



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 008 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, April 1, 2010

Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): I'd like to welcome everybody to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development as we continue to work with the Rights and Democracy organization.

I want to take a second to thank all of our witnesses for being here today. I understand you all have very busy schedules and we've been trying to arrange times to get you here. It's great to finally have you.

Each witness has eight to ten minutes for an opening statement. Then we'll have a couple of rounds of questions and answers.

For my colleagues, we talked about maybe only going to 12:30. We will reschedule our subcommittee meeting agenda for another day so we can get through a couple of rounds of questions while we have the witnesses here. I hope that's all right with the witnesses as well.

I'm going to start with Dr. Gauthier. You have the floor for 10 minutes. Then I'll move it around. We'll get to the questions and answers after the opening statements.

Welcome. The floor is yours, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier (Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors, Rights & Democracy): Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, it is my privilege today to be representing the Board of Directors, and Jacques Gauthier, as an individual, as he has gradually, in the last few months, become a central figure in this drama.

Who is Jacques Gauthier? Born in Montreal, I grew up in Paris for the first ten years of my life, and subsequently in Ottawa, where I attended the University of Ottawa Secondary School, Richmond Secondary School, Carleton University and the University of Ottawa. I then spent several years in Geneva doing my PhD, followed by studies in The Hague. After that, I settled in Toronto where I have been practising international law for more than 30 years now, with a concern for international justice and human rights.

A major concern for me, in these last 30 years, has been children's rights. In Toronto, I established Justice for Children and Youth, which is now recognized as one of the most important institutions for the protection of children's rights in Canada. I took an interest in children suffering in Africa and became involved in missions organized by the Canadian Save the Children Fund; I visited the site of a number of projects being carried out in Africa dealing with these

issues. I have serious concerns about refugees from Africa, and in the last ten years, I have focused on the rights of refugees from that region of the world.

I have also taken a great interest in the rights of Francophone minorities in Ontario, as chair of the Association des juristes d'expression française, and as a founder of the Official Languages Committee of the Canadian Bar Association, as well as a teacher with the Canadian Bar. I trained legal counsel in Ontario to practice the law in French at a time when there was absolutely nothing available. French-speaking lawyers had no tools and no documents to work with in that area.

I also took an interest in human rights in China. I headed a mission to China for Rights and Democracy in November, and this is an initiative that continues to be of concern to me.

For 66 days—I may write a book one day entitled *Sixty-six Days as Chair of Rights and Democracy*—my life revolved around the onerous responsibilities of the chairmanship, looking after my firm in Toronto and—something that has been a concern for many years now—my five women—a spouse and four daughters.

My adventure with Rights and Democracy began in February of 2008. I was appointed to the Board of Directors by the Conservative government with three other persons: Professor Tepper, Professor Payam Akhavan and Mr. Guilbeault. Of the four people who were appointed at the same time, two are considered, by those who have been opposing us for months, to be friendly directors, and Professor Tepper and myself found ourselves in the eye of the storm.

I should point out that when I joined the Board of Rights and Democracy, it was a fairly troubling period. Several months earlier, in December of 2007, a report had been issued by the Inspector General of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, DFAIT. That report looked at a considerable number of demands and attacks against Rights and Democracy, suggesting that the institution was poorly managed, and that there were major financial or accounting problems. When I came on board, I was told a number of times, by both Board members and members of the employee team:

[English]

we have just gone through a near-death experience.

[Translation]

The government took quite a bit of time appointing the four directors. In fact, the government took so much time appointing them that the impression was left that they would not be appointed, and that this was the end of Rights and Democracy.

To those who support the theory that we came into a healthy institution, with no issues, I can confirm that that is not true. Everyone appointed in February of 2008 was well aware of the concerns that had been reported in the newspapers for weeks and weeks. We were told that changes had to be made.

[English]

So we came in very conscious of the shortcomings and allegations and with a mandate to fight to make things right.

● (1110)

[Translation]

When I arrived—I was a member of the Board—the Chairman of the Board was Ms. Janice Stein, and Mr. Hubert was the President of Rights and Democracy.

Several months after my arrival, since Ms. Stein's mandate had not been renewed, she asked me to step into the position of Vice-Chairman of the Board. After some hesitation—if only I had been more clairvoyant and understood what awaited me subsequently, I might not have accepted—I did end up accepting.

[English]

As vice-chair, I had the opportunity to get to know the members of the finance committee because I was appointed to the finance committee. I had also become acting chair of the performance review committee of the president of the organization. As acting president, I was exposed to a lot of information. I had access to a lot of documentation. Keeping in mind the concerns that had been voiced in the media in the report of the inspector general, I started to ask a lot of questions.

Rémy Beauregard, it must be underlined, was appointed by this government and really started to assume his responsibilities in July 2008. I started to work with Monsieur Beauregard on a multitude of files. We met in different places, sometimes in Toronto and sometimes in Montreal. We attended functions of Rights and Democracy and broke bread on several occasions. I must say that for the initial period of four or five months, when we were together things went very well.

When I started to ask questions, I discovered that the staff, the management team around Mr. Beauregard, were very uncomfortable with the questions I was asking, for instance, about a very peculiar payment of \$100,000 that had been made to one of the staff members who left the organization. The more questions I asked, the more difficulty I had in obtaining answers. In fact, it was only over the last week that I finally got to the bottom of that question.

I asked questions about the more than \$800,000 that had been sent to the partner of Rights and Democracy, the high commissioner's office in Geneva. I asked questions about the discretionary funds and the contract that was used to send funds. Over the last five years, we're talking about over \$1 million sent in little chunks without authorization from the board—which is part of the rules, it's structured that way—with very little information given to the board in due course.

I asked questions about many other things.

I want to underline that the difficulties with the staff began when these questions were raised by members of the finance committee, me, and the chair of the board when he arrived, Professor Aurel Braun.

I want to deal with the issue of ideology. It has often been suggested in the media that we as directors, or I as acting president, was under a mandate to transform this organization and alter the direction of the organization. The truth is, if you study the contracts that were approved by the board of directors for the projects that were authorized by me over my 66 days and by the board previous to that, you will have an enormous amount of difficulty identifying any project or contract that has not been supported by this board or this president.

The suggestion that we have been given instructions to alter the course of the direction of Rights and Democracy is not truthful. I have never received a call from the Prime Minister's Office or DFAIT asking me not to do something about a project in this organization—to this day—as a director, an administrator, or an acting president.

For those who fear that this board or the current leadership of Rights and Democracy has been mandated to totally transform this institution into something that it hasn't been over the last 20 years, I want to emphasize that's not true, as far as the programming is concerned, but it is true as far as lack of accountability and transparency.

Thank you.

● (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Gauthier.

We'll now move over to Mr. Farquhar.

Welcome, sir. The floor is yours for 10 minutes.

Mr. Brad Farquhar (Member of the Board of Directors, Rights and Democracy): Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today.

[Translation]

I would like to preface my remarks by saying that my experience with Rights and Democracy is only limited to the last 11 months, as I was appointed to the Board at the end of April, 2009.

[English]

I'm glad to be able to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you, because comments have been made by some members of Parliament and others that directly and indirectly impugn the board of Rights and Democracy by attempting to undermine the credibility of individual board members, including myself.

My name is Brad Farquhar. I'm a management consultant and an international democracy development practitioner with a wide array of lifelong experience. By the time I turned 19, I had moved 11 times, lived in three countries, and visited some 32 others, culminating in a summer spent in northeastern Zaire, as it was then called, working on a water development project between high school and university. It was a great start for a career that would take me around the world.

I spent a number of years at the start of my career working in federal and provincial politics. During that time, I became somewhat of an expert on electoral financing in Saskatchewan, and I sat on an all-party committee that made recommendations to the Saskatchewan legislative assembly on changes to the Election Act of Saskatchewan. I also completed a master's degree in election administration from Griffith University in Australia, and I am quite possibly the only Canadian to hold a degree specifically in election administration.

It was on the basis of this background that I received a telephone call in 2004 from IFES, formally known as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, inquiring whether I would be willing to go to Tajikistan for four months over Christmas to work on a political party development project. Tajikistan was about to have its second parliamentary election in history, and the six registered political parties and their candidates needed support in learning how to campaign in an open contest. These parties included the governing People's Democratic Party, the Communist Party, and the Islamic Revival Party, which is the only registered Islamic party in Central Asia.

In Tajikistan I wrote a curriculum for parliamentary candidates that was taught across the country. I organized the first ever election trade fairs, which allowed the public to meet candidates from all six parties at once, and I was part of a team that organized the largest training event for election officials in Tajikistan history. In the middle of winter, we brought over 450 election-day officials from their remote mountain valleys to the capital in a massive logistical exercise. Then, on election day, I was accredited to the OSCE observer mission as an election observer.

Several months after returning to Canada, I was awarded the Saskatchewan Centennial Medal in honour of my contribution to democratic development in Tajikistan. Since then, I have worked on election finance reform projects in Jamaica and authored proposals for democracy development projects in Egypt. I co-founded the Democracy Promoters' Network, an online networking forum for Canadian democracy promoters. The University of Regina engaged me to teach a third-year political science course on elections, and I have been a panellist on international democracy assistance alongside Saskatchewan Lieutenant-Governor Gordon Barnhart.

