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## Standing Committee on International Trade

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, May 13, 2010**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Lee Richardson**



## Standing Committee on International Trade

Thursday, May 13, 2010

• (1545)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC)):** We are now going to proceed with the Standing Committee on International Trade, meeting 17 of this session. Our order of reference is with regard to an act to implement the free trade agreement between the Republic of Colombia and Canada, the agreement on the environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, and the agreement on labour cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

We have had some changes in the schedule over the past week to try to accommodate people. Today, we are happy to have two witnesses with us. I think with just two witnesses we will go for an hour. That will give us plenty of time to ask questions. I would like to conclude today by wrapping up the Canada-U.S. procurement report.

We are now in session, so there won't be cameras going off, now that we're officially started.

With that, I'm going to begin by introducing our witnesses today. I see with us at the table we have Carleen Pickard from the Council of Canadians. Thank you for coming.

Via video conference we have Barbara Wood. I'm going to ask you to acknowledge that you can hear us.

**Ms. Barbara Wood (Executive Director, CoDevelopment Canada):** Yes, I can hear you. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I think we will proceed with opening statements. I'll ask Ms. Pickard, director of organizing with the Council of Canadians, to begin with a statement of up to 10 minutes. We're going to try to stick to that for a change. Then I'll ask Ms. Wood to give us an opening statement as well.

Ms. Pickard.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard (Director of Organizing, Council of Canadians):** Thank you.

To start, from February 3 to 15 of this year, I participated in an international pre-electoral observation mission to Colombia. As part of a 22-person group, we carried out observation in four of Colombia's departments: Cordoba, Valle del Cauca, Antioquia, and Santander, as well as the capital city of Bogota. The regional observation teams were made up of professionals from different countries, organizations, and disciplines to assure a broad and multi-faceted perspective to the mission.

I have previously observed pre-electoral conditions and election day voting in Mexico, the United States, and Ethiopia with the Carter Center. I offer this testimony as important consideration for the committee in regard to the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, as the existence of a strong and healthy democratic system should be a key consideration of the committee and the deliberation on the CCFTA. As with the question of whether to recommend ratification of the CCFTA without a human rights impact assessment, we are convinced that the exercise of democracy cannot be understood as an isolated event on the day of voting.

Our methodology for observation was designed to be as broad and inclusive as possible. We met with leaders of all major political parties, representatives of civil society organizations, local, state, and national government officials, electoral authorities, officials charged with electoral oversight on municipal and departmental levels, journalists, and members of the media. We also sought out direct contact with citizens, organized through the church, civic groups, unions, indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups, the LGBT community, displaced persons, feminists, and others.

The purpose of the mission was to gather information regarding the conditions surrounding the March 14 congressional elections, also relevant to the presidential elections at the end of this month. International standards stipulate that valid electoral observation cannot take place without a study of pre-electoral conditions, as these constitute the often invisible but determinant backdrop to voting on election day. In a situation of internal conflict, the presence of illegal armed groups, widespread violence and violation of human rights, and internal displacement, as in Colombia, this is especially critical.

In March of this year, each of your offices received a copy of the mission's final report. I'll use the bulk of my time to highlight our key concerns, with only a few of the examples that are covered in the report.

Our first concern relates to the influence of armed groups—paramilitaries and narco-traffickers—on the electoral process. The influence of narco-traffickers and armed actors on the electoral process in certain parts of Colombia is, by all indications, significant and alarming. Their forceful interventions are directly related to the ultimate objective of becoming the de facto political authority in various parts of the country. It is certain in places where these groups have been active or allowed to operate with impunity that the legitimacy of both the electoral process and the candidates elected during those campaigns has not been and will not be trusted by the people. High-profile scandals, many of which this committee has already heard about, further erode the people's sense that the government and its representatives exist to serve them and address their needs.

According to community leaders and organizations based in various parts of the country, the government bears a large portion of responsibility for the recent expansion of the armed banditry and violence that is evident in all areas of social life, including electoral politics. Evidence from numerous sources indicate narco-traffickers and armed actors in and around Buenaventura are heavily involved with all aspects of electoral politics, including handing out gifts and bribing and intimidating candidates and the electorate, monitoring polling places, and directly interfering with poll workers and ballots after the voting process has ended.

Our second concern is about electoral fraud and electoral crimes. In our meeting with Colombian citizens, elected officials, and representatives of political parties, the following complaints were registered, which constitute interference with the free exercise of voting. To begin, in all regions there were reports that official poll watchers have been bought by parties to promote their interests and either turn a blind eye to irregularities or actively participate in them. These include activities such as marking ballots in favour of their candidate, falsifying vote counts, or annulling ballots that were already marked for opposing candidates. This level of collusion is essential to operationalize many of the additional strategies I'll talk about here.

The buying and selling of votes is the most common complaint received by the regional delegations in the mission. Citizens in Tierra Alta, Montelibano, and Monteria reported being offered anything from bags of cement and roofing materials to the construction of houses, to cash payments of 20,000 to 50,000 pesos, which is between \$10 and \$25 Canadian, per vote.

• (1550)

Typically, voters and representatives of opposition parties reported that vote buying from various political parties would require confirmation that a citizen had voted as agreed before paying the full amount. There are various methods for ensuring this, including taking photos of the marked ballot with a camera phone or just a regular camera, or using carbon copies to reproduce the vote.

The misuse of voter ID cards was commonly cited as a method of voter fraud in all regions. ID cards from people from other voting districts, counterfeit cards, or even cards from deceased persons have been used.

In the mission's final report we also discuss and cite examples of election observers being removed or obstructed from observing

election day activities and report impediments to the right to vote as related by witnesses we interviewed.

In the final report we also discuss testimony of the existence of illegal electoral campaign financing practices, especially originating in drug trafficking, which I will not elaborate on here in order to respect the time guidelines.

Third, there is the use of government programs to influence election results.

Acción Social is the agency that channels national and international resources to social programs under the presidency and that attends to the needs of vulnerable sectors of the population affected by poverty, violence, and drug trafficking.

Among the different programs that have been developed under Acción Social, the Familias en Acción program is the most recognized at the national level and has the broadest coverage, serving nearly three million families. The program consists of providing conditioned subsidies to mothers and poor families and/or families displaced by violent conflict, on the condition that they fulfill commitments such as sending their children to school, regularly attending health evaluations, etc.

After analyzing the results of all four regional delegations, we were impressed to find that a wide variety of sources coincided in affirming that candidates of the ruling Partido de la U and other parties in the governing coalition have attended meetings with beneficiaries of the social programs, at which they stated that if the beneficiaries do not support them with their votes, the subsidies they receive from the president will end.

