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Tuesday, March 16, 2010

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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), we're now going to deal with the supplementary estimates as well as the main estimates.

I want to welcome the foreign affairs minister, Mr. Cannon, to the meeting.

As well, to Mr. Edwards and Mr. White, thank you for being here.

We're going to start as we normally do—with your statement, sir. The floor is yours.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you very much, Chair.

When this committee considered my department's estimates in May of last year, we confronted a world beset by global economic turmoil. A year on, the setting is more stable and Canada's economic recovery is underpinning our international leadership. In the recent Speech from the Throne and in the budget statement, the government reaffirmed the four priorities of Canadian foreign policy, through which we have promoted a strong Canada in a changing world: pursuing economic opportunities for Canada, particularly in growing and emerging markets; strengthening and advancing our relations with the United States of America and with our neighbours and friends in the Americas; contributing to peace and security in Afghanistan as well as preparing for the transition there; and exercising and strengthening our sovereignty over the Arctic.

This foreign policy, colleagues, advances and protects the security and prosperity of Canadians while promoting Canadian values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. For example, Canadian leadership, once again, resulted in an effective condemnation by the United Nations of human rights abuses in Iran.

We will continue to protest, for those who cannot, the flagrant disregard for human rights elsewhere, as we have done in Burma, North Korea, and Zimbabwe.

I was very proud to ratify, on behalf on the Government of Canada, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the United Nations last week. That ratification underscored our firm commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and to enabling them to participate fully in society.

[Translation]

Following the catastrophe on January 12, 2010, Canada was one of the first donors to respond to the crisis. We are the second largest

contributor to the emergency relief and recovery efforts in Haiti, disbursing \$135 million in support of appeals from our humanitarian partners on the ground.

In January, we organized a critical meeting of donors and organizations to help Haiti cope with the devastating impact of the earthquake and to start to plan for the formidable long-term task of reconstruction. It is our leadership, dear colleagues, that has contributed to laying the groundwork for the next donors' conference, which will take place in New York and which I will attend.

[English]

As the Prime Minister observed in January 2010, in Canada's international year, there is an exceptional opportunity for Canada to lead in a series of important international meetings that will be taking place here in the weeks and months to come.

The most prominent summits are the meetings of the G20 and the G8 leaders in June, respectively, in Toronto and in Muskoka. My department plays a vital role in preparing for these gatherings in providing the secretariat. As chair of the G8 and G20 meetings, the Prime Minister will call for a globally coordinated withdrawal of economic stimulus, as well as a strong deregulation of financial markets and avoidance of protectionism.

As the Prime Minister indicated earlier this year, he will urge more significant investment in maternal and child health in developing countries.

The Prime Minister will, as well, host the North American Leaders' Summit this year, which will focus on sound financial regulation and freer trade as keys to prosperity for the continent as well as for the hemisphere and the world. At these summits, Canada's emphasis will be on meaningful results and accountability that promises are kept. In these important meetings, my department and I support the Prime Minister in his leadership role.

[Translation]

At the end of this month I will chair a meeting of the G8 foreign ministers in Gatineau. It will be the first time this group has ever met in Quebec.

As always when we meet, security issues will be our focus. I intend to advance three key priorities at that meeting. First, we must set the stage on non-proliferation for constructive outcomes in April at the Global Nuclear Security Summit and in May at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, and discuss recent developments with respect to Iran and North Korea. Second, we must build on the important dialogue that Canada has facilitated between Pakistan and Afghanistan on border issues. Third, we must help fragile countries and regions to build their capacity to address their security vulnerabilities.

Specifically, we need to work with the international community to help the government of Yemen to strengthen its ability to resist terrorism and to prevent it from being a safe haven for al-Qaeda. We also need to do more to disrupt the operations of organized crime groups in Central America and the Caribbean.

[English]

I will also chair a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Arctic Ocean coastal states to address our common concerns and to articulate and exercise Canada's sovereignty. This will further advance a key priority for the Canadian government: the affirmation and protection of Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic. Canada's foreign policy objectives in the Arctic complement and reinforce the Canadian government's northern strategy.

We will also put forward Canada's candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council for the year 2011-12.

Beyond the summitry, the department advances Canada's priorities and foreign policy by other means, often away from the global limelight. Let me briefly detail them here.