In the midst of this, I have also made it a priority of my consulting practice to spend about one month of each year volunteering in developing countries with my entire family. In 2008, my wife and I worked on the development of a school and a teacher training centre in eastern Niger. In 2009, we went back to Niger with our three young children shortly after Robert Fowler and Louis Guay were kidnapped by al-Qaeda, close to the area of where we would be working. People thought we were insane to go to Niger and take our children along, but we are committed as a family to making a

difference in our world and to teaching our children that the world is much larger than their comfortable, middle-class lives here in Canada. With privilege comes responsibility.

This summer we will spend a month in Mongolia, working with grassroots Mongolian entrepreneurs and NGOs on several agriculture projects, to help the people of Mongolia recover from a disastrous winter in which more than half the country's livestock died of hunger and exposure.

So why have I told you all this? I've told you this because we have been called here today in an effort by some to prove that we are nothing more than partisan stooges in some kind of conspiracy at Rights and Democracy. I know what partisanship and partisan politics look like. I spent a number of years working in that environment. I, too, ran for public office, albeit somewhat less successful than all of you. But those who claim that partisanship defines my character prove they don't know me and they don't know my motivations. Like you, I have a desire to serve and make the world a better place. So let's leave politics aside and let's look at Rights and Democracy.

Yes, there have been disagreements over a performance review and over unwise grants to some organizations in the Middle East. Disagreements take place in every organization, but at Rights and Democracy, disagreement took on a life of its own because the now late president decided to fight.

● (1120)

There was a deliberate campaign to divide the board and turn it on itself. The staff were politicized against certain board members by trying to convince them that the board consisted of evil envoys of the Conservative government bent on destruction. Legal means were used to pursue a resolution to the disagreement in a way that would be satisfactory to the president, but which would undermine the governance structures of the organization.

But there is something that concerns me far more than disagreements over performance reviews or grants in the Middle East. I have observed a culture at Rights and Democracy that is not predisposed to openness and accountability, even to members of the board. I have observed board members trying to do their jobs by asking questions about projects and results and being consistently met with non-answers, with bobbing and weaving, with disdainful contempt, and with delay tactics.

What I have observed at Rights and Democracy is a clear belief among staff that the organization's quasi-autonomy from the government of the day should translate into independence from the oversight of their own board. When board members' questions are met with non-information, physical blockades, and leaks to the media, it sets off alarm bells that prompt the board to ask more questions to get to the truth of the matter. When this is construed as harassment, as government interference, or as the implementation of some kind of partisan vendetta, it is an outrageous attempt to politicize something that does not deserve the label.

Rather than talk in generalities, let me share with you two examples of what I mean when I talk about accountability and transparency. This will take a few minutes, but I want to beg your indulgence, if I could.

I listened to the recording of your meeting earlier this week with the former employees and there are inconsistencies, so I want to outline for you a timeline of certain events that took place this January.

As you all know, we were shocked to learn on January 8 of Mr. Beauregard's untimely death. Later that day, the union president sent an e-mail to the staff about these events, and he said they would meet with management on Monday—that was a Friday—to discuss ways and means whereby the union could contribute to preserving the interests of Rights and Democracy.

On Monday, the now-famous letter calling for the resignation of the board leadership was sent out. Simultaneously, management retracted the main sticking point in its negotiations with the union so an agreement in principle was reached on a new collective agreement. At present, this board remains in the dark regarding the contents of the sections that were removed, which were retracted to break that logjam. The section generally deals with disciplinary measures, so we're left to speculate on what was removed.

The next day, the union president indicated to the staff that there would be a meeting to discuss a ratification vote on this new collective agreement. On Friday of that week—this is one week now after the death of the president—a new collective agreement was signed on behalf of the centre by Marie-France Cloutier, Anne-Marie Lavoie, and France-Isabelle Langlois, who are directors and deputy directors at Rights and Democracy.

The following Monday, the president of the union sent an e-mail to the staff indicating that the contract had been signed, and the next day there was a ratification vote in which the new contract was overwhelmingly approved.

Why is this important? This is important because for months and months the board had been told that the employees did not have a contract, there was an outstanding discussion, and that this was a very tough union to deal with. Suddenly, very quickly, they managed to get an agreement at a time when they needed the support of the staff. It's highly unusual.

On Tuesday, January 19—so this is the day of the ratification vote, two hours after the ratification vote—Mr. Braun received an e-mail from the management committee at the centre to inform him that they were respectfully declining his request as chair to reconvene the board meeting in Montreal later that week.

On Friday, the board met anyway in Toronto, and my colleague, Mr. Gauthier, was appointed as acting president. Dr. Braun sent a memo to the staff in which he indicated that Mr. Gauthier had been appointed as president. Less than two hours later a response was received from Marie-France Cloutier, and cc'd to the board and the staff, that she refused to implement the details of that memo, and she announced for the very first time that she was now on sick leave for three weeks. This is the only notice ever received from Madame Cloutier regarding her sick leave, and it comes five days after the date she indicated here in this committee, on Tuesday, that she had gone on sick leave. So five days later was when the board was notified. Even after she announced her sick leave, we know that she attended Mr. Beauregard's funeral, she went to Ottawa and met with officials at DFAIT, she wrote an op-ed in the *Ottawa Citizen*, and she went on a long-planned trip to Disney World.

● (1125)

Here's the thing, though. I have learned most of these details in the past two days. On Tuesday morning, just two days ago, the board of Rights and Democracy did not know that a new collective agreement had been agreed to, and signed, and ratified over two months ago. This board has met three times since this agreement was ratified, and no one on the management team ever brought it up. The collective agreement with a union is one of the most material contracts to an organization, and it is incomprehensible to me that the entire agreement was put together without board knowledge or consent, and that it remained hidden from view for over two months.

I had another point. I will leave that and maybe it will come up in the questions.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, in 11 months on this board, I have witnessed a method of operation at Rights and Democracy that is not consistent with good governance norms for transparency and accountability. This example that I gave, plus the other one that I'd be glad to discuss, are two examples among many, and they are the reason why the board has been consistent in its message in demanding more transparency and greater accountability. Without this, we are unable to do our jobs.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Farquhar.

We're now going to move over to Dr. Matas.

The floor is yours, sir, for 10 minutes.

Mr. David Matas (Member of the Board of Directors, Rights and Democracy): Thank you very much. Thank you for inviting me to appear.

I was appointed to the board of Rights and Democracy in November 2009. My first board meeting was January 7 and 8, 2010. The evening of the first day of that meeting the president, Rémy Beauregard, tragically died of a heart attack. Four days later, a letter, with the names of all staff appended, called on the leadership of the board, the chair, vice-chair, and chair of the finance and audit committee, to resign, citing harassment of the president.

So I had to ask myself what was going on here. The charge of harassment, I could see, was absurd on its face. None of the three accused of harassment lived in Montreal. They were busy people, and in my experience were often hard to contact. The chair, in the weeks before the meeting, was virtually incommunicado, spending most of his time in hospital with his then dying wife. She died just a few days before the board meeting.

Moreover, the sole specific complaint in the letter requesting resignations had nothing to do with harassment. The specific complaint was that the performance evaluation committee of the board treated the president unfairly, because it sent the performance evaluation of the president to the Privy Council without first having given the president a copy and an opportunity to comment. The president did get a copy of the performance review from the Privy Council through an access to information request and did have an opportunity to comment on the review before any decision was made in the Privy Council on that review. In my opinion, as an administrative law lawyer litigating the duty of fairness almost constantly for decades, there was nothing unfair in that.

Before I was appointed I was not told a whole lot. I was asked if I had any skeletons in the closet. I said, "Well, I'm a Liberal", but that did not seem to matter. I'd been on the board before, between 1997 and 2003. I was told there was a division in the board and my experience as a past board member would be helpful. I was told there had been a dispute about three small grants to organizations in the Middle East, but that the president, when criticized about the grants, had distanced himself from them.

Was this an issue or the issue, these grants? Apparently not. I decided to test the waters myself at the January board meeting by presenting a resolution repudiating the grants. The motion passed unanimously, with the president speaking in support and saying, "We could have done our homework better."

A staff representative, Charles Vallerand, in a letter to the *Globe and Mail* on January 16, indicated that the dispute the staff had with the board majority was not about policy.

On reflection, it was my view that to look for one answer to the question of what was plaguing Rights and Democracy was overly simplistic. I considered there to be a sequence of issues, each issue related to the others, a set of nested dolls. The issue of the three small Middle East grants was not an irrelevancy but rather embedded in another issue, the performance review of the president.

The performance review of the president, completed by the performance review committee and sent to the Privy Council in May 2009, had a half-page reference in the 16-page review to these three

grants. So there was a small reflection of the grants in the performance review. The performance review was a lot larger issue and was the immediate cause of division within the board. The president, as he was fully entitled to do, disagreed with the performance review sent to the Privy Council. But for reasons I must confess I still do not fully understand, he brought his disagreement to the board and not to the Privy Council. The president asked the board to decide that the performance review should be withdrawn from the Privy Council, but structurally the board had no authority to deal with the performance review. The president proposed a bylaw change so that the board could deal with the performance review. That proposal, as well as his request for withdrawal, was still pending the day he died.

The performance review was itself embedded in a still larger issue: the relationship between the board and the staff. From the paper record he left behind, I can see that Beauregard's concerns were not just the content of the performance review but also its scope. He considered the performance review as commenting on matters that were in his view none of the business of the performance review committee. An over-expanded scope for the presidential performance review committee meant that for the president to obtain a positive performance review, he would have had to conform to the views of the committee on matters that in his opinion were not properly within their jurisdiction but were rather part of the president's reserve domain.