It is of grave concern that there appears to be no separation between the presidential figure and the needed government programs that attend to displaced persons and other vulnerable sectors, and from reports we've received, there's an alarmingly high rate of manipulation and misinformation on the part of regional politicians regarding Familias en Acción. This practice leaves open the possibility of manipulation of subsidies and the restriction of the voters' right to choose freely who to vote for.

Before ending, I want to point your attention to the OAS election report released on May 6 after the March 16 congressional elections; it highlights similar findings in regard to vote-buying and lack of citizen participation and understanding of the democratic process during that congressional election. Reports commending the fact that these elections were the most peaceful in years indicate that the bar for Colombian democracy is pretty low, when the absence of bombings at polling centres or of assassinations of candidates is a marker of a successful election.

Pre-electoral observation includes a multitude of factors that run from daily participation in decision-making by a free and informed citizenry to defence of national sovereignty at the geopolitical level. For this reason, we strongly believe that an in-depth analysis of the social and political conditions in the country is indispensable, since these constitute the often invisible but crucial backdrop to the electoral process.

I would offer that in consideration of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, the human rights impact assessment proposed by this committee is an essential step to understanding the context on the ground in Colombia.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation. I would say in addition that I feel strongly that the committee needs to continue to hear from the outstanding list of witnesses who have requested to testify in the coming weeks.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Vancouver to hear Barbara Wood by video conference. She is the executive director of CoDevelopment Canada.

Ms. Wood.

•(1555)

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** Thank you.

I am the executive director of CoDevelopment Canada, an international development NGO based in Vancouver that works with communities and organizations in Latin America from a rights-based approach.

I have been in human rights and development work focused on Latin America for more than 25 years. As part of my work with CoDev, I manage the program in Colombia that we've been engaged in since 2001. I have travelled to Colombia on numerous occasions and have met with a large and diverse group of Colombians, including government ministers, local and regional authorities, trade unions, indigenous groups, religious groups, political parties, displaced people, and human rights groups.

My most recent experience there was with the pre-electoral mission that Carleen has just described.

I will focus my presentation today on the human rights situation. You have by now heard or received a great deal of testimony focusing on the Colombian human rights situation. Most everyone, including the Colombian minister of trade, recognizes there is a serious problem. That is where the agreement ends, it seems. Some think the situation is good enough that we ought to enter into a trade deal and hope that the trade deal itself will further propel positive change. Others see the situation as one of profound and systemic human rights violations that will only be exacerbated by a trade deal.

There seem to be a couple of questions central to this discussion, which I think are worth bringing up. How bad does a situation have to be in order for Canada to say we couldn't possibly engage in a trade deal with this country?

The second question, I think, is whether or not a trade agreement is a possible vehicle to improve human rights violations, as some have proposed.

The first question has no clear answer, but it is an important one with which to grapple, I believe. Some members of the committee have stated there is no country in the world, including ours, that does not suffer from human rights violations. This is true, but in speaking about Colombia, this statement becomes so reductionist as to become meaningless.

Colombia leads the world in the number of trade unionists killed and people internally displaced, as you have already heard. The situation of indigenous people is alarming. Last year, in 2009, 114 indigenous people were assassinated, a 63% increase over 2008. Furthermore, 6,201 indigenous people were violently expelled from their ancestral homelands last year as well. Extrajudicial executions continue in unacceptably high numbers. In the region of Cordoba, on the Caribbean coast, where I visited in February, in 2009 alone they had 569 extrajudicial executions, the highest number ever recorded there. Virtually all of these killings—and they included municipal leaders and teachers and campesinos and other leaders—were widely seen to be committed by the paramilitaries.

I could go on. The numbers are staggering and horrific, and each one represents an individual with a family, a community, and friends. It is simply misleading to indicate that Colombia is but one of many countries that has “some problems”.

My work is never far from my mind, but the situation in Colombia was brought closer again last Thursday when I received a request for urgent action from our human rights partner in Colombia, NOMADESC. They, and several other leaders and communities with whom they work, had received another death threat. Those who were threatened included indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders from the region of northern Cauca, as well as trade union leaders, opposition politicians, and human rights defenders.

Our partner, NOMADESC, has been the target of intimidation and surveillance for many, many months now. Their offices are openly watched; their telephone calls are regularly disrupted; they've recently suffered two robberies, and a near fatal car accident when their car was forced off the road. They see these incidents as part of the intimidation campaign against them.

The communities that NOMADESC works with, and that were also named in the April 8 threat in northern Cauca, are especially vulnerable. A massacre of eight miners there in early April has ratcheted up the tension there even more than the numerous killings before the end of the year did.

•(1600)

This one urgent action is not an isolated case, as you will know from all you have heard here in committee. Human rights violations in Colombia are systematic and more than 95% of the time are left in total and absolute impunity. The situation is unacceptable.

We need to look at who is behind this violence and abuse. The guerrilla armed forces of the FARC and the ELN have their share of responsibility for abuses in the country, including the use of anti-personnel mines and the recruitment of child soldiers. The vast majority of abuses, however, are the work of the paramilitary organizations, which continue to operate throughout Colombia despite an official demobilization process.

The groups of today, sometimes known as the successor groups, or, in Colombia's slang, the recycled paramilitaries, number between 4,000 and 10,000. Despite claims to the contrary by the Colombian government that paramilitaries no longer exist and that the few armed troops that are out there are merely criminal gangs, no credible human rights organization makes this same claim—none. The paramilitary demobilization was a flawed process that did not disband the economic and political structures, which the paramilitary bought up and allowed any who did not demobilize to walk right in and continue acting.

As you've also heard here in the committee, the para-politics scandal has brought to light the vast web of connections and power relationships between elected officials from the ruling party's coalition and the paramilitaries. Recent congressional elections have done little to change that.

Further proof that Colombia is not the country that Canada would like to have as a trading partner is the continuing scandal of the DAS, or the Department of Administrative Security. The DAS is a presidential intelligence body that has been under scrutiny in the past year for illegal activities, including wiretapping of Supreme Court judges, human rights defenders, trade union leaders, and even international human rights bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN High Commission on Human Rights.

Their activities did not stop at wiretapping, however. They are also responsible for sending death threats, committing illegal break-ins, stealing computers and other materials from their victims, and passing information about their victims directly to the paramilitary. Information continues to come to light about the depth and breadth of this illegal program, but there's ample evidence that these activities were not the actions of isolated individuals.

Meetings took place in the presidential palace with officials close to the president, including his previous adviser and also his personal secretary. In fact, the president of the Supreme Court in Colombia recently qualified this as "a conspiracy of the state against the court, a criminal action".