With respect to the global economy, the government argues forcefully, and engages with other nations, to avoid protectionism in dealing with the global economic crisis. With respect to our example, with strong financial institutions and regulations, tax cuts and measured stimulus have strengthened our influence worldwide. We have employed that credibility and influence to make the case for a return to fiscal responsibility as the global economy emerges from recession.

The government is actively promoting trade and investment with emerging markets. Visits to China, India, and Korea by the Prime Minister, me, and the Minister of International Trade, as well as the opening of new trade offices, have reinforced those efforts, which are vital for our economic well-being.

We are implementing free trade agreements with Peru and the European Free Trade Association. Parliament will be asked to ratify FTAs with Colombia, Jordan, and Panama. We are also negotiating with the European Union, India, the Republic of Korea, the Caribbean community, and other countries of the Americas.

We have broadened and deepened our relations with our closest ally, the United States, as well as with our other friends and neighbours in the Americas. We have a common experience and mutual interests, to work closely and constructively with the Obama administration to meet common challenges at home and abroad. Our engagement strategy delivers results, such as the easing of the Buy American provision in the U.S. stimulus package.

●(1210)

[Translation]

We have contributed to making the Americas more prosperous, more democratic and more secure. That contribution has involved strengthening ties with key hemispheric partners, as well as sustained engagement in important regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States, in which Canada is celebrating 20 years of membership this month.

It also involves making important investments to combat security threats, as well as continuing to pursue a comprehensive agenda of trade liberalization in the region to promote economic development and combat protectionism. We are thus delivering on our promise to enhance our relations with our friends and neighbours in the Americas, from Haiti to Honduras and throughout the hemisphere.

[English]

On Afghanistan, we witnessed many successes in the past years even as we mourn the loss of several of our brave men and women in uniform. The best way that we can honour their noble sacrifice is to continue the vital work there. Even as this department supports preparations for the withdrawal of Canadian Forces in 2011, it also prepares to continue without these forces to advance Canadian diplomatic, development, and security objectives in Afghanistan.

As the expenditures of my department last year and the estimates for the coming year indicate, we are committed to implementing our mandate in a fiscally responsible and effective manner. In these remarks, colleagues, I have not attempted to deal with every event or subject on the agenda for the past year or for the years to come. Instead, I have sketched the diverse concerns with which we must deal on a daily basis. No state can anticipate all challenges or opportunities that it will confront in world affairs, but I firmly believe that we are all well-prepared and well-equipped to deal with whatever arises in the next year.

Mr. Chair and colleagues, I would now be happy to respond to the committee's questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

As usual, we will start with the opposition and move our way around. There will be ten minutes of questions and answers. We're going to hold you to that so we can hopefully get in a second round as well, as time permits.

We'll start with Mr. Rae.

I believe you're going to be sharing time with Mr. Patry. The floor is yours. You have ten minutes.

●(1215)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Cannon, you may be surprised that I actually have a substantive question on foreign policy that I want to ask.

I wanted to touch on the question of the Middle East, which has very recently become a matter of focus once again. In addition to the press release that you put out last week with respect to Canada's position on the approval by the Israeli government of 1,600 new housing units in Jerusalem, I wonder if you could outline for us what steps you are taking and you will take to try to get the peace process back on track and back on the rails. This is such a critically important issue for us and indeed the world.

I will leave it at that. I might have a supplementary question, and then I will give my time to Mr. Patry.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Thank you, Mr. Rae, for that question.

I have, over the course of the last year and some, travelled on two occasions to the Middle East. I have had the opportunity of meeting with the foreign minister both in Israel as well as here in Canada. Obviously, we've had discussions on our bilateral relations but as well on the Middle East situation.

As you know, we've always been able to put forward Canada's position. Canada's position is one that calls upon the parties to jump-start or at least to sit down and have peace discussions, following the road map in the Annapolis peace process that was put there. We firmly believe in two sovereign states living side by side in harmony, and that is the position that the Government of Canada has put forward.

On the expansion into east Jerusalem, we feel that this is contrary to international law and therefore condemn it. We are very concerned with what is taking place now. Let me tell you how we will deal with this and what we are doing. We are in discussions with like-minded countries as well as with our partner from Israel and the Arab world. I have participated in numerous meetings, whether they be meetings that were held not long ago in Marrakesh—I might be mistaken on that, but I believe it's there—the BMENA meeting, which bridges G8 countries as well as countries from that part of the world. We will be discussing this issue as well, as the G8 foreign ministers meet and gather in Gatineau at the end of the month.