We can see that the dispute is not about personalities but a continuation of the dispute, even though many of the characters have changed. The dispute about performance review was embedded in the larger dispute itself about accountability, about whether the staff or the board decided the course of the organization. But even that issue was embedded in a much larger issue, the role of Rights and Democracy.

● (1130)

Rights and Democracy was established to give grants to third world NGOs that would promote rights and democracy. It was set up at arm's length from government in order to avoid giving the impression of political interference in foreign countries, which direct Canadian government granting to foreign NGOs might give. Yet the staff and management of Rights and Democracy, from my perspective, has all but abandoned that original parliamentary intent.

There are NGOs, of course, to which Rights and Democracy gives money, but none of this is simply the awarding of grants among applications. All spending today by Rights and Democracy on NGOs results from elicited requests. The organization devises the programs and finds NGO contractors to deliver them. NGOs that receive grants today from Rights and Democracy are doing what Rights and Democracy wants, on contract.

The original vision was that the third world NGOs that received grants from Rights and Democracy should be independent from the Government of Canada. This has been perverted into a notion that the staff of Rights and Democracy should be independent from its board. Yet independence of the staff from the board violates the statute of the institution that vests authority in the board over the conduct and management of the affairs of Rights and Democracy.

As well, independence of the staff on the board makes no sense. The Government of Canada should take the NGO world as it finds it and not try to manipulate it through money, but that is different from saying that a government-appointed board should leave the staff of a government-devised and wholly financed creature to do whatever it wants. It is, on the contrary, bizarre to suggest that the Government of Canada should fully fund an institution to hire people off the street to run its own political agenda in the name of human rights without its appointed board raising so much as a peep.

This was a problem I could see even when I was on the board before. Again, the catalyst was the Middle East, where there are often disagreements. Rights and Democracy had a fledgling Middle East program, which the board terminated in 1998, when I was a member of the board.

Warren Allmand then, without board approval, sent two letters to Bill Graham. One of them expressed shock at Canada's voting against one of the many anti-Israel resolutions at the then United Nations Human Rights Commission. Another was an anti-Israel diatribe condemning Israel for violating every international crime known to humanity. This time it was the Hezbollah terrorist attacks from Lebanon that generated that letter.

As a board member, I then wrote to Bill Graham, pointing out that I was a member of the board and disagreeing with what Allmand wrote. At that time, Allmand and his staff, in good grace, accepted what had happened and we moved on, but these were two trains moving on the same track toward each other on a collision course.

One could question the mission of Rights and Democracy as devised by Parliament, even as the organization stayed within the statutory vision. But it has not, by, in effect, creating programs that it is running itself with NGO delivery. We can see the notion of independence of staff on the board, not just because of what the staff have said, but also because of what the past presidents have said. We have a statement from four past presidents asking the Prime Minister to address a subversion of the independence of the organization.

Where does that leave Rights and Democracy? If this were just a matter of hot tempers, tempers could cool and time would heal. If it were just a matter of some misspoken words, apologies might remedy the rudeness. However, if the problem lies with the structure and relationship within Rights and Democracy itself, the resolution of the problem is not so simple.

Independence of a government-created and fully financed operation from a government-appointed board makes no sense. Unless and until we have a staff that have accepted that the board is responsible for the direction of the organization, the problems at Rights and Democracy will persist.

Thank you.

●(1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Matas. We're now going to move over to Dr. Braun.

You'll have the last comment, and then we'll go around the room for questions and answers. The floor is yours, sir, for 10 minutes.

Mr. Aurel Braun (Chair of the Board of Directors, Rights and Democracy): *Bonjour.*

My name is Aurel Braun and I'm the chair of the board of Rights and Democracy. Please allow me to say a few words about myself by way of introduction. I am a professor of international relations and political science at the University of Toronto, where I have held the highest academic rank of a full professor for more than two decades.

My interest and expertise in human rights and democratic development go back decades, and my willingness to take on the position of chair of Rights and Democracy has also been influenced by my background. I came to this country as a young boy with my parents in the early 1960s. My parents had been victims of right-wing extremism—Nazism—and of left-wing extremism—communism.

One of my books, in fact, is about extremism and the danger that both right-wing and left-wing extremism pose to human rights and democracy. As a child growing up in a neo-Stalinist state from which my parents brought me to Canada, I could sense the perniciousness of an extreme system in which merely asking questions was deemed to be subversion. Canada, however, gave me every opportunity to grow, and whatever I have achieved, I owe to this country.

The profound sense of fairness that characterizes Canadian culture has always been an inspiration, and joining Rights and Democracy seemed to be an opportunity to give something back and express my gratitude. Sadly, however, the current situation, which you've seen in the press and elsewhere, reminds me of the great liberal writer, George Orwell, author of *1984* and *Animal Farm*. The late Orwell must be ruefully smiling from the grave at what he is hearing.

The situation we've encountered in the past couple of months is truly Orwellian. If I had known fully what I was getting into, I would never have agreed to be chair of the board of Rights and Democracy. It was as if I'd been invited to attend a conference and was asked to get some papers in a back room, only to discover there land mines instead.

Let's begin with the obvious. You have been hearing all these months two completely incompatible versions of reality. In the situation of "he says, she says", wise people avoid jumping to conclusions, because they do not know whom or what to believe. I urge you to believe no one, including me, before checking the documentable facts. By checking the documented evidence, a fair and objective person can know who is the arsonist and who is the firefighter.

Let's begin with what many of us can agree on. Rights and Democracy is a dysfunctional organization. Becoming a dysfunctional organization can be decades in the making. For this reason, you should not believe the words of ex-presidents any more than you should take at face value what I have to say. My view of Rights and Democracy is that it was seized by a culture of dogmatism, a rejection of accountability, and a lack of transparency.

But I wish to point to the facts. The first type of verifiable fact involves actual facts about impropriety and sponsorship. The organization has spent, as we've heard, about \$3.5 million in subsidies. We don't know where all of this money has gone. We do know that far too much of it has gone to terrorist front organizations that pretend to be human rights organizations, notably Al-Haq, in certain ways a front for the terrorist organization PFLP.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars have gone to the Geneva-based office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is the secretariat of the disreputable UN Human Rights Council, an organization whose conduct has been characterized by the UN Secretary-General himself as totally unacceptable.

• (1140)

Thousands of dollars have gone to a Cairo conference organized with the inclusion of Hezbollah, an organization deemed terrorist under the laws of Canada and other democracies.

The second type of verifiable fact involves senior staff's disregard of due process and elementary fairness. Days after the passing of President Beauregard, the senior staff, as we heard, rushed to sign a collective agreement with their own union without even informing the board. It very much appeared that the purpose of the rushed collective agreement in January 2010 was to give unionized staff taxpayer money in exchange for the union's backing for the senior staff campaign to obscure that senior staff's long history of dogmatism and rejection of accountability.

Elementary fairness will also require the senior staff to be honest about who signed the famous letter of protest and who actually wrote it. Certainly the letter claiming unanimity was not signed by everyone on January 11, 2010. Days later, senior staff rushed around coercing employees to provide their signatures after the letter had already been written and sent. Further, elementary fairness would require the staff not to misuse the passing of the president to serve their personal agendas. It is true that the board and the president did not always agree, but it is a verifiable fact that the president took the side of the board, not the senior staff, at the all-crucial board meeting of January 7, 2010.

The third type of verifiable fact involves the disregard by the senior staff of their obligation to protect confidential information. By this I mean that staff had an obligation to guard computers so that information about Rights and Democracy's anonymous staff in war zones like Afghanistan would never leave the offices. Instead, a number of computers with sensitive information disappeared mysteriously without third-party confirmation that there was a break-in.

Furthermore, it seems that senior staff gave the widow of Mr. Beauregard his computer, with all its sensitive information, even though she had neither the right nor the clearance to receive such information.

In conclusion, please allow me to note again that dysfunctional organizations can take decades to become that way. Fair-minded people withhold judgment about who is telling the truth until they can get verifiable, documented evidence. We are here to present the facts. We have discovered the problems. We did not create them. We, as volunteers, have given our time and have made major sacrifices in order to ensure that Rights and Democracy fulfills its mandate to enhance human rights and promote democracy and that it acts in a fashion that is congruent with the good conscience of the Canadian people.

Thank you for inviting us.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Braun.

We're now going to start with Mr. Rae. You have seven minutes, sir.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much. It's hard to fit it all into seven minutes.

I'm trying to deal with the incongruity of the messages from the board, Dr. Braun. Last week you issued a statement—I have it from the *Ottawa Citizen*—saying that you welcome public hearings on Rights and Democracy. It was signed by seven members of the board. It said how much you were looking forward to it, and you were calling upon Parliament to hold public hearings so that facts can replace fantasies, so we can move ahead, and that Rights and Democracy should be nobody's football. That was signed by seven, including Dr. Marco Navarro-Génie.

Imagine my surprise when I read in the *National Post* two days ago an onslaught attack on this committee by Dr. Navarro-Génie. Did he discuss his letter or his publication with you before it went into the *National Post*? Did you have any knowledge of this?

Mr. Aurel Braun: I'm sorry. Are you directing the question at me?