Although the DAS has now been disbanded, there are many outstanding questions about who the intellectual authors of these actions were. If this is not uncovered and tried through court proceedings, it is feared these illegal activities will continue under another name or in a different department.

Can trade agreements help to resolve human rights issues? We don't think that in this case it's possible because we're involved with a government that is complicit in human rights violations through judicial inaction and the direct involvement of its agents. The human rights amendment that has been put forward is not an adequate instrument to address the serious situation, especially because it relies on the Colombian government itself to make reports on itself.

Colombia is a complex country faced with many challenges. As Canadians, before we enter into this territory, the least we can do is to carry out a full and impartial human rights impact assessment, as was agreed to here in this committee two years ago. Such an instrument will give us more information as well as objective measures and indicators with which to make an informed decision

and that could form the basis for ongoing monitoring and evaluation should we decide to go ahead with this deal.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I thank both our witnesses for their courtesy in staying within the timeframe we established.

We're going to begin our round of questioning. We're going to have time for at least one full round and perhaps a second shorter round.

We'll begin with Mr. Brison, the Liberal critic.

• (1605)

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Thank you, Ms. Wood.

You stated that the human rights amendment and the binding agreement that will be signed by the Canadian and the Colombian governments requires only that Colombia write reports on their own human rights. Is that what you believe to be the fact?

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** I don't have full information on what that amendment includes, but I understand that the Colombian government would be responsible for presenting reports on the human rights impacts of this trade deal in their country.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** You're right. You do not have and you have not taken time to gain or ascertain the information that you probably ought to have. The fact is, the Canadian government will write a report on Colombian human rights. That report will draw on the NGO community, and it will draw on input from the civil society community. It will be reported to Parliament on an annual basis, and we can debate it at a trade committee or a human rights committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to communicate that, but you did present what is false as a fact. It troubles me because it reflects what I believe to be a bias you have. If in fact you were willing to provide half truths to support your ideological argument on something so easily determined simply with a phone call to my office, then I wonder whether much of what you provided to our committee is based on rigid ideological aversion to trade and how much of it is actually based on well-researched fact. There is a certain responsibility for those who appear before our committee to bring us fact and not necessarily pure rhetoric.

I have a question for Ms. Pickard—

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** May I respond to that? You just made some fairly.... May I respond, please?

**Hon. Scott Brison:** No, I didn't ask for a response. I'm fine.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** You made some pretty significant accusations.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** That was a pretty offensive comment. Please allow the witness to reply.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** My next question is for Ms. Pickard.

**The Chair:** Mr. Brison has the floor.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Ms. Pickard, you've spoken of national sovereignty and the importance of respecting national sovereignty in Colombia. In the congressional election there was only one party against free trade agreements and that was Polo, and the result for this election was that 7% of Colombians voted for the anti-free trade party. Several recent polls have demonstrated that the same party in the presidential election is tracking at 4% to 5%. Isn't it disrespectful of Colombian national sovereignty to not respect the independence of that nation when they say they want these free trade agreements?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** What I presented in my report to the committee is based on the findings from our pre-electoral report. What I put forward were findings of problems we found in the electoral process. What you'll find in the report, if you read it, is it doesn't make a judgment on the free trade agreement or not, or whether or not the will of the people in Colombia is being respected. It reports on the serious concerns around the longstanding problems inherent to the system at that point that will take a lot of effort by whatever government ends up being in Colombia, whatever government needs to deal with these issues.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** You did discuss free trade in terms of its potentially deleterious effect on sovereignty in Colombia.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** No, I don't believe I did. When I was referring to the free trade agreement, I was referring to the fact that if Canada wants to enter into a free trade agreement, then this committee should be considering the democratic process in Colombia: the process, the mechanisms, and what the institution of democracy in Colombia itself—

**Hon. Scott Brison:** The logical corollary of your argument is that we should consider as well the democratic will of the Colombian people. That is what you're saying.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** What I'm saying.... Certainly, the point of the electoral mission was to look at the democratic process in Colombia and make comments on that, and vis-à-vis how the will of the people is expressed is one key component to it. But I think there are a number of holes that we identified in the report about impediments for people who are actually unable to do that on the ground in Colombia. What I present to the committee is that the discussion around the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, from what I've observed, has been an assumption that there is a healthy and robust democracy in Colombia, and therefore the ability for people to express their—

• (1610)

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Have you studied the democratic institutions and elections of Venezuela?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** Sorry, I just want to finish that thought. What we put forward in the report was that if that does not exist, then the committee should be considering it, and one of the main ways to do this is through the human rights impact assessment.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Have you, as an organization, looked at the electoral processes in Venezuela?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** The organization I currently work with...?

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Yes.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** No.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Only Colombia.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** The organization I currently work with is separate from the delegation that I attended.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Okay. I was just curious.

You speak about the terrible impact of the narco-traffickers and the drug trade on the people of Colombia. Why do you think people get involved in that? Why do you think that, as young people, they get involved in that activity?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** If you're asking my personal opinion.... Again, it was certainly not something we looked at. We looked at the democratic process in Colombia.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** No, but you spoke of drug traffickers several times as being an impediment to democratic progress in Colombia.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** The violence created by the drug trafficking, absolutely—

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Yes, but why do you think people get involved in that drug trade?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** There are a number of reasons, but I think there are certainly organizations better able to speak to that.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** I'm asking you. You're a smart person. Why do you think people get involved in the drug trade?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** I don't think—

**Hon. Scott Brison:** I'm just asking you the question. When I met with people in Colombia, former FARC members and demobilized paramilitary people told me the reason they got into the drug trade is that it was the only way they had to make a living. It was the only job they could get.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** I think that's one widely accepted reason for people getting into drug trafficking, certainly.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** What would some other widely accepted reasons be? Do they just wake up and say, "I want to join the drug trade, that looks really cool"?

I'm just curious. If you agree that one widely accepted reason is that there's no other opportunity, and if you don't have any other widely accepted reasons, then let that widely accepted reason be accepted here—

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** I said it's one of the accepted, absolutely. It's not the only one.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Well, what are the other reasons that people join the drug trade?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** Again, this isn't a field that I've studied. I think it's very complicated, as you said. I don't think somebody wakes up one day and says, "Oh, I can't wait to get involved in the drug trade." I think people have very complicated life situations that cover a myriad of problems.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Yes, like to eat or not to eat.