There are initiatives that are undertaken. Canada is extremely supportive of the peace process of course. I have mentioned this before. When we do meet, whether it is Canada or the other countries of the G8 and like-minded countries who are seeking to establish a peace process there, we do push the parties to that position.

Hon. Bob Rae: I have one brief supplementary.

Minister, could you tell us if in the last week you've spoken to your Israeli counterpart, Mr. Lieberman, or to your knowledge has the Prime Minister spoken to Prime Minister Netanyahu?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I haven't spoken to Minister Lieberman in the past week. I might be mistaken, but I do believe the Prime Minister has had discussions over the last 48 hours with Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Hon. Bob Rae: Can you tell us something about those discussions?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: No, I'm not in a position to tell you about the discussions.

Hon. Bob Rae: Okay. Thank you.

That's it.

The Chair: Mr. Patry.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Minister, regarding the Canadian presence in Afghanistan, the Canadian population truly feels that the Department of Foreign Affairs is simply passively accepting decisions made by the Department of Defence.

There is something I would like to know. First, in the supplementary estimates, loans worth \$450 million were approved to erase the government of Pakistan's debt, so that the country could invest in education-oriented programs. What was the basis of negotiations for debt forgiveness and what do the educational programs in which the government of Pakistan has committed to invest consist of? In addition—and this is even more important when it comes to Pakistan—what follow-up mechanisms have been put in place to ensure the monitoring of these commitments and to ensure that the government of Pakistan delivers on them?

● (1220)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

First, allow me to say that Canada is one of the countries contributing to the improvement of security, governance and development in Afghanistan. Our men and women in uniform, diplomats, but also development specialists are over there risking their lives. The government must spend accordingly to guarantee their safety and ensure that they are fulfilling their duties. This goes without saying.

The Canadian government regularly and publicly reports to Canadians on the cost of its mission through annual performance reports, plans and priorities submitted to the department, and other public communications.

The total cost of the mission for the department, from 2001 to 2011, has been estimated at \$536 million. Much of that money will be spent in the later stages of the mission. This year, the department has earmarked \$153 million for the Afghanistan mission in 2009-2010. This contribution includes the cost of programs and functioning of the headquarters, the embassy, the Kandahar airfields and the provincial reconstruction team. The total cost of the Afghanistan mission for the Government of Canada, from 2001 to 2011, is currently estimated at \$11.3 billion, without taking into consideration costs related to health care and veterans disability pensions after 2011.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Minister, a recent Ottawa newspaper article reported that the department would postpone its decision to deploy 400 headquarters employees to field postings throughout the world. It would appear that everything is done in Ottawa, that is, at the foreign affairs department and nothing in the field.

Could you tell me why the employees will not be deployed?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: On the contrary, we will deploy staff, but we will do it gradually. I will let the deputy minister outline our plan, but the government is committed to going through with it.

Mr. Deputy Minister.

Mr. Leonard Edwards (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We have continued to transfer our headquarters staff overseas. In recent years, we have assigned almost 100 people to our missions outside of Canada. We will continue with this practice this year with a number of other transfers. This means that the staff transfers we have been promising over the last few years will continue. Our priority is to increase our total workforce outside of Canada because our overseas network is the government's most important value added.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you.

[English]

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

We'll now move to Madame Deschamps for 10 minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will share my time with my colleague.

Good day, Mr. Minister. Ten minutes with you is very little. A number of things have taken place on the national and international stages since our long break. We had a lot of time off. Consequently, we have a number of questions to ask you.

For instance, regarding the emergency relief afforded to Haiti, did the funds allocated to the Haiti earthquake relief fund consist entirely of new money, or was a portion of this funding reallocated from other envelopes, or from aid already assigned to the Haiti program?

Also, would it be possible to provide us with a report on emergency funding provided for Canadian and international NGOs, or for multilateral agencies?

Finally, I would like to know who has the responsibility, in Canada, to report on and supervise Canadian assistance to Haiti?

•(1225)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Could you repeat your last question, Ms. Deschamps?

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Who has the responsibility, in Canada, to report on and supervise Canadian assistance? Who coordinates these operations?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: First, allow me to say that the department, under the authority of Ms. Oda, plays a key role in the delivery of assistance. This goes without saying, since the budgets are determined by her department. The sums of money that were allocated as part of the Canadian response come from pre-approved budgets. These moneys come from crisis emergency funds. Perhaps Mr. White could explain further.