Hon. Bob Rae: I'm directing it at you, Dr. Braun, as chairman of the board.

Mr. Aurel Braun: Thank you very much.

Thank you for bringing this up, because we did welcome appearing here. I want to make it very clear that we came here willingly. I want to make it very clear that it is absolutely untrue what was said by a member here that I had refused to come on the 18th. There was no schedule for me to come. That can be verified, sir. On the 23rd, there was a request early on to change that and it was agreed upon. We gave an alternate date. So we are here voluntarily and we welcome being here.

In terms of what appeared in the paper, I did not read that. It was not sent to me directly. It's my best recollection. I perhaps would not have used the same language, but there clearly has been some concern at the type of things that have happened before this committee, the kind of irresponsible accusations that were levelled at us, the kind of utterly confused timelines that were given by the staff, an impression that was created—

Hon. Bob Rae: Dr. Braun, if I may interject—we only have seven minutes and you can talk out the clock—I have to try to get to the bottom of this article.

This article appeared before the employees appeared before the board. You've described the organization as deeply dysfunctional. It would be a little odd if Parliament didn't deal with that: it's our organization and we created the organization. The comments of the people who are saying we shouldn't be here or shouldn't be discussing this, of those who refer to it as a gong show or say the opposition can't tell the difference between democratic allies and terrorists, or of those who accuse us of being anti-Semitic because we had a meeting on Passover—and Parliament does meet on Passover, as we all have to be here, and the G8 meeting was held on Passover—and who then go on to attack all the other former people who were involved with the organization, do you see those as consistent with the working of a functional board, particularly when the member of your board who is making those comments decides to let himself go and attack every person on the board who's not a member of the Conservative Party?

What's going on in this board? Why would you countenance that kind of behaviour from a board member? You're chairman of the

board; you have a responsibility to hold members of your board accountable. This is just bizarre behaviour by somebody at the outset of a hearing to be making these accusations.

You want to talk about George Orwell? George Orwell would have a field day with this. I know quite a bit about George Orwell. He'd have a real field day with this kind of nonsense appearing in the middle of our discussion.

Why wouldn't you ask for this board member's resignation?

Mr. Aurel Braun: Mr. Rae, again, I appreciate the concern you have. The member you are referring to is not here to answer for himself. You do see four members here. We are here willingly, we are here respectfully, we're here to answer questions. I hope the same respect we're showing to you and others will be shown to us in return.

• (1150)

Hon. Bob Rae: Absolutely.

Mr. Aurel Braun: I hope you do understand our concern that in this type of hearing, it is very easy to make irresponsible and unsubstantiated statements, and perhaps this is what the board member was expressing, that is, the person who wrote what he did. I think it is very clear when we read the transcript what had happened, and what the employees have said is that there should be a very careful examination, especially what Mrs. Cloutier said. Mr. Farquhar gave you a well thought out timeline that is utterly inconsistent with that. I think in terms of fairness that those are the kinds of things we should look at. Very clearly, I think it is important that we get the facts out, and that is why we're here.

Hon. Bob Rae: I certainly have no intention of doing anything other than that, but I just want to ask a question with respect to one other fact. I've been involved as a board member of innumerable organizations in the private sector and the public sector. I've been a manager of organizations. I've worked in law firms. I have never heard of a situation, and Mr. Matas commented on this, where a review was done of the work of a senior employee, in this case the president, and he was not shown the results before a final determination was made on whether or not it was a fair evaluation.

You've talked a lot about fairness and the duty of fairness. How does it match with the duty of fairness that a president has to make a request for information before seeing the document? Don't you find it unusual that somebody would get what, in effect, was a negative evaluation and not be shown it, and not be given an opportunity to respond to it, before it's passed to the Privy Council?

The Chair: Dr. Braun, we have less than 30 seconds, but I do want you to answer the question, so go ahead.

Mr. Aurel Braun: Would you like me to answer it? David Matas would also like to answer that.

The Chair: Or whoever wants to answer it.

Mr. David Matas: Since I addressed this issue, I certainly don't mind answering it. The performance review that was sent to the Privy Council was an advisory one; it wasn't constitutive, and the actual decisions on the performance review were made by the Privy Council. The decisions were about a pay raise—actually, they were about a bonus. Rights and Democracy got a legal opinion about this stating that it was a confidence of the Privy Council and that only the Privy Council could release it.

I wrote to the Privy Council and asked that they release the review publicly, because there's a lot of dispute about it. They wrote back to me and said, your lawyers should talk to our lawyers. I was just trying to avoid a legal expense, so I left it at that. However, because this was advice given to the Privy Council, Rémi Beauregard got the review. He had different views, and he did express contrary views. Then it would have been up to the Privy Council to decide what to do, and that strikes me as fair.

Mr. Aurel Braun: May I just add one comment?

The Chair: Just be very quick.

Mr. Aurel Braun: Mr. Rae, as you know, any organization has to live by the laws of the organization, by the rules of that organization. No one is above the laws of the organization and no one is below them. If we had proceeded differently, we would have been in violation of our own bylaws.

Second, Mr. Beauregard was given every opportunity to meet with the committee before, but refused, and to meet with the committee afterwards, but refused. He had that document in less than four weeks, and he was able to see it, at any rate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move on to Madame Lalonde, for seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you all for being here.

I feel I have to say that the accusations—because that is how I see them—that you have made regarding the staff and management bring me right back to the position I took when this dispute first arose—and that is that there must be an inquiry into the situation at Rights and Democracy and a report done by someone familiar with the international aid and NGO communities, who could help to put it back on track, remembering that it is an independent organization—an institution of Parliament yes—but still an independent organization operating at arm's length from the government.

The statements I have read and the material I have seen confirm my conviction that an inquiry is needed. Let me put the question to you: Do you not think there should be an inquiry? Everything that the four of you have said leads to that.

My question is addressed to Mr. Braun.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Aurel Braun: I will say something briefly, and then my colleague, David Matas, would like to say something as well.

First of all, if I understood you correctly, you used the word “independent”. Am I correct in that, that you said it is an independent organization?

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: It is an independent organization operating at arm's length.

[English]

Mr. Aurel Braun: I would very much like to clarify that, because in fact we are not an independent organization. We are a SWOT organization. I think we really need to understand that, because it's profoundly important that we do appreciate the distinction between independence and autonomy, and that is, in terms of our funding and in terms of our responsibilities to Parliament and in terms of our reporting, we have an area of autonomy—but we are not an NGO.

This is one of the issues. It has been misreported very often that we are an NGO, and we are not an NGO.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: That is true; there is legislation. Your organization was established through legislation, and that legislation clearly dictates the way it is to be managed.

[English]

Mr. Aurel Braun: We are not an NGO in the law. Consequently, in terms of our reporting, in terms of the way we have to be responsible for our financing... This is one of the issues.

Let me just give you an example of what happened—

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out that when Rights and Democracy was first created, the idea was to allow Canada to take action to foster democratic development in a non-partisan manner. It was so that it could operate in a non-partisan manner that this institution created by Parliament was given that freedom.

[English]

Mr. Aurel Braun: Absolutely, and we believe deeply in non-partisanship.

What troubled us a great deal was that when you look at the pattern of these grants, there was partisanship. That was the default setting, and it was very often delegitimizing and dehumanizing a fellow democracy, as if this were non-partisan. And in the attempt to seek fairness, that is when there was a problem.

I think it is essential, therefore, to understand that there are some parameters within which this organization works, and those include the good conscience of Canadian people.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Can I ask you what you mean by “partisan”? Could you give me an example?

In your opinion, was the grant to the Israeli NGO B'Tselem, which I am well acquainted with, a partisan grant?

[English]

Mr. Aurel Braun: I would, since David Matas has spoken to this, and the resolution that was adopted, for which I want to emphasize the repudiation... President Beauregard admitted that the grants given to these two organizations were a grave mistake, that they should have done their homework better. Mr. David Matas passed that resolution, and perhaps he'd like to speak to it. Then Mr. Gauthier would like to say something.

Mr. David Matas: First of all,

[Translation]

I will respond in English. Although I speak French, the interpreters speak it far better than I.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: When I have a chance to speak French rather than English, I do the same.

[English]

Mr. David Matas: An inquiry, yes, I agree. But we have an inquiry. Jacques Gauthier, when he was acting president, ordered an inquiry through Deloitte & Touche.

The issue is not whether there should be an inquiry, but who is doing it and what its terms of reference are. What Deloitte & Touche is doing is trying to find out where the money is going, which is a legitimate inquiry, I would say. I have heard other people say that we should have an inquiry into the cause of death of Rémy Beauregard, which I frankly question. The staff reject the inquiry from Deloitte & Touche, saying it's a witch hunt. So the issue is not whether, but whom and how.

In terms of B'Tselem, I did a memorandum for the—

• (1200)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Tell us about B'Tselem, please.

[English]

Mr. David Matas: In terms of B'Tselem, I did a memorandum for the board, for the resolution that I presented at the board meeting of January 7, asking for repudiation of the grants. I have filed that memorandum with this committee. It talks about B'Tselem. I have it on my screen and I could read out the parts about B'Tselem.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Is B'Tselem a partisan organization?

