UN-AU mission. If the Chinese had not got involved, we would not have this agreement on deployment. So they are starting to play a more constructive role. I think they have also understood that south Sudan may secede in 2011, and if that is the case, they will need to establish relationships with the government of south Sudan.

Clearly, the actors of the oil industry are not western. This is also a factor, obviously, for us to consider.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll come back to Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, and thank you to our guest for her overview and update.

It's interesting that as Canadians we share a long history of Sudan. In fact, we go back to 1884, when there was a picture taken on Parliament Hill of a group that set off under the leadership of Garnet Wolseley to go to Sudan to actually rescue and bring back General Charles Gordon, who had been left there. So we actually went back, and on that escapade, I think, there were lumbermen and Mohawk first nations—quite a crew. I'm not sure they all knew what they were getting into, and I think that's maybe similar to what we do sometimes.

I think right now we have to establish what our goals are as a country. I think one of them is very obvious to me—you mentioned it already—and that is, the provision of helicopters. It's certainly been an issue in our House of Commons that we actually have the capability to do that. There was a rather interesting debate as to whether we actually had them physically here, never mind that there were ways of securing them. So one of the things that makes infinite sense is to provide the helicopter capacity.

I know in the case of Sudan and in the case of Congo, there has been an ask to Canada to provide for that coordination piece amongst the UN missions, respectively in Congo and in Sudan. That is because we have an expertise there. So it's not deploying thousands and thousands of troops, but providing the coordination piece.

I'd like your take on that as something that would be helpful.

I also found your point about the consolidation around state-building very interesting. I guess this is hopefully what's happening in Doha right now, in looking to the horizon of how we support the post-conflict piece. My question would be this. How can Canada help with the consolidation part?

So I would just like your comments on those three questions: the equipment; the coordination ability for Canada to help out with that in the military mission; and also how we can help out with the consolidation of state-building and governance.

Ms. Fabienne Hara: Thank you very much.

On the helicopters, it has become a media story that the Darfur mission is looking for helicopters. So if Canada were able to provide those helicopters, you would become heroes immediately to the international civil society, at the very least, and certainly to people in Darfur too. But now the question is, of course, what will the mission do, even if it does have helicopters? The mandate is still limited. The security environment is still extremely challenging. So helicopters would not be enough to make a real difference on the ground.

As I said, and I come back to my main message, as long as there's no prospect for peace, what will the UN peacekeeping mission do? We've seen in many places in the Horn of Africa that there's a lot of peacekeeping being decided and shaped in a vacuum. So what will the UN peacekeeping mission do in a vacuum? There's no regional strategy, and yet we know that the problems in Darfur—and here I come to your second point—are very much Sudan-Chad related, or very much regional problems. There is no strategy to deal with the local conflicts at all. There is not even a real strategy to look at the national conflicts in a very coherent way.

So the capacity of the mission is important. The mandates are also very important. The goals and the objectives that the council would give this mission are key.

As for coordination of the UN mission, as I said before, there's almost no coordination at all. It's reflected in the Security Council agenda. You have one item, the north-south; one item, Darfur; and one other item, Sudan-Chad. It's unbelievable, really. It absolutely needs to change. I suggested, for example, joint reporting of the three missions—at least the two Sudan missions—or joint reporting between the Chad mission and the Darfur mission on the Sudan-Chad issue. Why is the Sudan-Chad issue not really considered a threat to international peace and security by the Security Council? That's a big mystery, and it should change.

In other words, it's a very good idea. Military coordination should be established between the missions, and political coordination. There should be a request for a cross-border strategy.

On the last point regarding consolidation of state-building, as I said to your colleague earlier, there is no process to discuss this at this stage. There's a lot of discussion on institution-building, helping the government in Juba right now, and the delivery of peace dividends and all of that, but there's no formal process to discuss international aid. Maybe we should look at a strategic framework for south Sudan. This is what the UN peace-building commission is supposed to do, by the way. Some similar process will have to be invented for south Sudan, but it doesn't exist yet. My fear is that the south Sudanese will not necessarily be in the lead in designing that process. They should be, and they should be encouraged to be.

● (1625)

Mr. Paul Dewar: You mentioned the peace-building commission, which Canada has a vested interest in—and certainly given our history. Well, first of all, it's nascent, and hopefully it will be seen as a viable institution for the post-conflict period.

So your hope would be that in the south, where there is some peace, if you will, to build upon, we should also be putting our resources in that through the commission. Is that what you are saying, or are you just hoping it's going to go ahead and it's fine as is? How do they fit into the rubric here?