These sums are set aside annually. When a crisis erupts, we can withdraw sums of money to address immediate needs. I am told that Canadians have donated almost \$154 million, and the government

will donate an equivalent amount, that is, \$154.4 million to the earthquake relief fund. Mr. White could provide you with more information about this.

[English]

So where does this crisis pool...?

Mr. Gordon White (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Finance and Operations, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Mr. Chair, my understanding is that this is consolidated and provided for emergency management for government departments that are in the same position that we and CIDA were in with respect to the Haiti crisis.

[Translation]

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Could you repeat your first question, Ms. Deschamps?

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Would it be possible to provide us with a written document outlining the assistance afforded the Canadian NGOs and international organizations?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I will forward your request to Ms. Oda.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you.

It is difficult to not mention the Rights & Democracy issue, so I will use this opportunity to talk about it.

Parliament was not in session, so we, as members of Parliament, could not discuss this issue. The actions of the current board of directors and its chair have caused a crisis within the organization. The president of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission went so far as to accuse the board of directors of destroying the organization.

I would like to know, Mr. Minister, if you are going to take immediate measures to remedy the abuses by the board of directors and ensure that Rights & Democracy complies with the legislation.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Are you asking me if I am going to enforce the act?

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Are you going to take immediate action? Under the act of Parliament that regulates the Rights & Democracy organization, the members of its board of directors must act honestly and in the greater interest of the organization.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: If you read the act carefully, you will see that this is exactly how it was worded by the legislator at the time. The board of directors must fulfil its mandate. I am trying to find answers to your question to explain that the onus is on the board of directors to fulfil its mandate.

Unfortunately, I only have the English version of the text. Therefore, if you look closely at the wording of the act, you will note, as I was saying, that the board of directors is under an obligation to establish policies and to apply them in accordance with legislation. For instance, the board of directors is responsible for enforcing human rights that govern our society and that are generally recognized internationally.

•(1230)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I would now like to talk about a financial matter.

It is in relation to the first recommendation stemming from the five-year review of Rights & Democracy's action plan for the period from 2003 to 2008. The review conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs recommended that in light of the observations arising from the review, the Government of Canada consolidate the core funding mechanism for Rights & Democracy to facilitate the planning and implementation of its activities on a multiyear basis.

Mr. Minister, do you intend to implement the recommendation and consolidate the core funding mechanism for Rights & Democracy?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I understand that on October 29, 2009, representatives of the board of directors and of senior management appeared before this committee. I believe that, at that time, the committee was very satisfied with the organization's undertakings.

If, following discussions in this forum, the members of the committee are in favour of tightening the obligations and further clarifying the recommendations, I would be willing to consider it.

In addition, considering the arm's length relationship between the minister and this organization, you would do well to discuss these issues with the representatives of the board of directors.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: But your department provides the funding.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: We are always liable when it comes to money transfers. We are talking about millions of dollars and, each year, the legislator has the obligation—

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I have only two minutes left.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I will finish answering your question, Ms. Deschamps.

At the time, the legislator had established Rights & Democracy's obligation to submit a report to the Parliament of Canada each year, which is what the organization has been doing.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I yield the floor to Mr. Dorion.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Minister, most international context analysts are aware of the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the heart of a great many problems. We know that this situation has had a major impact on the Iraq issue. We know that Iran's apparent desire to acquire nuclear weapons is related to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. We know about the impact that this issue has had in Lebanon, and we know what is currently going on in Yemen. Generally speaking, this issue has always been at the heart of the uneasiness between the Arab/Muslim world and the West.

I am going over your report, which is four pages long, double spaced, and there is no word region that you do not talk about. You touch on almost all of the issues, but no mention whatsoever is made of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Does the explanation for this omission lie in the fact that Canada is satisfied with the situation or even that resolving the problem is

not a priority for Canada? I repeat that there is not one word regarding this issue in the report that has been distributed to us.

[*English*]

The Chair: Minister, could you make just a quick response? We're almost out of time.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Okay. I'll give a quick response.

[*Translation*]

Dear colleagues, when I answered this question first put to me by Mr. Rae, I talked about the commitments Canada has made when it comes to this Middle Eastern conflict. I pointed out that I have visited the Middle East, that I have discussed issues with stakeholders at the meeting of foreign ministers. We discussed the subject. At the end of the month, we will have the opportunity to discuss this current issue at the G8 Foreign Ministers Meeting. We will discuss stability in the region.