But let's assume you're right. You just said it is widely accepted that people join the drug trade because there is no other economic opportunity, and that the drug trade has a pernicious effect on democracy in Colombia. So isn't providing rules-based trade opportunities in the legitimate global economy important in helping to foster peace and democracy in Colombia? Doesn't that make a lot of sense to you?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** I think that providing rules-based trade is certainly not going to end the drug trade in Colombia. We've seen that with Plan Colombia in the United States. That has not worked in any way to positively impact the drug trade.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Okay, so tell me how not buying legitimate goods produced in Colombia will help end the drug trade.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** It's outside of the discussion, other than if you're asserting that the free trade agreement should exist because it will end the drug trade in Colombia.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Well, free trade doesn't end the drug trade in Canada either, does it?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** And it certainly hasn't in Mexico, after many years of NAFTA. We have seen an increase, a dramatic increase, of violence in the drug trade in northern Mexico.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Your organization, we know, was against NAFTA. We know that. You're also against the Canada-EU FTA. We don't have a Canada-EU FTA, but you're already against it.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** You're speaking about the Council of Canadians, just to be clear.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Yes.

Name a free trade agreement your organization has supported.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** Again, the bulk of this testimony doesn't come from my position at the Council of Canadians. It is as a participant on this delegation. Therefore, I'm not speaking to our position as the Council of Canadians on free trade.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Okay.

My colleague—

**The Chair:** I'll get you on the second round.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** A point of order, Mr. Chair. It has been 10 minutes already.

Will we have the same period of time?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I was just about to go to you, but you're eating your time.

Monsieur Laforest.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Mrs. Wood and Mrs. Pickard.

It seems to me that Mr. Brison's questions were misleading in the sense that the issue is to know what comes first, the chicken or the egg. It is quite clear that if the government of Colombia were to set up a judicial system able to put an end to the drug trade, people would not be involved in that activity. That is what it should do first, I believe. Before claiming that a free trade agreement will make people want to grow something else than the components of cocaine, it should think about protecting those people. As a first step, cultivating plants for the production of cocaine should be forbidden. Steps should be taken for that. Then, and only then, might it be possible to have a free-trade agreement.

Last year, the Standing Committee on International Trade gave unanimous consent to an independent study that would be carried out before accepting this agreement. Unfortunately, Mr. Brison moved an amendment stating that the assessment would be done by Canada and Colombia one year after the agreement coming into force. This is totally unacceptable to us, to say the least, because it would mean that no pressure could be exerted on the government of Colombia to make it improve the human rights situation. Furthermore, I do not agree with Mr. Brison telling Mrs. Wood that she is prejudiced. I believe that parliamentarians, before deciding if they are for or against such an agreement, should make sure that they have as much information as possible.

Unlike you, I have never been to n Colombia. So, I would ask you to tell us how you assess the pre-electoral situation and the human rights situation. Also, Mrs. Wood and Mrs. Pickard, I do not think you are prejudiced. You have reported to us your observations, which will allow us to make an informed decision. I would like to know if you believe that the proposed amendment would really force the government of Colombia to take steps to eradicate human rights violations in that country.

• (1615)

[*English*]

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** I was surprised.

I would like to say, first of all, that I have never been treated with such disrespect. I am astonished that my credibility has been put into question by Mr. Brison in such a way.

My position is based on a belief in human rights, a very passionate belief in the need for respect and promotion of human rights, and by my almost 30 years of experience working in this field. I have compiled my presentation from various credible sources and from the many times I've been there, as you've just pointed out, sir.

The amendment that's being proposed...as Mr. Brison so ably put out, I was not fully informed on all the indicators the report would be based on. However, I do not believe it will make a significant or a positive difference in this situation to begin to look at the impact the free trade agreement has had on the human rights situation a year into a free trade agreement, when we know we're walking into a situation where the human rights situation is already absolutely alarming and systemic.

I still believe that if we could do a study previous to...it would give us more information to make a credible and better-informed decision, and perhaps then set out some markers and indicators that might fall into the same amendment we're putting forward now. But we would be better informed walking into it.

• (1620)

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** Thank you very much.

To start with the question of whether the amendment will give the Colombian government any ability to impact the human rights condition, one thing I would talk about, which we also lay out in the report to some degree—but there are various other reports, which I'd encourage people to look into—is the process that the Colombian government put in to “demobilize” paramilitary groups.

We've seen, since the law of peace and justice was put into effect in Colombia, a number of people come forward who have described themselves as paramilitary groups and have said that they were going to put down their weapons now and become officially demobilized. Then they either serve some time or they give some testimony talking about the paramilitary groups they were involved in, and then are sent out into society again. There are accounts, there are reports, there is information about the failure of this. That President Uribe stands in Colombia now and says that there are no more paramilitary groups, because he has essentially wiped away the definition of paramilitary groups in Colombia, does not mean there are not any paramilitary groups in Colombia.

Picking up on the pieces that Barbara spoke to, which I would support and back up, which are based on factual reports from international and human rights organizations as well as global institutions that we all accept, the issue around the demobilization of paramilitary groups has not worked in Colombia. You still see the same operations on the ground in the smaller and mid-sized communities that we visited as part of this pre-electoral delegation.

Having walked into a situation in which the government has already tried, of its own volition, to institute a number of rules and regulations to dismantle incredibly corrupt and incredibly violent organizations in Colombia, it seems to me that simply asking them one year from now to write a report on how it's going isn't going to enable them in any further way to impact the situation, just by the virtue of this amendment.

In closing on that, the last thing I would say is that it's similar to any of kind of process that is signed and sealed with consultation after the fact. A colleague recently looking into it asked, isn't this an example of one of the old adages we all know, a case of the fox guarding the chicken coop? We can't possibly expect that there'd be reporting from an institution that itself wants to remain in a deal, as we've seen with the Uribe administration. Whatever the outcome of this upcoming election is will presumably support free trade. As Mr. Brison says, there's overwhelming support.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest:** Colombia and the United States negotiated a free-trade agreement in 2006, two years before Canada. Our agreement has not yet been ratified by the Parliament of Canada and it is the same situation in the United States even though their agreement was negotiated four years ago. We have heard, seen and read that the issue of human rights is what prevents final ratification of that agreement and its implementation.

Considering the potential size and scope of US trade with Colombia, could we not take it for granted that they would be much more able than us to achieve a reduction of human rights violations in Colombia? If they are unable to do so, how could we believe that we would be more successful?

[*English*]

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** If I could just quickly clarify—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. You're at nine and a half minutes.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** I could be very quick in my—

**The Chair:** Mr. Julian.

You can answer to Mr. Julian, if you'd like.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Ms. Pickard and Ms. Wood. I appreciate your coming forward today. We are still only beginning to hear from the witnesses we need to hear from. It's very important that you're here today.