[English]

Mr. David Matas: This is what I write. I said that its reports are politicized and tendentious. It identified casualties according to their activities at their moment of death, and therefore describes Palestinians, while not engaged in hostilities, as civilians. Among those listed in this category are known terrorists, Hamas officials, stone-throwers—who can be lethal—and civilians used by terrorists as human shields, whose deaths are the responsibility of terrorists.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Matas, you must have met the leadership of B'Tselem. When one enquires about them in Israel, one is told that they are very courageous Israelis, because they are seeking to document anything and everything that could help to negotiate peace between Palestinians and Israelis. For example, they have made some excellent maps, which will certainly be used if ever actual negotiations begin, because they are extremely precise. Even the Israeli army recognizes the value of their work. So, to say that the grant to B'Tselem should be revoked is to be unaware of the circumstances in which B'Tselem works.

[English]

Mr. David Matas: We obviously disagree about the nature of the work of B'Tselem. I invite you to look at the writing and research that I've done on it, which, as I say, I filed with the committee. I'm happy to engage you further on this.

The Chair: Mr. Gauthier, do you have a quick comment or was it covered?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: Ms. Lalonde, I think it is important that we all take an interest in the facts and in reality. Let's just back up a little, to be sure there is a clear understanding of the status of Rights and Democracy.

According to the Act, it is a shared governance organization. It is not a non-governmental organization. According to the Act, there is some connection to the government, which does not exist in other cases. What is strange is that—it is a little like a dog giving birth to a cat—Rights and Democracy, a shared governance organization gave rise, in Geneva, to a separate legal structure—Rights and Democracy in Switzerland—which is an NGO. The parent body is therefore invited to international meetings as though it were an NGO, even though it is not.

That is one source of complications, but you must not believe that we attribute that responsibility solely to the management team. There are structural problems at Rights and Democracy which we are currently trying to resolve.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have for this round. I'm sure we'll get back to another round with the Bloc.

I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Abbott for seven minutes.

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

As has been pointed out and underlined this morning, Rights and Democracy is an autonomous organization set up at arm's length from government. For the record I will state again, as I have in every one of these committee hearings, that this is not a matter this committee should be studying. As a committee we are asked to study matters of international affairs and development.

I recognize that I have said previously that this is an internal staffing issue in an arm's-length organization. I recognize that indeed this issue is a lot larger than a staffing problem. However, again I state on behalf of the government members that this is not the correct forum for this to be carried out. That said, because we are into it and because the questions have been asked by the opposition, I will engage in the same kinds of questions they may be asking.

I'm rather curious. Was it after the January 7 meeting that there was the tragic passing of Mr. Beauregard? Is that correct?

•(1205)

Mr. Aurel Braun: Yes, that is correct.

Hon. Jim Abbott: I understand that the meeting was very raucous and vitriolic. There was a lot of contentiousness at the meeting. It seems to be inconsistent with the other understanding, which is that at that meeting he chose to repudiate his own decision to pay out the contentious grants. I wonder if you could help to clarify this, because it goes to something that is rolling around—I think very irresponsibly, considering that this was the death of an individual—which is the idea that this meeting led to his demise. I think it's important to have that clarification.

Mr. Aurel Braun: Are you asking me, sir, to respond to that? Perhaps I could say a couple of words, and then others could join in.

This is one of the very distressing aspects of the process that has taken place. Floating out there you have ludicrous, irresponsible allegations directed against us, innuendoes that are absolutely horrific and that are totally at variance with the reality of what happened.

As chair, I have always asked people at these board meetings to treat each other with civility. I call on people to make sure they use parliamentary language and that individuals have an opportunity to speak. At this meeting, which took place on January 7, the meeting began with Mr. Beauregard being extremely concerned about his wife's health. Mr. Beauregard asked me to do something that we normally do not do at board meetings; he asked that he be allowed to leave his cellphone on. The reason was that his wife was in hospital. I immediately said to him, "Sadly, I understand all too well these kinds of problems and this kind of situation. I will absolutely make that exception. Please leave the cellphone on, and if there's anything we can do to help, we will do that."

The meeting itself was civil. There was a disagreement over a vote about reappointing one of the members of the board who was a foreign member, but that was a normal disagreement and involved two democratic votes. The afternoon was entirely civil. There were no vicious attacks. There was no atmosphere of chaos or stress. We took vote after vote. The president and the rest of us spoke civilly to each other. The president, in fact, voted with the majority of the board on a number of these votes, including one of the last votes, and that was the vote about repudiating these three grants, with which he fully agreed.

Therefore, these accusations that have been floating about are not only totally false, they're incredibly hurtful. One needs to ask what the possible purpose is of these accusations, since they entirely misrepresent the facts.

Other members of the board who are here can also speak about the atmosphere that prevailed on that day and how that day concluded on a civil note.

Thank you.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Thank you.

Mr. Aurel Braun: Mr. Matas or Mr. Farquhar might want to say a few words.

Mr. Brad Farquhar: Yes, the meeting in January was my second board meeting. My first one was last June.

The meeting in January, as Mr. Braun said, was much more civil than the June meeting. The June meeting was unbelievable. It was an incredible introduction to this board and to the organization.

I remember saying to my wife when I got home from that January meeting that it had been a much more civil discussion than I had experienced at the first board meeting. I think it was quite constructive. Sure, there were disagreements. We disagree on things regularly, but there was certainly no acrimony.

•(1210)

Hon. Jim Abbott: Mr. Farquhar, last Tuesday you gave us one example of inconsistency in the testimony of the witnesses. You said you had a second example?

Mr. Brad Farquhar: The other example is not so much of consistency with their testimony—and it's been alluded to here—but it's that last May, before I attended my first board meeting, some of the first correspondence I received from the centre was a package of bylaw amendments that were proposed to be discussed at the June meeting. Mr. Beauregard circulated them in advance of the meeting for us to consider.

I read them over, and it was clear that some of them were housekeeping items. But one amendment would have gutted the responsibilities and the role of the executive performance review committee, and it would have placed the entire responsibility for his performance review criteria on him. I sit on another board, and last year, in the period leading up to this, we had been through a review of the performance review process. The proposed changes I saw in that document were completely outside the accepted norms of good governance.

I went to that meeting prepared to oppose those changes. As it happens, none of those amendments were considered at that meeting because we didn't get to that part of the agenda.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Abbott. That's all the time we have.

We're going to finish off the first round with Mr. Dewar, for seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Since I only have seven minutes, I'll focus my questions on Mr. Gauthier and maybe one for Mr. Braun. I have nothing against the other two guests, but their experience and the roles they play aren't pertinent to my questions.

So Mr. Gauthier, I'll start with my disappointment that today we learn that the requests this committee had made to you, as the former acting president, to bring forward documents with regard to contracts that recently were signed off by the board or by you—I'm not quite clear by whom—were not brought to committee. I think we did ask, in our request for your appearance, that you bring with you the contracts that had been signed off.

I'll just list them. The audit with Deloitte & Touche has already been mentioned. I think you secured legal services from Borden Ladner Gervais, and you hired the communications firm Prima Communications. And there was another, what I'll call a private investigative firm, SIRCO Solutions.

I wonder why you didn't bring those contracts with you. Or did you bring them with you today?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: First, I must confirm that I received the request that you made reference to. The request, which is signed by the chair of the committee, was dated March 29, and it was sent to the office in Montreal. As I'm sure you know, I ceased to be president of Rights and Democracy last Friday. There is a new president.

I did visit Montreal on March 30 to help the new president understand a number of matters and to transfer files to him. Only that afternoon was I given a copy of an unsigned letter asking me to bring a number of documents.

Mr. Paul Dewar: So up until that point you had no—

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: Can I please finish?

Mr. Paul Dewar: I just want to confirm. So up until that point you had no idea a request had been made?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: There was reference, I believe, in some of the committee meetings—not a motion—to the fact that this would be forthcoming.

Mr. Paul Dewar: But you acknowledge the contracts exist.

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: I would very much appreciate it if I could finish the answer.

• (1215)

Mr. Paul Dewar: I only have a little bit of time, so you can appreciate that. I don't want to—

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: The answer is important, because you're suggesting something that is not accurate.

What I want to say, sir, is this. Yesterday I was, for the first time, able to consult the lawyers of the centre to ascertain what my rights and responsibilities were. Here is the answer to your question. I will give you an undertaking now to provide each and every one of the documents that you refer to, plus one that you did not refer to.

The contracts were with Samson Belair Deloitte, SIRCO, Ogilvy Renault—hired to do part of the investigation over the last months—Borden Ladner, and Prima Communications. Two of those contracts will be delivered after the first three because the investigations will

be completed over the next weeks, and both Deloitte and SIRCO have asked that the contracts be delivered upon the completion of their investigation, which I understand is a matter of weeks.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I really do have limited time, and you appreciate this. Can you tell us—

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: My response is that I will provide you with them.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Fine. That's great. Thank you very much for that. I appreciate that.

How much were these contracts worth, for instance, the SIRCO contract—which I'm calling a private investigative firm and you can call it something else—and with Prima Communications? Can you tell this committee how much those contracts are worth, or give a ballpark figure?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: Looking at all of the contracts that I've referred to, I cannot answer the question because the accounts have not yet been received.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I was just asking for an estimate, because you did engage these firms. I'm just wondering if, as the acting president of the time, you had an idea of how much they were going to cost. Was it more than \$10,000?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: I cannot give you... It's certainly more than \$10,000.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Okay. Did you tender these contracts to other firms to secure these contracts?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: No, I did not.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Isn't it the practice of the board to tender contracts over \$10,000 to ensure that the rules are followed?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: Well, let's back up a little bit here. You're not talking to me as a board member. I'm now the acting president.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Let's not get into the weeds here. You know the information on the contracts. They were contracts that either as a board member you were aware of or as president you signed off. I'm just asking a very simple question that Canadians should know the answer to. One of these contracts is with Prima Communications, whose president I think might be here, Peter Stockland, who is a contributor to Cardus, a think tank headed by Michael Van Pelt, who is a member of the board.