I would like to remind you that Canada's position has always been one favourable to initiating as soon as possible new discussions that would result in enduring peace, that we are entirely in favour of two independent states existing side by side: a Palestinian state and, obviously, an Israeli one. However, an underlining consideration is the need for discussions that would bring about peace. Every time I am given the opportunity to discuss this issue during my visits, I make sure to remind everyone of Canada's position.

Although we did not mention the issue in the statement, dear colleagues, it is nonetheless a component of Canada's foreign affairs policy.

•(1235)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We're now going to move over to the Conservatives. Mr. Lunney will be sharing his time with Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Lunney, you have 10 minutes.

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

Minister Cannon, you've already answered a dozen questions on the situation in Haiti. I think that Canadians are very proud of the government's response on Haiti, and the rapid response. They themselves were very generous in responding. However, tragically, very shortly thereafter there was a major quake in Chile, of magnitude 8.8 I believe. There was significant damage and loss of life.

Can you briefly outline what the Government of Canada has done in response to assist in the Chilean situation?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Briefly, Canada and Chile enjoy a mature, as well as a multi-faceted bilateral relationship. Chile is Canada's most like-minded partner in South America and is one of six priorities in our Americas strategy.

We obviously remain committed to working with Chile in its time of need following the disaster. In the early stages of this, on March 2, in the name of the Government of Canada, my colleague Minister Oda responded to a request for international assistance from the Government of Chile and announced it would provide to this trusted partner up to \$2 million for urgent humanitarian assistance. I think this timely response certainly supports Chile's efforts to meet the needs of those affected in the disaster area.

In this case, as in any other case, the Canadian consular officials continue to use, as we have used in the past, many different avenues to be able to, for instance, locate Canadians who may have been affected by the earthquake. Today, I'm happy to report, there are no confirmed reports of Canadian casualties.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you very much, Minister.

You mentioned briefly in your remarks already about the upcoming G8 and G20 meetings. The Government of Canada has taken a position to promote maternal and child health. We have a tragic situation around the world, where over half a million women are dying in childbirth, and many children are not making it to age five.

I would like to ask you if you could update the committee on what the Government of Canada is doing to promote this agenda with the upcoming meetings and tell us whether you are getting any kind of positive response from our colleagues in the G8 and G20 with regard to this issue.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: As you know, the honourable gentleman who is seated beside me is Canada's, or at least the Prime Minister's, sherpa. He would probably be more adequately equipped to answer the question.

But may I advance, very humbly, in his presence, that we are being very well acknowledged by our colleagues. It's under the theme of "Recovery and New Beginnings". We'll focus on the G8 value-added areas, such as development, with a signature initiative on maternal and child health, and on international peace and security.

On the development side, it's important to note that the statistics are shocking. Each year, nearly nine million children die before they turn five, and half a million women die in pregnancy and childbirth. Many of these deaths can be prevented with improved access to health care, better nutrition, and the scaling up of proven interventions, such as immunization.

This is a key Muskoka priority. It's directly related to the United Nations millennium development goals...which experts have identified as the ones most lagging behind and having the most important ripple effect on other development challenges. As well, addressing these UN development goals has been fully endorsed by our G8 partners, the United Nations, and of course the World Health Organization.

I'd say that through these outreach activities, Canada is also benefiting from strong support from private foundations as well as from domestic and international civil society organizations, including ONE and Make Poverty History. Canada continues to be engaged in proactive outreach with key partners and is exploring ways to mobilize and leverage financial contributions to, indeed, improve maternal and child health. We're actively identifying and

planning opportunities for interaction between the G8 sherpas and civil organizations in Canada.

• (1240)

Mr. James Lunney: Still on the G8 theme, you mentioned in your remarks earlier that you'll be meeting with your counterparts, the foreign ministers of the G8, very shortly, I believe, in Gatineau, in preparation for the G8 and G20. Can you briefly give us an idea of the priorities of the Government of Canada in addressing the broader issues that will be coming up at these meetings?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Let me state at the very beginning that the security of Canadians, whether it's at home or abroad, is affected by what happens beyond our borders. Our security depends on our ability to address, with partner countries, threats and conflicts, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, organized crime, and illicit trafficking of drugs and people.