Ms. Wood, I'd like to apologize for the conduct of my colleague. CoDevelopment Canada has a very strong reputation among MPs of all parties in British Columbia, and I know that Liberal MPs from B. C. will not be happy with the way you were treated today. Thank you for coming forward and speaking to us.

I'd like to come to the issue of elections that you have spoken about—

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. I was simply informing her that she was, as a witness, promoting something that was false at committee, and I corrected her—

• (1625)

**Mr. Peter Julian:** If you'll allow me to speak, Mr. Brison, I'd like to question the witnesses.

**Hon. Scott Brison:**—and she then accepted my correction, which is something I wish the honourable member Mr. Julian would start understanding as well.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I'd like to continue the questioning. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Julian, but you did interrupt Mr. Brison in the middle of his time. But carry on.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Well, that wasn't a point of order, Mr. Chair, as you well know.

**The Chair:** Well, I'll be the judge of that.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Fair enough. You are a good judge. I will say that, Mr. Chair.

The electoral issues you've raised—fear and coercion, vote buying and selling, misuse of identity documents, illegal possession of identity documents, coercion and intimidation of voters, fraud—paint a pretty stark portrait. When we talk about sovereignty in Colombia, I'm wondering whether there are any precedents of a government trying to push ahead—as the Conservative government is doing—with an agreement in the midst of an election campaign, particularly one that's characterized by all these obstacles to free and fair elections.

In the past Canada has played a role in observing and condemning governments that don't allow free and fair elections. I can't think of a precedent where you have a government actively interfering, as they are in pushing ahead with this agreement at this time.

I'd like to ask both of you, do you think this in some way might legitimize the brutality of the Colombian secret police, the Colombian military, the Colombian paramilitaries in trying to push ahead with this agreement at a time when the government is actively stopping the free and fair elections in all regions of Colombia and the factors that would contribute to free and fair elections there?

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** My sense is that if they were truly concerned about our free trade agreement and the opinions of Canadians and the Canadian government, we may have actually seen less of these illegal and violent activities during an electoral campaign than what we saw. In fact, from what we heard from hundreds, even thousands, of people on the ground, these illegal activities have not diminished.

I don't think the fact that we have been promoting a free trade agreement during an electoral campaign has actually had an effect, which I think we could then extrapolate to question our influence in being able to positively affect the violent situation in Colombia through a free trade agreement.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** I would add to that, in agreement with Barbara, saying obviously the Colombian government hasn't made a larger effort to take any...and not just our recommendations but other recommendations of international organizations that have been on the ground in Colombia, to make any concrete changes toward the concerns that are raised.

Outside of that, the question around whether or not the Canadian government should be pushing forward during an electoral process I think certainly is important to consider. At the same time, I go back to the case of the independent human rights impact assessment.

I've read through most of the testimony to this committee to date on the assessment, and I haven't heard anybody say they think it's a really fantastic amendment and therefore it's unnecessary to do the human rights impact assessment report. I do wonder why the committee is seeing this as taking the place of the human rights impact assessment report, when really that is an outstanding piece of important investigation that the committee should be presenting to the government so that people can fully understand what's happening on the ground.

In closing, I want to quickly add to the question around the United States being able to impact the human rights situation. I think we've seen Plan Colombia to date.... I'm not sure how familiar everyone is with Plan Colombia, but we certainly haven't seen a decrease in the drug trade. We haven't seen a decrease in the violence.

The numbers that Barbara outlined in her presentation clearly point to a dramatic increase, in a lot of cases, in killings and in violence in communities. So the amount of money that the United States has put into Plan Colombia has clearly not had an impact on making people's lives better in Colombia.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you for that.

Obviously, when you look at the Mexico situation, where a rules-based trading system has led to a rural meltdown in Mexico and a substantial increase in drug-related murders and drug trafficking, it would be ridiculous for anyone around this table to try to pretend that rules-based systems actually bring an end to drug trafficking and crime. In fact, what's happened is exactly the opposite, but that's a discussion, Mr. Chair, for another time.

I'd like to come to the issue of amendments. We have had commentary on the amendment that Mr. Brison has offered, even though we've only started to hear from human rights groups and labour organizations. The CCIC said it lacks credibility and the

damage from a non-credible process is high. The ITUC, Mr. Benedict, said on Tuesday that it wasn't a credible amendment.

I'd like you to say in a word what you think about the amendment, how you'd describe the amendment, and whether you believe it lacks credibility.

Secondly, there's the whole issue around whether the Canadian government actually looks at the report that the Colombian government produces. We have, unfortunately, stark evidence of this when the DFAIT testimony on Colombian human rights was exactly the same as the Colombian government's testimony on human rights, glossing over all of the appalling human rights violations that are taking place there. What we have is a carbon copy from both governments, I think proving the theory that this is simply the Colombian government producing a report and the Canadian government rubber-stamping it.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Mr. Chair, the member is attacking the public servants of Canada.

**The Chair:** No.

Please continue, Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Finally, there's the difference between the issue of what Mr. Uribe and Mr. Santos have said about human rights and what they say behind the scenes. The BBC reported that Mr. Uribe said those serving human rights just end up promoting the policies desired by those in collusion with terrorism, in other words, connecting human rights activists to terrorists. Could you comment?

• (1630)

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** Over the two terms of Mr. Uribe's time as president in Colombia he has made numerous public accusations against human rights defenders in particular, but also journalists and trade unionists, as being terrorists, or as being militants of terrorist organizations, or covering up for terrorists.

This is extremely unfortunate, but also extremely dangerous in a situation like Colombia, where to be linked with a guerrilla or a terrorist organization is tantamount to having a target on your forehead. Human rights organizations internationally have repeatedly asked that this kind of public and official statement not be made because it is indeed so dangerous, and absolutely inappropriate as well. It's unfortunate that those statements have been made and continue to be made, if not by the president, then by some of his closest allies.

Getting back to the point of whether the amendment dealing with human rights has credibility, I would say it does not. Regardless of who is collecting that information, the Colombian government will still have, as I understand it, a fair amount of control over what the report says because it will be reporting on them. Indeed, it will be difficult I think to be able to make a fair and impartial judgment of the human rights situation at that point.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** I would briefly add that in July I was in Bogota for a very short amount of time, for six days. We were down there looking at the feasibility of doing this mission in February. At that time we went to the Colombian government. We met with the government-funded, -sponsored, and -promoted human rights office, the human rights commission. We met with a woman there who is the spokesperson on human rights for the Colombian government. She said emphatically, over and over again, that her commission was not funded enough to be able to speak to or to make a human rights evaluation or assessment of the situation.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Trost.

**Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I don't hog the time, I will end up sharing it with my colleague, the parliamentary secretary.