Ms. Fabienne Hara: Well, if south Sudan becomes independent, which is a big if, it could become a client for the peace-building commission. But there are also other configurations being discussed right now. I don't know if you're aware of the initiative on early recovery and stabilization, but there are various configurations being shipped right now. The peace-building commission is only one of them. This would need a serious discussion to look at what's most appropriate for south Sudan, and also a discussion with the south Sudanese authorities. If they are a client of the peace-building commission, then it means they will get money for what I call "politically incorrect" activities; for example, DDR, SSR, and so on. But at the same time, most of the post-conflict countries don't want to be under political scrutiny, and the peace-building commission is an instrument that keeps governments under scrutiny.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I have one last question. It is in regard to the elections. I'm not sure where you come down on them. Are you saying they are to be encouraged and should go ahead? Obviously countries like Canada can play a role in ensuring they're done as fairly as possible and certainly that a lead-up to them is done in a fair way.

Ms. Fabienne Hara: I don't have an answer at this stage, but I think my recommendation would be that a very serious political evaluation needs to be done about the elections, expectations of elections, conditions of elections, and then the fairness of the process. If the elections end up marginalizing the Darfuris more, then perhaps they need to be reconsidered. If elections end up triggering more violence in the south, then perhaps they should be postponed until peace consultation has happened in the south.

But I think the question now is, who will do this political evaluation? Who will be responsible for doing that political evaluation? I think that's a key question, but we won't be able to determine that if we don't have an overall strategy for Sudan, based on the CPA but also based on the day after the CPA. What are the scenarios: secession; violent secession; peaceful secession? Where are we now? What do we really want to see in the next few years?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

I have a couple of questions, and then we'll go back to Mr. Abbott.

People put different tags on the situation in Darfur to describe it, but it is certainly one of the worst humanitarian crises ever. The international community has been criticized for being slow in responding. Measures they've put in place have not worked. I know when you're in opposition you like to point at the government and say, “You aren't doing enough.” When you're in government, you like to say, “This is what we're doing. We're doing this bilaterally, we're doing this multilaterally, we're working with the UN.”

I had a group of students come into my office about a year ago, and I was very impressed with them. It was a group of university students here in Ottawa, and again, back in Alberta, that came to mind. The group was called STAND, Students Taking Action Now: Darfur. Back then, the issue was about helicopters. But where do these helicopters go now? Back then, there was a larger contingency of NGOs. You say they've been mostly expelled. Even some of the UN has been expelled. There is no security there. This was a big issue back then with the students, that we just needed to get helicopters in. Even if you send helicopters, there's really no strategy, no plan—or is there? That's the first thing.

The other thing I recall from a year ago is that they talked about disinvestment. We did a little study on that last year, I think, before the election, and we found out that there wasn't much investment at all in Sudan, and in the Darfur area specifically. Yet students and politicians from opposition and from governments all wanted to really do something.

You talked about the elections. You said the question is, what will bring peace to Sudan? Obama had some ideas.

I guess my question is, what can a government do bilaterally, not just send money to the UN but what can our country do bilaterally, Canada-Sudan? What do you think? Are there any ideas you have specifically on some of those things?

● (1630)

Ms. Fabienne Hara: As far as the humanitarian situation in Darfur is concerned, there are 85 NGOs operating in Darfur, 13 UN agencies, and only 13 have been expelled. Most of them will probably come back in one form or another. There is a huge humanitarian assistance operation in Darfur. Even if some NGOs have been expelled, others stay, and there will be this big operation for some time to come. I don't think we should be completely worried about that. It's a very difficult environment to operate in for humanitarian NGOs and UN agencies, but it's one of the largest crises. It's also the largest humanitarian operation in the world right now. Four million people are on food assistance and 2.7 million people are in camps serviced by NGOs and so on.

In terms of the helicopters, I think the dilemma goes way beyond this particular mission. There is an increase, or an inflation, of mandates given to peacekeeping missions that include the protection of civilians and the responsibility to protect philosophy. These are robust mandates. Missions are sent into situations of conflict, active conflict sometimes, that really border on war fighting. The mandate is not peacekeeping, but it's very robust peacekeeping. It's almost war fighting. We see that in Sudan and other places. For example, we see that in the eastern Congo. We could have seen that in Somalia. There was even a discussion that a mission should be sent to Somalia.