The G8 brings together a group of nations that have a proven track record of accomplishment on peace and security issues, and I don't think there's any substitute for that. The G8 members are committed to using their influence and their resources to try to ensure a safer and more secure world for all.

I'll be raising three priorities with my colleagues in Gatineau on March 29 and 30. First of all is nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, as well as the Afghanistan-Pakistan issue and the issue of security vulnerabilities.

On the nuclear proliferation and disarmament issue, my goal is to set the stage for a positive outcome to the upcoming review conference for the non-proliferation review that will take place in May of this year.

I'll also discuss with my partners the way forward to stop Iran's nuclear fuel enrichment activities and to convince Iranian authorities to come back to the table; at least, we will attempt to do that and have discussions around that issue.

I'll be raising the issue of the DPRK, North Korea, which pursues its nuclear program despite being in contravention of its international commitments.

On Afghanistan, colleagues, we will discuss how we can help ensure that President Karzai delivers on the promises he made at the January conference on Afghanistan in London to take responsibility for security, basic services, and governance across the country.

I'd also note that many countries are not able to deal with security challenges faced from conflict, disaster, terrorism, crime, and trafficking of illicit drugs and people. All the G8 partners have different programs to help countries and regional institutions to address these challenges, from peacekeeping and beyond, but what we want to be able to do here is to see how we can be more effective and more efficient in the way we use these programs and tools in countering security vulnerabilities.

Those goals, in a nutshell, are what we want to achieve.

• (1245)

Mr. James Lunney: That's great. I appreciate the proliferation issue and that you're tackling the Iran issue.

I know the time's getting short here, but the last issue is a favourite of mine.

I'm concerned about the Arctic and Canada's leadership in demonstrating our own sovereignty and sorting out the Arctic issues of boundaries, the sea floor, mapping, and so on. How are we progressing on that front?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Let me state at the outset, Dr. Lunney, that my colleague Minister Strahl has put forward our domestic policy, which is based on a number of pillars—from the environment, to making sure that social responsibility occurs, to governance, to sovereignty, to exercising Canadian sovereignty. That element of exercising Canadian sovereignty falls under somewhat my responsibility, along with other colleagues'.

What we have done over the course of the last two years is to be able to not only increase our presence in the Arctic with the government's intentions through its budget, but as well, in international fora, to clearly express what we are doing in terms of mapping the continental shelf, for instance, or conforming to the International Maritime Organization's general principles for safe shipping as well as protecting the environment.

On the mapping issue, Dr. Lunney, we will be in complete compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We do intend to be able to table the information, the scientific data, by the year 2013. We are working in partnership, sometimes with the Danes, where we have done some mapping particularly on the eastern part of the Arctic, and we are also working with the Americans. The *Louis St. Laurent*, which is one of our icebreakers, as well as the *Healy*, which is an American vessel, are working together doing that mapping through sonar techniques. So that is well under way.

I'll end up on this. I'll be hosting in two weeks' time a meeting on the Arctic coastal states so that we can look at what are those issues in common between Canada and the United States, Russia, as well as Denmark and Finland, so we can come together with some set policy that makes sense. This does not, and I want to repeat this, does not undermine, in any way, shape, or form, the Arctic Council, which for Canada, as one of the founding members, is the premier forum for discussion on Arctic matters.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lunney, and thank you, Minister.

I'm now going to move to the final request from this first round.

Mr. Rafferty, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Cannon, for being here today.

I have a number of questions; in fact, I have three or four more questions after listening to some of your answers to my colleagues' questions here. Feel free to be brief in your answers if you wish.

Minister, in the main estimates under grants on page 11-6, there was a grant to the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, also known, of course, as Rights and Democracy. It's almost \$5 million. Canadians of course are proud of the work of this organization, but as you are aware, the organization is in tumult because of the behaviour of its board of directors.

The conduct of the board members is governed by the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development Act. In section 24 of that act, the board members are required to act honestly and in good faith with a view to the best interests of the centre.

Earlier this month, the chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission alleged that the board members are destroying a great Canadian institution. She's one of the distinguished board members who quit in disgust because of the behaviour of the remaining board members.