I have to say, this has been one of the most bizarre and odd legislation or treaty study things I've ever worked on, in that, by and large, the debate is not what is best for Canada, which is normally what we tend to do. We have some of our agriculture groups here, and it seems to be generally accepted that this trade deal is good for Canada economically. But what we seem to have had is a bit of a debate between the witnesses, pro and against, about whether this is a good trade deal for Colombians.

If I can summarize—and correct me if I'm way off base here—the essence of the argument I'm hearing from the two witnesses today and otherwise is that this is a bad deal for Colombians because ultimately it will legitimize the current regime, its allies or its perceived allies, depending on who you're talking to, and their behaviour in abusing elections, human rights, etc. Am I accurately summing up the core of the argument? Everyone has details about what has been done and whatnot, but essentially you're saying this is a bad deal for Colombians. It's bad to have this free trade deal agreement because it will legitimize an illegitimate regime. Is that close to what the core is?

Please be fairly brief in your answers. Is that the core of your argument?

• (1635)

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** I believe Canada has an important role to play in the world in terms of having an impact on trade, human rights, and development in countries.

**Mr. Brad Trost:** Could you give me a more direct answer?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** I know my argument is not that this is a bad deal for Colombia; it's a very bad signal that Canada is sending to the rest of the world.

**Mr. Brad Trost:** So I was close there, but I can accept that I was a little bit off. This could be a good deal for Colombians, but Canada is sending a bad signal by doing it. Would that be more accurate to state?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** No.

**Mr. Brad Trost:** See, I'm having a bit of a hard time getting this one, because it's not an argument about whether it's good for Canada. We seem to have that.

From my perspective, if it's good for Canada and good for Colombia, why wouldn't we do it? So who is this deal ultimately bad for?

I'll go to our friend in Vancouver.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** Thank you.

In addition to what Carleen has said, which I think is a very important and weighty issue that we need to consider as Canadians, I also believe that although a human rights impact assessment—believe me, I feel like a broken record in continuing to say it—would help us to see this better, the trade agreement with Colombia could exacerbate an already staggeringly difficult human rights situation.

There needs to be more—

**Mr. Brad Trost:** So you're saying it would be bad for Colombia because it would exacerbate the human rights situation.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** There's a very great potential for that, and that's what I think an impact assessment could help us to see.

**Mr. Brad Trost:** Here's the problem I have with where your argument is going. Maybe that argument is true and accurate, but you're asking a bunch of Canadians to make that judgment for Colombians.

I have a sister-in-law from Cali, Colombia. I'm having some friends up tonight from Colombia. I'm hosting them in the parliamentary restaurant. One of them used to be a human rights attorney down there and did work on various things, until, for various reasons, she was forced out of the position. When I go down there, I talk to friends, and I don't see the opposition to it that I see from Canadians. There are some who are opposed, there are some who are in favour, but we keep having a problem in that the political parties that don't support the agreement tend to have very little support.

I know we've talked about how there has been crookedness and corruption in the elections, and I don't doubt that. With Chicago, and with Tammany Hall, American politics had a lot of that, too. I can list incidents here in Canada as well. But ultimately, shouldn't we let Colombians decide what this is all about? Wouldn't you say, at the end of the day, Colombians need to decide whether this is a good deal for Colombia, and Canadians need to decide whether this is a good deal for Canada?

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** I agree with you.

Go ahead, Carleen.

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** Thanks, Barbara. I'll be brief.

I think the purpose of this committee is to determine whether or not this is good for Canada, and overall a good deal. I'll take the opportunity now to say that I do not understand the opposition to a human rights impact assessment report. If it uncovered that it would be positive for Colombia and positive for Canada, then that report would have been dutifully done.

You heard from Yessika Hoyos Morales, an attorney from Colombia, so you have heard from people in Colombia who are also speaking to, from, and on behalf of the people in Colombia.

•(1640)

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** I think also that we have many people—names have been put forward—from Colombia who would be able to speak directly to the committee as Colombians. I know some of them have been heard, and I hope that more are able to be heard. I think your point is well taken, and we need to hear from Colombians from a diverse representation of civil society.

May I also give just a quick background to Colombian politics. For those of you who know, in the eighties, the demobilized guerillas from the M-19 formed a political party called the Unión Patriótica, in which they decided to disarm and join the political process through an agreement with all parties. Over the course of the next decade, less than a decade, over 3,000 candidates—

**Mr. Brad Trost:** Thank you.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** —including presidential candidates.... I'm just saying that—

**Mr. Brad Trost:** Yes, I grasp that it's there, but—

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** —the political situation in Colombia is not as black and white as—

**Mr. Brad Trost:** When the Green Party candidate—

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** It's hard to be in opposition in Colombia.

**Mr. Brad Trost:** —who describes himself as post-Uribe—he's leading in the polls, and he has no connection to any of the ruling parties—says he thinks the free trade agreement is good, and when my friends down there, who I'm talking and working with.... When I ask them what it is, it's the economy; they want a better life. Heads of households, single moms, will benefit from this agreement. Poor people who want cheaper food will benefit from this agreement. Bakers who want less expensive wheat will benefit from the agreement. When I see those tangible things, and I don't see any political support, or very minor political support, for a party that is opposed to it, I have a hard time thinking that even with 1,000 witnesses or 100,000 witnesses in a country of 44 million people, there is significant majority opposition to this agreement.

I think I'm done.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** My point, before you cut me off, was just that—

**The Chair:** We'll go to Mr. Keddy.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** May I just finish that?

**Mr. Brad Trost:** That wasn't a question.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** May I finish my point?

**The Chair:** Mr. Keddy.

**Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC):** I do have a question, Ms. Wood. Welcome to our witnesses today.

I realize I don't have a lot of time left, but I do have a couple of questions and a couple of points that I want to make.

Ms. Wood, I appreciate the fact that even though you're in opposition to this agreement, you at least mentioned the fact of the indigenous people who have been assassinated. What you didn't mention is who's responsible for that. So what we continually hear is that the violence in Colombia is very complex, and it's been institutionalized in society over a very long period of time. But if

you look at the graph, the graph is going upward at a major angle; it's not going downward.

My question to you is on the 114 indigenous people who have been assassinated. How many of those individuals were assassinated by narco-traffickers and by FARC?

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** Or by the paramilitaries. I have those numbers—

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** I'm assuming they weren't just a number. I'm assuming they're real people who died in the jungle, and therefore somebody is responsible.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** Absolutely. That's correct.

Those numbers are from the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, ONIC, which is an organization that includes indigenous organizations from the entire country, and those are their numbers. In fact, they may be low because they had an extra 62 numbers reported to them at the end of last year, which they were still investigating when the certificate came out.