What's going on here? The allegations you have made have been about accountability, and when I ask you how much these contracts are worth, you're saying you don't know.

Do you know or not know how much these contracts are worth? Why weren't they tendered? Why weren't the rules followed?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: I think I've answered your question. I have not received the accounts, so for me to try—

Mr. Paul Dewar: So you don't know.

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: At this stage, I don't know how much these contracts... If you think about my answer, I'm saying that I have not received the accounts. When I receive the accounts I will know.

Mr. Paul Dewar: So did you just give them a blank cheque and tell them to go and do services and you would pay whatever, whenever?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: Let's break down the contracts.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'm just asking the question. Did you have any idea how much money was going to be spent on these contracts?

Hon. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, we have had a fairly civilized tone in this meeting. Mr. Rae has asked some very, very difficult questions, as we all have.

I think the tone that is being displayed by Mr. Dewar is disrespectful of the witnesses. I would like him, if he would, just to calm himself down a little bit. It would be helpful—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Can I leave it at this? Can you provide this committee with an estimate of how much those contracts were worth and why they weren't tendered?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: I'll do better than that, Mr. Dewar. The accounts, when they come, will become public. You will know exactly how much these contracts will have incurred.

What I was trying to do, and you interrupted me—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Sorry, answer my question.

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: I wanted to underline to you the importance of the work given to Samson Bélair Deloitte. You talk about an inquiry. They are doing an inquiry at this time, and the purpose of their work is not only to underline deficiencies but to make recommendations so that together we can—

Mr. Paul Dewar: I wasn't asking that—

The Chair: I have to cut everybody off here. That's all the time we have.

We're going to go back over to Mr. Obhrai for five minutes. We will start our second round of questions and answers for five minutes.

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

Thank you to all of you for coming here. Just before the untimely death of Mr. Beauregard, he came to see me, as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to talk about the vision and the work of Rights and Democracy. Today we have the current board members as well as the chair.

While the other questions are going on, on the other points, Canadians are also interested in knowing this. You have said it's a dysfunctional board. You have said this. I would like to hear from all of you about what you are putting in place to make this board functional. Where are you, going forward? What is your vision going forward? We want to move forward. Could you please tell this committee, minus all of this innuendo that's going on, where it is going? Mr. Beauregard did give me a brief outline as to what his vision was, and I want to hear from you as to where and how you are putting this board back on track and moving forward.

Mr. Aurel Braun: Is this question directed at me?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Well, the organization.

● (1220)

Mr. Aurel Braun: I will start, and perhaps the other members of the board can join in, because we work collectively.

I think the question is very important in terms of not only looking at the past and the present but also looking to the future, because that is exactly what we are engaged in. Our goal is to make sure this organization works well and fulfills its mandate.

I don't want to leave the impression that the board is dysfunctional. The board is not dysfunctional. It is the organization that has been dysfunctional.

It is also extremely important to understand the period that we're undergoing. Crises have been manufactured. There has also been a tragedy. The president passed away and the management staff created a number of crises. In a sense, they created a fire. We are in a situation of transition where we have to address this. When you have a fire, you try to put it out and bring things under control. It is somewhat ironic that people would ask how much water we're using.

We need to make sure that we do the right thing and that we act responsibly. We have a fiduciary duty. Our future goal is to make sure the programs fulfill the mandate of promoting human rights and democracy. It is absolutely crucial that we operate within the good conscience of the Canadian people and there is proper accountability. As a board, we are accountable. We report to Parliament. Those who are accountable are not only entitled to information, but we must make sure there's a system where we get the information to make informed decisions. We want the fullest possible information to make the best possible decisions and to continue programs that deliver public goods to the intended recipients, and that we do so economically and in a timely fashion. For example, we have already taken steps to make sure that we enhance what we're delivering to Haiti. It's been a key concern.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: May I interrupt here, Mr. Chair?

The new president will be coming in front of the committee. We'll hear what the new president will require.

Through the chair, in conjunction with the chair and everyone, may I ask that you provide to the committee what the next project is going to be, what the board is concentrating on, and where it's going? We'd then have a better idea and understanding that the board is now moving forward. Through the chair, in conjunction with the new president, could you give us a plan for the next six months?

Mr. Aurel Braun: Yes, absolutely. We'd be happy to talk about it.

We've been consulting with the new chair. We are proceeding to the period of transition. A number of very significant projects have already been approved. Those are continuing. We're doing the key work. We are enhancing certain things, such as our position in Haiti. We are certainly in that process. We want to communicate with the chair.

We have some other members who might wish to say a few words.

Mr. David Matas: Obviously, this is very much a matter of concern to me. I came here saying the problem is that there's a dispute about the independence of the board from the staff. The board has to assert itself.

I proposed a number of resolutions dealing with this issue. Of course, there's the Middle East one that we've talked about, but I also presented a resolution affirming the role of the board in controlling and managing the organization. We have cut out the discretionary funding, the urgent action opportunity. The president basically said the funding has to come through the board. We closed down the Geneva office, which we felt was operating without proper controls. We will continue to do a number of activities that will assert the control of the board over the direction of the institution.

Another one that occurs to me is the block granting to the Congo, which was originally proposed for three years. We're looking at it year by year, instead of all three years at once.

I accept your invitation. I'll work with the others to propose a plan that will show how we are trying to develop more complete control over the organization.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aurel Braun: If you would permit, perhaps Mr. Farquhar could comment.

The Chair: He may very quickly comment.

Mr. Brad Farquhar: I want to very briefly reinforce the comments of my colleagues.

At last week's board meeting we approved a strategic plan for the next five years, which had been worked on for many months by the senior staff. More importantly, we approved a plan that they brought forward to assist our staff. We have seven staff in Haiti, all of whom lost their homes in the recent earthquake. We've set aside a special fund to assist our staff get themselves and their families back on their feet. It's quite generous. It's an important part of being able to fulfill our mandate to do the job we're doing in Haiti.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move back over to Dr. Patry.

Sir, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

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

I hope you will not mind if I speak my mother tongue, even though I understand English perfectly; it is just easier that way.

My first question is for Mr. Braun.

Mr. Braun, I want to be sure my understanding is correct. You said that votes were taken at a meeting of the Board of Directors. That is perfectly normal, and what I want to get at is the result of the votes. Mr. Beauregard apparently approved three grants, to Al-Haq, to the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights and to B'Tselem. You voted against those grants; that is what happened. You said a little earlier that you did so because they were terrorist organizations. Is my understanding correct?

[English]

Mr. Aurel Braun: I had said that some of the organizations, such as Al-Haq, have links with terrorism. You will note that the Israeli Supreme Court, one of the most respected courts in the world, found on three separate occasions—2007, 2008, and 2009—that the head of this organization, the person with whom Rights and Democracy had signed a contract, Mr. Shawan Jabarin, is a senior member of a banned terrorist organization. This is a Supreme Court of Israel decision.

We also had a problem with this organization in that it violated the fundamental rule of non-partisanship, of impartiality. If you go to the website of this organization—and in fact I brought along one of the publications before they were commissioned to do any work—this organization had already made up its mind as to what happened, it had already designated a fellow democracy as basically a criminal entity, as committing systematic war crimes, and that this organization should be boycotted, divested, and sanctioned.

This is certainly not the sense of the people of Canada. This is not within the good conscience of the Canadian people. But what is very odd about this is that this was on the website; this was a decision they had already made. They had reached a conclusion, and then, ironically, bizarrely, in violation of every rule of fairness, they're asked to investigate.

Let me just read you something from the Supreme Court of Israel

Mr. Bernard Patry: No. I just want to ask some questions, if you don't mind.

Mr. Aurel Braun: That's fine. I just thought perhaps you'd like to get a sense—

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Gauthier, let's talk about the decision to retain or not to retain the office in Geneva. Was an external evaluation done? If so, what were its findings?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: Are you talking about the findings of the external evaluation?

• (1230)

Mr. Bernard Patry: Yes.

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: A report was prepared by Mr. Robert and reviewed by the Board of Directors. However, you referred to the closure of the Geneva office. I am sure you know that this was a two-year project, with a specific start and end date—namely August of 2009. So, because the project was completed, the question was not—contrary to what is often said—whether or not the office should suddenly be closed, but rather whether a new project would be approved in order to renew that office's mandate. That was the issue.

It is important to point out, however, that in early December of 2009, there was no one left at that office, because Ms. Cynthia Gervais, who was the Director in Geneva, had suddenly resigned. There was no one there for months.

The context and circumstances surrounding that closure are important. You should also know that there was that legal structure for the Geneva office. Rights and Democracy Switzerland was completely controlled by salaried members. None of the outside directors was part of that board. It had members, rather than shareholders. There were no board members. As a result, for years, very little information was passed on.