My question to you is do you think the board members may be in violation of this act of Parliament?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Let me first and foremost state that I agree with you in terms of the overall mandate, Mr. Rafferty. You're absolutely right, the obvious task here is to be able to promote democratic development and to advocate and defend human rights also in cooperation with civil society and governments in Canada and abroad. Rights and Democracy initiates and supports programs to strengthen laws and democratic institutions principally in developing countries. You're asking me my opinion on whether or not I agree with this, and obviously I agree with the work that's being done there.

But when you read the law, you will note that it's an arm's-length organization. This committee obviously has all of the power. You convened the organization to meet with you on October 29, 2009. You had the opportunity to ask all the questions, and I understand that you will be asking questions of this organization in the coming weeks. Certainly I encourage you to do that.

If this committee deems necessary, at the end of all of that, to review the legislation and make some suggestions, I will be very pleased to entertain those suggestions and recommendations.

• (1250)

Mr. John Rafferty: Thank you for that.

I don't want to go into too many details about the things that have happened. I think everyone around the table is aware of Rights and Democracy and the issues surrounding it and some of the things that have happened, but one of the things in this is a money matter. Perhaps Mr. Cannon or Mr. White might like to answer this.

A number of private contracts have been given by Rights and Democracy for private investigation, for auditing, for legal, for communications work. I think the grant we're approving here should go to meeting the mandate of the organization rather than handing out contracts to private firms.

Let me just use auditing as an example. You know, Rights and Democracy is audited annually by Sheila Fraser. If they are now spending grant money to have a private audit, it doesn't make sense to me: there's something wrong—I suppose—with the auditing of Sheila Fraser.

Does that mean that perhaps you don't trust the work of Sheila Fraser to do her auditing annually on this organization, that they need to spend money on private auditing?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: You're referring to the legislation, colleague, and clearly it's written here in section 30:

The accounts and financial transactions of the Centre shall be audited annually by the Auditor General of Canada and a report of the audit shall be made to the Centre and to the Minister.

As well, I think there is a review process and the same thing is there. So these are the powers that the legislator at the time decided to give this organization.

Here again, I'm open to your suggestions. You'll have the opportunity to meet with them. If you want to, and see fit to, put forward recommendations, please feel free to do so.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. White, would this be normal practice for something that is receiving money from your department, you being the chief financial officer, to even allow them, I suppose, to have a private audit when they're audited annually?

Mr. Gordon White: Mr. Chair, when you look at the legislation, the Auditor General is engaged to provide an external audit of the accounts. There's nothing preventing an organization from using its internal funding to conduct internal audits if it wishes, specific reviews—and I'm not privy to all of the information, so I'm just speculating here. This may be the case, but I would need further information to confirm.

Mr. John Rafferty: Thank you, Mr. White.

On another issue, Minister, as you know, there's a long-standing complaint among military and diplomatic personnel that their spouses who can't find work during postings can't collect EI when they return to Canada. Now, the foreign service has lobbied for years for spouses on those postings to get access to EI. The McDougall commission recommended this way back in 1981, but the government has yet to act.

Will you be pressing for the adoption of these reforms at the cabinet table?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Thank you. The extension, I think, of employment insurance benefits is an issue that falls under the responsibility of the Treasury Board as well as Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. However—

Mr. John Rafferty: But you can press for it to be addressed, though.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: —we are seized by the challenges and stresses placed on the families of our employees posted abroad and are exploring options for improving the support that they receive. DFAIT, Mr. Rafferty, is committed to doing what it can, what we can, within its means and its mandate.

•(1255)

Mr. John Rafferty: Minister, can you tell us how much of the Canadian money that was matched by the government for Haiti has been spent or has not been spent, if you know either of those amounts?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Well, \$154.4 million has been contributed by Canadians. Minister Oda has indicated, as has the Prime Minister, that we will be matching those funds. Madame Deschamps asked to have a complete list of how that was going to unfold. I will take it upon myself to ask Minister Oda to do that.

Mr. John Rafferty: I have one last question. It's sort of an opinion question. I hope you don't mind me asking your opinion. Well, I've already asked you your opinion once, haven't I? But I'll certainly ask again.

This is a question about maternal and infant mortality and G8 and the emphasis that this government has now said they place on it. One thing, and you said it a little while ago, is that access to health care is probably paramount, if not right up there among the most important things, when talking about maternal and infant mortality.

I've done a fair amount of research on this, and probably the most important way and maybe even the cheapest way to ensure that those mortality rates come down is for women to have access to family planning. It's very cost-effective, and it's an important way so that people have access and the possibility to make decisions on their own. A big part of family planning, of course, is contraception.