I did not see the statistics as to who was responsible for all of those killings—

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** It was not the government.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** —although I do know that FARC guerillas have been responsible for some and paramilitary forces have been responsible for some as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll get back to trade issues in a minute.

Mr. Cannis.

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It all has to do with trade.

I'll just pick up from my good friend, Brad Trost. I really enjoyed his opening statement, because with all due respect, we've not been focusing on what's good for Canada.

Mr. Chairman, you'll recall yesterday we had a gentleman from the forest products industry, and I think two meetings ago we had another gentleman representing a very large organization. I asked him if he had unionized people, and he said yes. I asked if it would affect the industries in terms of revenue for Canada and Canadian households, and he said it would.

I think that's where Mr. Trost is coming from. I didn't know he had relatives from Colombia, but I think that adds another dimension for me from what he's hearing.

Not to trample on human rights at any cost—don't get me wrong, that's not what I'm saying—but I think we're being a bit naive if we don't think we have human rights violations here in Canada, people who have been wrongfully incarcerated, for example, and we find down the road we made a mistake.

So from that aspect, I would ask the two presenters, whom I welcome, to rethink it. When we talk about basing this year or nay on the fact that there were election violations, Mr. Chairman, we had a referendum in 1995, and what did the news talk about? There were violations, electoral violations. There were. I know of a riding in the great city of Toronto where they talked about taking names from cemeteries, Mr. Chairman. So does it happen here in our country?

The gentleman is laughing. It happens. So I guess we should tell the world, don't deal with Canada.

Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to ask the question.... I'm just going to say it's my understanding—and if I'm wrong, I would ask the two presenters to correct me—that there is no trade deal they have ever spoken in favour of or supported. I'm saying this only so that the audience out there listening to us, Canadians who foot the bills.... I know who pays my salary, the Canadian taxpayers. I don't know who pays their salaries or their expenses. That's their privilege. But I want Canadians to know that there are two sides to every story here.

For example, they talk about kidnappings. That's very important. I come back with these statistics: in 2002 there were almost 3,000 kidnappings, and now they're down to 213. I think they've made some progress. Can they do better? I believe they should do better.

Victims of massacres: in 2002 there were close to 700. They're down to 147. I think 147 is too many. Terrorist acts: close to 1,700; down to about 450. They've made some improvements, I want to tell our witnesses.

At the end of the day, we know they're working with the indigenous communities as well. For example, scholarships are being set up to help these people get an education and be able to improve their lives. Mr. Chairman, that is a step in the right direction. The rights of indigenous people...for example, in the Durban review conference they're making these efforts.

I'm going to close here and give the rest of my time to my friend, Scott Brison, by saying let's come to our senses. We know you take a certain position—we respect that—but if you can tell me any agreements you've supported, then I'm willing to listen to you even further.

Scott, the floor is yours.

• (1645)

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Ms. Pickard, you have said that the government has tried to demobilize the paramilitaries, and that's consistent with what the UN Commissioner for Human Rights has said. In fact, she said she was:

...impressed by the increased expenditure on government programmes to protect and support vulnerable groups. Such efforts, in a country facing such a complex and multifaceted armed conflict must be acknowledged and encouraged.

The Supreme Court and the Attorney General's Office are incredibly brave in investigating and bringing to trial public officials linked to [drug trafficking]....

We should all support their efforts in such difficult circumstances and continue to uphold the independence of the judiciary—something Colombia is rightly proud of.

Do you believe the UN Commissioner for Human Rights is a credible source of information on Colombia?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** Yes.

I think what you've spoken to in terms of the investment that the Colombian government has put into the demobilization is one thing, but the actual impact or the results of that “demobilization” program are quite a separate thing.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Part of the challenge is if they are paramilitaries and they are being paid to be paramilitaries and suddenly they're demobilized and not being paid, they don't have any way to make a living. So how do you think they're going to make a living? Somebody who had a job last week as a paramilitary... suddenly you're given your pink slip as a paramilitary and you have to do something else. What are you going to do?

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** As we've seen in the region I went to as part of the delegation, Bajo Cauca was one of the main areas that had been identified, not only by human rights organizations but by the state officials we talked to, or the department officials, as one of the places where these “demobilized” paramilitaries came back and walked right back into a life of crime, because they certainly know nothing else. That has been their sole experience, their entire life.

• (1650)

**Hon. Scott Brison:** You are absolutely right. They are funded by crime. They are funded by illegal activities, which is one of the reasons some of us believe we have a moral responsibility to help to provide legitimate trade opportunities.

Ms. Wood, in terms of the amendment, do you view former deputy minister of DFAIT, Peter Harder, or former Canadian deputy minister, Gaëtan Lavertu, as credible?

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** I don't know either of those people personally, but I would assume from their positions that they have a high degree of credibility.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** I would ask you to take a look at the Hansard from Mr. Lavertu's appearance before this committee and what he said about the amendment.

Former deputy minister of DFAIT, Peter Harder, has called the amendment a

significant innovation in free trade agreements in that it provides both the Colombian and Canadian legislatures the opportunity to annually review and assess the human rights implications of the agreement. I expect that future parliaments will build on this precedent when they consider proposed free trade agreements.

**The Chair:** Mr. Brison, you're going to have to stop there. I'm sorry that we don't have the time for a response.

We're going to Mr. Holder, then Mr. Keddy, and with luck we'll get a last round in.

**Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC):** Thank you.

I'd like to thank our guests today for their comments. It's helpful as we go through our deliberations, because since we had the opportunity to become involved in the Canada-Colombia free trade deal, we've had roughly 120 interventions, give or take a couple. We've had dozens and dozens of interventions from individuals and organizations who frankly do not support this free trade agreement for any number of reasons.

I think the testimony we've heard on both sides has been wide-ranging and comprehensive. I'm not certain how much more testimony adds to the argument, but I would say to you that, like today, people have very strong views, and we as a committee have heard all of those views. I think it allows us to come closer to our own perspective on this, so thank you for your contribution.

What has been really compelling to me is that the testimony I've heard, particularly from officials from Colombia who have come here, is that they acknowledge that this is not a perfect place. I think that acknowledgement is not just refreshing, but I found their testimony to be sincere and helpful as we reviewed certain things.

I heard comment from one of my colleagues opposite who talked about one of the countries we deal with in NAFTA, that they have a rules-based system—and not really rules, but... Frankly, I'd prefer something that has a foundation in rules, because when there are arguments, disputes, or concerns, we always have something we can fall back on.