The question really is, what does the international community want? It's either robust peacekeeping, in which case we have to make the mission's effective fighting forces capable of protecting civilians, helicopters have to be sent, and missions have to be supported, or—

The Chair: I don't want to interrupt, but there are others wanting questions.

However, on that, years ago, back in 2004 or 2005, there was a discussion amongst different political parties. I think at that time it was amongst two people in the Liberal Party who I think really had good intentions towards making a difference. David Kilgour brought forward some very good suggestions, but his own government at that time said that it may not be the best.... These were both sides that maybe wanted to see a change. Then they were talking about sending troops, but the African Union said not to send any troops unless they were black because they'll simply be looked at as outsiders. All these groups are here, but I want to get back to specifically what can be done bilaterally.

I'll play the devil's advocate here. The government on the one hand can say that we're doubling aid and all this, but sending it through the UN or sending it through in multilateral ways. Then we have African nations saying that we're pulling out our focus and aren't focused on some of Africa anymore. We are still sending much money through the UN. But they say it isn't focusing in. What is it bilaterally that a country like Canada can do?

● (1635)

Ms. Fabienne Hara: Thank you.

The Government of Sudan dictated conditions for the composition of the peacekeeping force, not the African Union. It was the Government of Sudan that asked that the troops be African. This is a specific situation related to peacekeeping.

I think there's a lot that can be done bilaterally, for example, on justice and the rule of law in both north and south Sudan. The discourse on justice has been monopolized by the ICC issue, and it's all about international criminal justice, but there are many other forms of justice. There are many other ways of addressing human rights problems in Sudan, especially in the context of the democratic transformation brought about by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, that could be looked at—for example, reform of the justice system; for example, support to civil society in north Sudan.

We are talking about free and fair elections, but the opposition parties are not well trained and not well supported. Also, the international civil society is extremely weak and very often manipulated by government. A program of support for democratic transformation would be very welcome I think from a bilateral perspective. It's the same in south Sudan. We've just discussed that there's a huge amount of work to do on institution building.

Canada will be seen by the northerners, and this is where it's politically interesting, as an ally of the U.S. What the Government of Sudan, the NCP, really wants more than anything else is normalization of relations with the U.S., including economic relations. Engaging in a constructive dialogue with Canada on democratic transformation, for example, on justice, on rule of law, would be seen as an entry point into a dialogue that they really want. They want to have normalization of relations with the west, not under any conditions, but they want to get there at some stage, and I think there is an opening.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Abbott, I have taken up a fair bit of your time, but you still have two and a half minutes left.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to finish up with your impressions. You had mentioned, correctly, that it's not just the absence of Talisman, but that in fact there are no western companies involved. From the time Talisman left until today, I would like to know if there has been any impact—positive, negative, or none—in terms of two things.

The first is the impact on the ground—in other words, the number of unofficial under-the-table things that might be flowing to the governments. Second, you did mention something that I can honestly tell you hadn't crossed my mind, and that was the influence of China on Sudan in the world.

On the basis of there being the change from western companies to no western companies, I have those two questions. First, has there been any change whatsoever on the ground, and if so, what was it? Second, was there any change in terms of the international picture, and if so, what was it?

Ms. Fabienne Hara: Thank you. I would mention perhaps two things here.

One is the impact on human rights. I think the behaviour, if I may say so, of international oil companies has changed a little bit. In the past, just to open oil fields, a population would have to be cleared forcefully, so a lot of people in south Sudan have just been pushed to the swamps. It's a very inhospitable environment, as you may know, and it was done without compensation, without anything like that. A lot of human rights were violated just for the sake of oil exploration.

It has become a little more visible now, and most of the companies—including Chinese, Indian, and Malaysian companies—are now trying to compensate the population for dislodging them from their region. More infrastructure is being built. More roads are being built. Schools are being built for communities. Now there is more dialogue with communities than there was in the past. It's not perfect—far from it, and there is still a lot of progress to make—but I think there is awareness among the big players that they need to be accepted by the local population. It's not enough to have a deal with Khartoum, and the Chinese have realized that very quickly, or even a deal with Juba. It's not enough to have a deal with the leadership; they also have to be accepted locally.

In recent times, some of the installations have been attacked by JEM in south Kordofan, one of the transition areas. One of the rebel groups in Darfur attacked these installations because they see Chinese installations as supporting the budget of the government they are fighting, so they are targeting the nerve of the war, to be explicit. This is an issue, and that's why, to come back to the question of the gentleman here, it's important that oil revenues be shared and that the government of south Sudan be seen as sharing the revenues quite fairly with the population and with the various regions. This is not the case right now.