I wonder what your thoughts are on contraception, in terms of government money in your department and others being spent on that particular sort of family planning.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Well, we—obviously in our department, and the sherpa here beside me—are in the midst of preparing the G8 and G20 summits to which I referred some time ago in my opening remarks. The Prime Minister has announced that we will be pursuing the idea of maternal health as well as supporting young infants. That is the policy; that is the position we have put forward. It does not deal in any way, shape, or form with family planning; the purpose of this is to be able to save lives. Too many people are losing their lives on a yearly basis.

As a matter of fact, and I'll close with this because you want me to be brief, when I was over at the African Union meeting, I met with the leaders of government at NEPAD, and they were extremely pleased with the Government of Canada's announcement of what it wants to do in terms of promoting this issue. You can ask the sherpa, but he has not had anybody say that the goal we are pursuing is counter to what they want to see done, and I take it from my meetings that it isn't. The issue of family planning hasn't been raised. Indeed, what we're doing is saving lives by helping people live.

Mr. John Rafferty: Well, some millions of dollars are spent every year by this government on family planning outside of Canada, in their foreign work and support of organizations like International Planned Parenthood and so on. I guess maybe my question is are those funds going to be secure? Will you again, at the cabinet table, work to make sure that these funds are still available?

The Chair: That's all the time we have. Make a quick response.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I would just say, Chair, quite quickly, that if my colleague has the opportunity to ask the Minister of International Cooperation that question, that would be appropriate.

Mr. John Rafferty: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: We're almost out of time. It is one o'clock. We started a little late. I'm going to go with one very quick question from the government and then from each opposition party, and then we're going to call it a day.

Peter, you have one short question.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Mr. Minister, I see the line here for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. I've been involved with them over the years on election monitoring and was in Ukraine this year for the two elections for president of the Ukraine. Some say that the Orange Revolution was a failure, but I can state categorically that the legacy of the Orange Revolution is the free and fair elections of today; and that President Yanukovich's election, which just occurred, was a demonstration of the will of the people of Ukraine.

I understand that we had discussions before—at least discussions on free trade and more cooperation with the Ukraine—with the past president. I'm hoping that those discussions continue today with their new president. Will that be on the agenda?

• (1300)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I've had the opportunity, colleague, of meeting with their foreign minister—the previous foreign minister, obviously. We are highly regarded by that country. I haven't had the opportunity of meeting with the new officials, but on a government-to-government basis congratulations have been extended to the new leadership. I am looking forward to maintaining and indeed increasing our relations with that country.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Rae, yours will be the last question.

Hon. Bob Rae: Minister, when you received the letter from Mr. Beauregard on the subject of the evaluation that was done in private by a couple of board members about his performance, he asked for a meeting with you.

Can you tell us why you didn't meet with him? Second, who did meet with him in your department to try to create some reconciliation between him and the chairman of the board and others who did the evaluation?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I looked into that, Mr. Rae. The letter, which was dated November 3, was received in my office on November 15 or November 11—I might be off a week here or there—and from there, of course, it went through the system. By the time it was brought to my attention, it was unfortunate that Mr. Beauregard had already died.

Hon. Bob Rae: So you never read the letter?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I never had the opportunity of reading the letter myself. It came into the department and it went through the system, as general correspondence usually does, and so I didn't have the opportunity of reading this letter.

My take on this clearly was that I was made aware of the appraisal, but under the.... When I say I was made aware of the appraisal, I was made aware that an appraisal had been requested, that the board of directors had indeed made the appraisal known to the Privy Council, as the law requires them to do. I wasn't put into that loop.

Later on, I asked my officials why I wasn't involved in that loop, but the law does not oblige this board of directors—as was the case, for instance, when I was Minister of Transport—to involve me in the decision-making about the evaluation of the individual.

I'd just add to that, Mr. Rae, my take on that issue. Particularly the correspondence that led up to it, the correspondence I had seen from Mr. Beauregard, dealt with some ongoing issues, whether it was Afghanistan or whether it was the Prime Minister's trip, for instance, to China, where he suggested that the Prime Minister raise some of the human rights cases. There was no indication in the correspondence I had from Mr. Beauregard that any problems were occurring at Rights and Democracy.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Minister.

I want to thank Mr. White and Mr. Edwards for taking the time as well to be here today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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