Let's talk about costs. I had understood that this had cost close to \$400,000 for two years. I learned later that it was very difficult to ascertain the actual cost because of mechanisms, that were consistent with the rules at Rights and Democracy, whereby funds could be provided for a project, because of a partnership or for any other reason.

As the Chair, in recent months, I was finally able to take a closer look at things. That is when I realized that the amount of money sent to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was not \$700,000, as we believed, but more than \$800,000. Furthermore, the Geneva office had received, not \$400,000, but more than \$500,000. So, there were concerns about flaws in accounting procedures.

It was decided that important projects that were being monitored by the Geneva office could be monitored from Montreal.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Along the same lines, I would like to come back to a question that was asked earlier by my NDP colleague regarding the firm of Samson Bélair Deloitte & Touche.

I am very surprised that a public agency would call on an outside firm, when this kind of work is done by the Office of the Auditor General on an annual basis. Why call on an outside firm when you can have it done internally through the government?

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: Sir, that is an excellent question.

It is important to understand that the mandate given to Samson Bélair Deloitte & Touche is in no way similar to that of the Auditor General. I had lengthy discussions with officials from the Office of the Auditor General, who asked me the same questions. After hearing my answers, they told me they understood the situation. Allow me to explain.

We wanted Samson Bélair Deloitte & Touche to help us get the answers we had been unable to get from the management team.

Indeed, I want to say that there has been an attempt on both sides to create villains in this situation. But I do not want to do that today with respect to the management team. There are presently circumstances that require us to secure some answers.

For example, what did the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights do with the \$800,000? Why did the management team not provide answer for months on end, even though these were considerable amounts of money?

Finally, I learned in recent weeks that it was because the office did not have that information. We needed the assistance of Samson Bélair Deloitte & Touche to track it down. Precise questions were put to the Office of the High Commissioner, which recently began to send us the answers we did not have previously. We will share those with you at the appropriate time, if you agree.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Patry and Dr. Gauthier.

We're going to move back over to Mr. Lunney.

Sir, you have five minutes.

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

First, thank you for appearing here today. We know it's a difficult issue, and we thank you for the time you've put into this. I know that some of you, as you've admitted, if you had known how much it was going to engage you on such a difficult issue you may have thought twice about taking the assignment.

Mr. Matas, I want to pick up on something you said earlier. First, your reputation is well known here in issues of human rights. I see that since 1987 you've been the director of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development. You were nominated recently for a Nobel Peace Prize. And of course you're a former member of the board, someone who brings a lot of experience in international human rights and experience with Rights and Democracy to the table.

In your remarks you referred to the original mandate for R and D. If I can summarize what you said, it was set up to provide grants to the third world NGOs to aid in promoting objectives of the organization—R and D—and that third world organizations delivering the services would therefore be well removed from the influence of the Canadian government but working on projects that were advancing the objectives of Rights and Democracy around the world.

But it seems to me that you said the mandate has somehow changed. Rights and Democracy is now creating programs and then using NGOs as contractors to deliver services, and the perception of NGOs around the world has changed since the original mandate. I wonder if you would care to comment or expand on that, because it may be germane to what's happening.

Mr. David Matas: Yes. We do have a funny structure right now in the sense that we have an organization that is fully government funded, has its civil service salaries, purpose, unionization, but that thinks of itself in many ways as an NGO and wants to function as an NGO in terms of policy and direction. And there's a mismatch.

The global perspective of the NGO community has moved on from the date when Parliament legislated the creation of this organization. We've had these various revolutions in countries—the Green Revolution, the Orange Revolution, and so on—that were led by NGOs and that have been foreign financed. And this has changed, often, the perpetrator perspective of human rights NGOs. And this notion of arm's length through this type of organization doesn't really exist the way it used to.

We've also seen the corruption of the NGO community through the Durban I process, this kind of anti-Israel ganging up. If one puts these grants at their best, one can say that the institution simply was blindsided by this because they didn't have a fully developed Middle East program. They weren't quite aware of the high politicization of all of these NGOs operating in the area and they just walked into this problem.

In terms of the institution, (a) it is not functioning the way it was set up to function; and (b) even functioning the way it was set up to function, the world has moved on. As a result, we have to think through... The purpose instructs the organization, and the answer to that, to me, means much more control of the board over the staff than there has been in the past. Certainly, that's what I've been trying to do with the various resolutions I've been presenting, and that's why I welcome the invitation to present a plan to that effect.

•(1235)

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you.

That leads into my next question.

Mr. Aurel Braun: May I add a comment?

Mr. James Lunney: Okay, but make it short because I have a couple more questions.

Mr. Aurel Braun: We have to look at the larger picture, and one of the very important things we need to understand is that any organization that does not grow, progress, and entertain new ideas is not going to be efficient. The sad thing is when ideas are replaced by dogma. We have a situation where you create a private fiefdom using public money; you have that rejection of accountability.

In looking forward, we have to continue to generate new ideas. We have to look at the 21st century, and what we need in the 21st century may not be same thing we needed 20 years ago. The general approach may be the same, but we have to be receptive. We can't just reject anything that is different. We need to operate on the basis of responsibility and accountability, because it is public money.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you.

Change is always stressful for any organization. They like to hit us with oxymorons like "one of the fixed principles of leadership is flexibility". We're all challenged by that, of course.

Another issue is the signing of this contract with the unionized employees. I understand it was under negotiation for half a year or more, with some difficult though apparently unidentified concerns.

I wonder if you can confirm that this contract was signed by management—I believe it was Ms. Cloutier—probably very shortly after the unfortunate demise of Monsieur Beauregard, without any consultation with the board.

The Chair: Mr. Lunney, I'm going to cut you off at that. We'll finish the question and then go on.

Mr. Brad Farquhar: Very specifically, the contract was signed on Friday, January 15, which was a week after the death of Mr. Beauregard. It was signed by Marie-France Cloutier, the director of finance and administration; Anne-Marie Lavoie, deputy director of human resources; and France-Isabelle Langlois, the deputy director of policy; along with some union counterparts on the other side.

We learned about this on Tuesday of this week.

Mr. James Lunney: Was that within the mandate of the board? Did they have the authority to sign that contract without consulting the board?

Mr. Brad Farquhar: I certainly don't think it was within the acceptable norms of governance for any organization anywhere. That's why I was stunned to learn about it on Tuesday. This is something that must be cleared up. For a collective agreement that has been difficult to negotiate and has been negotiated for months and months, to come about suddenly in one week and be hidden from the board, there's something wrong here. We've only known about it for two days, and we need to find out more about it. That's an important part of our job.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move to Madame Deschamps for five minutes, *s'il vous plaît*.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you. I do not have much time.

I have in front of me a report issued by Amnesty International called "Canada and Human Rights in 2010: Time to Return to Leadership". With respect to the Human Rights Council, that report states the following:

Canada has consistently voted against UN resolutions that are critical of Israel's human rights record.

With respect to January, 2009, it goes on to say:

Canada was the only state among the 47 members of the UN Human Rights Council to vote against a resolution condemning human rights violations that occurred in the context of last year's Israeli military offensive in Gaza. In November 2009, at the UN General Assembly, Canada was one of only 18 countries to vote against a resolution calling on both Israeli and Palestinian authorities to conduct independent, credible investigations into allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

A little further on, with reference to Canada's attitude, it states:

There have also been a series of funding cuts to Canadian organizations that work with or provide financial assistance to human rights and other groups in Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the Occupied Territories.

It makes reference, in particular, to the inter-church coalition Kairos and the development organization Alternatives.

A little further on, it talks about Rights and Democracy, an agency established by Parliament more than 20 years ago. Based on what is stated in the Amnesty International report, I have three very simple questions for you.

Why did certain Board members question partnerships with internationally respected and recognized Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations? Once again, I am going to ask this, even though it has already been asked. Why did the Board of Directors decide to close the Geneva office of Rights and Democracy, which was established close to the Human Rights Council, ignoring a positive external evaluation and recommendations that it be maintained? Why was the religious and ethnic background of staff raised by a member of the Board in the context of the President's performance appraisal?

● (1240)

[English]

Mr. David Matas: I will attempt to answer those three questions.

The first question has to do with the organizations. Within the Middle East there is a dispute among many players, unfortunately, about the existence of the State of Israel. It's the only state in the United Nations whose very existence is under threat.

There are many states that don't recognize it and engage in a very active campaign in demonization and delegitimization in order to further their goal of the destruction of the State of Israel, including two of the three organizations—Al-Haq and Al Mezan.

I appreciate your reading from the report of Amnesty International. I myself have written a book on this issue called *Aftershock: Anti-Zionism & Antisemitism*, which I've brought. I invite you to read it, and you will see in detail what the concerns are and why I have trouble with these organizations.

On why the bureau was closed, I must confess that I like the answer of Jacques Gauthier, which I thought was very good and very thorough, but there's something substantive at issue here as well. That bureau was mostly helping NGOs from third world countries come to participate in the universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council—as well as to liaise with other NGOs and the human rights secretariat, but their hands-on work was that.

I have been to the universal periodic review a couple of times about Iran and China. It's a very problematic process, and I don't think it's a good use of public money. I can't get into Iran or China, but it makes little sense to get NGOs that can actually work in those countries to leave those countries to participate in the universal periodic review where they can't speak. Only governments can speak. The NGOs can only meet with governments, and most of the governments they meet with can't speak either because there's a time limit. Only 60 states out of 192 are allowed to speak, and there's a rush of violators to the microphone in order to provide immunity to the states under scrutiny. So most of the rights-promoting states don't even get to the microphone. It's just not a good use of money.