Mr. Laforest, you were commenting on Mr. Brison's testimony earlier, and you asked, what comes first, the chicken or the egg? My concern is that if we don't do this deal, there will be no chicken and there will be no egg. There will be no beef, there will be no wheat, there will be no grain. That's a deep concern I have.

As I've looked over the testimony we've had, with some 120 interventions, I've looked at the organizations that have supported this free trade deal. I want to mention some of them, because I think it serves a point.

I'd ask you to find the theme in this, please: the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the Grain Growers of Canada, Canada Pork International, the Canadian Swine Health Board, the Canadian Wheat Board, Pulse Canada, the Canadian Canola Growers, and Alliance Grain Traders. The theme with all these organizations is food.

One of the most compelling testimonies I heard was a couple of weeks ago when a gentleman from Regina, Mr. Al-Katib, talked about red beans. He said we can't get red beans into Brazil; there's a 60% tariff.

I wanted to understand why that's such a big deal, so I studied up on red beans. I found out that a cup of red beans provides some 225 calories. It provides high protein, high dietary fibre, thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin B6, vitamin C, vitamin E, vitamin K, calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium, and zinc. It's so significant that we can't get that product, which is nutritious for the poorest of the poor, into Colombia because of the high tariff system.

But the organizations I've just mentioned, all these food-based organizations in Canada...you cannot tell me around this table—I don't mean this to our guests—that these people do not care about their industry, that they do not care about Canada, that they do not care about their international obligations. I think there is nothing more compelling, if you ever come back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, than feeding our people. That's our obligation around the world.

I'll turn my time over to Mr. Keddy, if there's a moment left.

•(1655)

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** Do I have a bit of time, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, please, go ahead.

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The debate today is complex, and I think we're all in agreement on that. I think we're all in agreement that there are no easy answers, but I have to tell you that where I don't agree with your opposition to this trade agreement is in your painting of the Uribe government—

**The Chair:** There's a point of order.

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** There is no point of order here. I'm trying to make a point—

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The witnesses are here to respond to questions, and I'm a little disturbed by the filibustering of the Conservatives.

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** No, there's no filibustering. I said it was a statement, but I will put a question at the end of it.

**The Chair:** We'll take that off your time.

Go ahead, Mr. Keddy.

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** The difficult I'm having here, and please bear with me, is that when we speak of Colombians who are supporting this agreement, when we speak of the government members themselves, including President Uribe and his cabinet, I get the feeling from you folks that you're painting them all with a very broad brush, that they're all members of some type of right-wing extremist government who are bearing down inordinately on the poor in Colombia. When you look at that cabinet, and I've met them, they represent every facet of the political spectrum—every facet. There are former socialists; there's a former editor of a socialist newspaper who was kidnapped by the FARC or the paramilitaries, I'm not sure which one right now. There are groups that have been kidnapped by the FARC, kidnapped by the paramilitary, and people who have been incarcerated for a year and a half, or two years, or three years at a time. The president's father was assassinated in front of him.

These people have been injured during this period of violence in Colombia. They come from all political backgrounds and have one thing in common: they want to see a better Colombia. They want to see a Colombia that deserves and is ready to take its place in the world.

The only way we can help them do that is to put clear rules in place to assist them to provide jobs and opportunity for their people, and I truly and quite honestly believe that. If we don't do that, then I think we're not doing our job as Canadian members of Parliament and we're not doing our job for our own citizens.

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

I'm sorry, we don't have time for any further response.

We're going to go now to the Bloc.

Monsieur Laforest.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest:** I am tempted to answer Mr. Keddy in this way: if the members of the government of Colombia are as pure and good as he claims, how come they are unable to prevent the murders of trade unionists, the displacement of populations and the violations of human rights? I find it somewhat strange to hear this government being described as being made up of people of good faith when we see those totally unacceptable things happening in Colombia.

Let me also make a comment about the question put to Mrs. Pickard by Mr. Cannis who asked if you have ever supported a free trade agreement. As far as I am concerned, that is irrelevant. Whether or not you supported previous trade agreements does not concern me because I was not there. However, I need to hear from people who were there on the ground, people who observe the consequences of a free trade agreement.

In closing, I want to make a brief comment for Mr. Holder. You gave us a list of some groups supporting the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement but you might be able to get even more support — and perhaps even the support of other opposition parties — if you were to accept, as the committee did originally, an independent assessment of the true human rights situation in Colombia before the ratification of the agreement. Our opposition is due to the fact that we are violating a previous all-party agreement.

• (1700)

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mrs. Pickard and Mrs. Wood, for being here today.

I am not a regular member of this committee but I have been given some information. I have been told that 2,690 trade unionists have been killed in that country since 1986. I have been told that the US State Department and Amnesty International have concluded that 305,000 people have been displaced in 2007. In other words, they have been removed from their homes, their communities, their jobs. In 2008, that figure reached 380,000.

You have been on the ground and you have observed the electoral system of that country. I sometimes hear it said in Canada that two or three votes might sometimes be stolen in our ridings. This is like comparing a firecracker to an atomic bomb. There is absolutely no comparison. Canada is a country with democratic rules that are respected, which does not seem to be the case over there. You went to that country, you reported the results of your observation of the

electoral process, and we are being asked to let Colombians decide. I agree with that. Let us let Colombians decide but, if they have no credible democratic system, how will we know that they were really the ones deciding? That is my question.

[*English*]

**Ms. Carleen Pickard:** Thank you.

I was also disturbed by the comparison between Canada and Colombia in terms of electoral crimes, or the state of democracy between Canada and Colombia, which I do think are two fundamentally different things. I would encourage folks to go back to the report that we did put out. There are also other reports, and I would encourage people to look at the questions that the OAS report also raised after the congressional elections. But to anybody who states that elections in Canada are anywhere comparable to those in Colombia, I would challenge them to find communities in Canada where all of the men in the community are rounded up and put on trucks and driven out to a field and told in the middle of the night, “If you don't vote for the ruling party, we will kill your family after the election.”

**The Chair:** Thank you.

It is five o'clock. I guess we could move on to other business, but I think there is a sense that this is about as far as we're going to go.

So let's wrap this part up and thank our witnesses today from the Council of Canadians, Carleen Pickard, and from CoDevelopment Canada, Barbara Wood. Thank you for your attendance here today.

**Ms. Barbara Wood:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We do have a few minutes for our other agenda to proceed now, as we suggested, with the Canada-U.S. procurement bill, which we were going to do earlier.

You look puzzled, Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** No, I'm ready to get to work, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Normally we would have gone in camera for this. I don't have a lot of time, but we'll switch to in camera in about two minutes.

In two minutes we'll begin a discussion in camera on the agreement on government procurement.

We will have a two-minute break.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]





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