China in particular, I think, has generally changed its attitude towards the population and government of south Sudan. They have invited the leader of south Sudan to Beijing to discuss the future post-referendum. Interestingly, they have also contributed peacekeepers to UNMIS in certain regions of the south. It's basically a show. They're trying to show that they're doing some good for the local population, so there's a lot of marketing happening, more now than before. There are a few western companies. There's a Swedish company there in south Sudan, and of course they are the avant-garde of compensation packages and so on for the local population.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Pearson.

Mr. Glen Pearson: Following up on this idea about the oil revenues, I know that when Talisman was there—I was at Bentiu and I was there in the fields—the reflections of Canada by the locals were very negative. They were terribly negative. I think people tried to pressure Talisman into doing more to speak to the government. Talisman refused to do so because it felt that wasn't its place. I also realize that the war was going on and it was more complicated.

But I have met with the Chinese ambassador, both the old one and the new one, as well as others, and it seems to me that having somebody like China there, which is also on the Security Council, is a very, very important thing. Canada did not have that. There was nothing that Talisman could do about that.

It seems to me that we don't want to be involved in any operation that's going to get the people on the ground in Sudan to think that we as a country don't care about human rights. I think that's what Talisman got us into. It's difficult. I know. I met with the Talisman board. It was just difficult.

But now that we're in a new day and we're kind of past the CPA, do you think there is a way in which Canada can engage the Chinese government on issues around Sudan and around Darfur? Are there ways that we could maybe get them to use their position on the Security Council to continue to open up and to continue to try to do more in Sudan, as they have done? They've been more responsible in that way—in many ways—than we have. I know that's not popular to say, but I just think that's the reality of late. Do you have any views as to how Canada might be able to influence the Chinese?

Ms. Fabienne Hara: One of the reasons why the Government of Sudan has chosen to partner with China is that China buys the oil without conditions. There are no conditions attached to their business. There are more conditions now, especially in the last few years, because they are responding to the pressure they're under on Darfur. But there were no conditions.

I think the Chinese are also getting quite a good deal. The price of oil is cheaper for them in Sudan than anywhere else, which is also one of the reasons why the SPLM is not happy. They're getting 50% of the deal, but they're getting less money, of course, than if the oil was sold to U.S. companies or other international companies.

And absolutely, I think Canada can engage the Chinese government. I think they are receptive. I think they're willing to play a relatively constructive role. You should look at Chinese foreign policy over the years. It has now evolved, dramatically I would say. They are willing to be engaged on Sudan. Really, the issue that they've insisted on all along is the consent of the Government of Sudan. There is no chapter 7, no peace enforcement mission, and no imposition of force on Sudan, and there is respect for the consent of the government.

If you look at the situation in Sudan from the human rights perspective, it may not be acceptable, but if you look at it from a pragmatic political perspective, there was no way around it anyway. I think their position, in any case, was quite reasonable and reflected a certain reality.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hara.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I would like to comment on what you were about to say a little earlier. You asked what the international community wants. You mentioned stronger peacekeeping. So, let me ask the question, who are the international community?

To link this issue with the one Mr. Pearson just raised, someone has to take the leadership in that community and there has to be a real political will to define a political framework that presently does not exist. Even if we bring in more “robust“ peace missions, they will be tilting at windmills if the international community’s decisions are not made within a real political framework.

Ms. Fabienne Hara: The United Nations is only what its members want it to be. If the members want a political strategy, there will be one. The trend we have seen recently is for the Security Council, on behalf of all the members, to check off the “peace-keeping” box when there is nothing else, when there is no political strategy. It is a strategy by default, in a way.

So can we be surprised when missions like UNAMID or MINURCA find themselves in extremely hostile situations and are unable to have any effect on the ground? If there is no genuine support for a clear political strategy from the major countries, including Canada, none of the parties in the conflict are going to respect United Nations missions. Support for a political strategy has to be visible.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I don't know if anyone else has questions. It's more of an informal meeting today.

Ms. Hara, we certainly want to thank you for being here.

Someday I hope we can sit here and say this worked, this worked, and this worked. I think everyone hopes and prays that we will see effective change in Sudan and the countries around it. Somehow those countries immediately around Sudan need to have a certain place in the solution as well, when we see the drift of population, and stronger democracies and governance models in some of those countries. When you have a successful neighbour, some of those things tend to rub off.

Thank you for being here.

This meeting is adjourned.

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