There is a third question I was going to move on to, but...

● (1245)

[Translation]

Do you have any other questions?

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Could you please answer me, because the third question was more closely connected to the Board of Directors. It has to do with the religious and ethnic background of staff, a matter that was raised by a member of the Board.

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: Could I answer that question?

[English]

The Chair: I'm going to cut off the time. You can answer the question, and then we're going to move to the last round.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: I will be brief. In relation to your comment about the report, there is no reference, in that report, to what you just mentioned. Before passing judgment, it is important to look at the facts and rely on those facts. In this case, what you have suggested is untrue. I know that report by heart. There is no such reference in that report, Ms. Deschamps.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move to the last questioner for today, Mr. Goldring.

Sorry, it's Mr. Abbott first.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, I want to make a quick observation before my friend Mr. Goldring asks some very good questions.

I was rather entertained by Mr. Rae reporting on this op-ed piece that was done by somebody other than Mr. Braun and that was calling on Mr. Braun to put a gag on the board members...that he should not have written that. I thought it was a rather entertaining position for Mr. Rae to take.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you for appearing here today, gentlemen.

I have reviewed the impressive credentials of the four of you appearing today. I have noted as well the credentials and political background of other persons associated with the organization over the years: Mr. Broadbent, NDP; and Warren Allmand, Liberal.

Mr. Matas, you said you had run as a Liberal at one time. Mr. Farquhar has run with the Saskatchewan Party, which I think we can conclude to be on the Conservative side.

That indicates there is a broad political spectrum in your organization. It bodes well for the very important work you have been doing. I'll be looking forward to your updating your plans for the future too.

In keeping with that, Mr. Farquhar, I want to talk about some of the comments you made. You have quite a bit of experience with OSCE, as have I and others in Parliament. I think I've been on 11 different election monitoring programs—in different parts of the world too. I think it's an excellent background to develop the philosophy and theories on how to move forward to help some of the situations. There's nothing like being on the streets during the political challenge and game to determine what is right and wrong and what has to be done.

I'm very interested in your comment that you've been looking at political party development, which I would take to include policy development. One of the things that has been made very clear to me is that some of these struggling democracies have so many political parties—some have 40 or 50 political parties running in an election—that it's very difficult for them to organize policy development, what the political party should be doing.

Haiti is one example that you mentioned being involved in. There is a serious lack of understanding of how the members of Parliament should be representing the people.

Could you expand a bit on the party development, and perhaps some other initiatives that you will be looking at in the future?

Mr. Brad Farquhar: Thank you for the question.

My work in Tajikistan is the focus of the political party development work that I did overseas. Tajikistan is a former Soviet state. It's the poorest of the former Soviet republics. I was there for the second parliamentary elections in the country's history. It gave me great pleasure...you mentioned I was part of the OSCE observer mission. That was very interesting and educational, but what was terrific about the experience was that I had spent the previous three and a half months in the country working with all six of the registered political parties.

In a way, they're fortunate to only have six, although I know there's demand in Tajikistan to have more political parties, and it's significantly controlled and constrained by the government. It did mean that we could work with all parties on what an election platform is, and how you would bring disparate parts of even your own membership together to create consensus around the kinds of policies you would put forward in an election campaign. They were pretty green. We had to teach them what it meant to go out and knock on doors. They weren't sure if they'd be allowed to do that. The transition from a former totalitarian state to a democratic, elected state is still going on in many of these countries.

One of my objectives in serving on this board is... You know, the organization is called Rights and Democracy, and my area of experience and professional background is in the democracy part. We have others on our board who are human rights specialists. My observation with Rights and Democracy is that our actual project work has been more heavily tilted to the human rights end and less to the democracy end. I'd like to find a more even balance between the two, because it is inherent with our name. It's the passion that I bring to my position on the board in saying, what can we do in some of these states in order to assist the political process? We do a little bit of political party work. We've brought Bolivian parliamentarians to Haiti and we've created some back and forth. So I think there's a lot

more that Rights and Democracy can do in this area, and I look forward to being a part of it.

• (1250)

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

We have a final question from Mr. Rae, and then I need to do a little committee business to approve a budget to hear witnesses on this.

Hon. Bob Rae: I have just a comment on one of the organizations that's been at issue here, which is the B'Tselem organization.

I understand your point, Mr. Matas, and I appreciate the depth of your feeling and point of view, but I'd just like to point out that according to their websites, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Christian Aid (UK), Commission of the European Communities, DanChurchAid Denmark, Diakonia Sweden, Development Corporation Ireland, the German development organization, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, the Ford Foundation, the Norwegian foreign ministry, as well as the Dutch organization have all determined that supporting an organization that is advocating on behalf of human rights in the West Bank and Gaza is a legitimate organization. I think you do have to think a little bit about where the balance lies and not assume the worst with respect to the motivations of an organization such as Rights and Democracy, which is engaging in support of this organization or others.

I hold no grief or candle to them one way or the other. I'm just saying that one does have to recognize that a number of other respected governments have determined that this is an organization worthy of support. If you say no, it isn't, that's of course the right of the board to do that, but I think the board has to take into account to some degree the overall policy of the Government of Canada with respect to the question of what kind of a solution we see as being essential for the future of the Middle East. I do think that's something the board is going to have to consider.

My last point, Mr. Chairman, is this. In light of Mr. Matas' testimony today, as well as Mr. Braun's, Mr. Gauthier's, and Mr. Farquhar's, I really think this committee has an obligation...not to micromanage the organization, but you're describing, first of all, a level of dysfunction, which I think is important for us to hear about and to get your views on. We also have a very clear view from Mr. Matas as to how there are profound issues about the organization itself, based on the change in circumstances.

The idea that somehow it's inappropriate for us to look at an organization that has clearly been in crisis strikes me as rather odd, since it is funded by Parliament and is responsible to Parliament. I suggest to my friend, Mr. Abbott, that perhaps we might want to rethink this question, because you are telling us that you're going to have to look at some very fundamental issues. Quite frankly, if that's what you think you have to do, I think we have an obligation as members of Parliament to know what those new directions are, and to know what the implications of those directions are.

● (1255)

Mr. David Matas: In terms of your last comment, I have nothing to say. It's up to the committee, as far as I'm concerned, to decide whether and how to conduct its own business, and I have nothing to say on that.

When it comes to the Canadian Middle East foreign policy, sure, that's something again that is for the Canadian government to decide. Rights and Democracy is not the agent of delivery of the Canadian government Middle East policy. The Canadian government decides its own Middle East policy and delivers it in its own way. That's not our job, and we don't have a Middle East program at Rights and Democracy. If we had a fully fledged Middle East program with balance on both sides, maybe B'Tselem would be somewhere in that mix, but to take three organizations all doing the same thing on the same side... B'Tselem is certainly the most moderate of the three; the others are off the map. It's out of context, it's not helpful, and it just didn't work in the context of the organization.

The fact that I'm in a minority in terms of my views of B'Tselem... well, I'm a Liberal in the Prairies, I'm used to being in a minority, so that in itself doesn't bother me. As far as I'm concerned, the decision was appropriate. If the Canadian government can figure its way out of this Middle East thicket better than we can, more power to it.

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: I have just one quick word.

Mr. Rae, in listening to this response, we have to keep in mind, when we talk about the Middle East, we're talking about probably less than 2% of the budget and activities of Rights and Democracy. We have approved a strategic plan 2010 to 2015. We are not in disagreement with the staff that have prepared this plan. We like the plan. So before we come to the conclusion that we have a crisis with regard to programming or specific areas, let's keep in mind that 98% of what we're doing at Rights and Democracy has the support of the board, has the support of the staff. So yes, the questions that have

been raised are important. They're worthy of further consideration, but in the context of what we're doing, I think it's a mistake to think that everything has to be revamped and reconsidered, taking into consideration the fact that almost everything we're doing over the next five years is pursuant to the very wishes of the staff. There's no disagreement there.

Hon. Bob Rae: The only thing I'd say is that I'm just quoting back what Dr. Braun said in his prepared statement, what Mr. Matas said in his prepared statement. Dr. Braun described it as a dysfunctional organization, talked about a culture of dogmatism and other things. Mr. Matas has talked about how the world has changed completely, so the board has to change completely. He talked about how the board had to take much greater control over the organization. These are very critical issues.

Mr. Jacques P. Gauthier: Mr. Rae, the dysfunction has to with accounting issues and the lack of transparency, and the work that's being done by Deloitte right now will result in a number of recommendations. Their objective is not to condemn one side or the other. Their goal is to highlight things that are not sufficiently addressed by the current rules of the organization, and hopefully when we all look at these recommendations together, we will fix what's deficient with an otherwise very valuable organization.

The Chair: Okay, gentlemen. I want to thank each and every one of you for coming. I realize you're all volunteers and probably didn't realize you would be signing up for this many meetings when you took on the organization, so thank you for being here today. I know you all have very busy schedules.

I'm going to dismiss the witnesses.

As a committee, though, we need to approve \$14,828 so we can bring witnesses in on this. Do I have the approval of the committee?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

● (1300)

Mr. Aurel Braun: On behalf of the board, thank you for inviting us and giving us this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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