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Monday, March 21, 2011

Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study on the Canadian and international disaster response and the situation in Haiti is what we are going to talk about today.

I see we have some witnesses from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, as well as from CIDA. I believe we have Ms. Golberg, who is going to speak first, for 10 minutes or so. Why don't you introduce your team members, who are here to help you out or to be supportive?

Then I believe Ms. Norton is also going to be speaking for 10 minutes. I'll ask you to introduce your team as well before we get started.

Ms. Golberg, why don't you start? The floor is yours.

Ms. Elissa Golberg (Director General, Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force Secretariat, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

By way of introduction, I have with me Patricia Fortier, who is with our consular operations bureau, and Neil Reeder, who is the director general in our Americas bureau. I am the director general of our stabilization and reconstruction task force, and Leslie will introduce the CIDA colleagues.

[*Translation*]

I am very glad to be here today to discuss the measures taken by the Government of Canada following the earthquake that shook Haiti on January 11, 2010, as well as to discuss our response strategy in natural disaster cases in this region more broadly.

When natural disasters occur abroad, the Government of Canada tries to respond by using a set of proven and effective mechanisms and procedures intended to make our action coordinated and coherent. These mechanisms involve three main elements: first, standardization of operational procedures for managing interministerial coordination; second, release of information and decision-making; third, outlining of intervention possibilities available to the government. This also includes a standing interministerial task force, 24/7 monitoring measures, and exercises on lessons learned in order to continue steadily improving our capacity to respond to disasters.

Our procedures are tested regularly, and we ensure that staff is trained government wide, so that everyone's roles and responsibilities are known and there is no need to become familiar with them when a disaster occurs.

[*English*]

In essence, our bottom line is this: we've developed over the last decade a set of standard operating procedures across the Government of Canada that have served us extraordinarily well. I sometimes joke among my colleagues that it's not a Magic 8 Ball that you shake and then look at the standard operating procedures and it tells you the answer to the crisis. It doesn't necessarily tell us that, but what it has helped us to do, time and again, is to lay out a framework within which the Government of Canada can respond, so that colleagues across government know what's expected of them, so that our roles and responsibilities are clear, and so that we're not exchanging business cards after a crisis strikes.

How does this work in practice? To put it into context, every year Canada monitors hundreds of natural disasters abroad. Foreign Affairs has procedures and templates in place to consult with our missions on the impact of these disasters on the affected country, the majority of which don't require a whole-of-government response.

In this respect, it's generally through our colleagues at CIDA that we would respond to dozens of small and medium-sized disasters that don't garner widespread international attention. But in the case of significant natural disasters abroad, my organization, the stabilization and reconstruction task force within Foreign Affairs, is responsible for convening the standing interdepartmental task force on natural disasters abroad.

This task force is made up of core federal departments typically involved in a Government of Canada response, the core being Foreign Affairs, CIDA, DND, the Privy Council Office, and a few others, depending upon the circumstances. This task force can expand to include as many as 16 departments and agencies, depending upon the nature of the crisis. For Haiti we had 14 departments and agencies implicated. For Japan we currently have 16 departments and agencies implicated, because of the complexity of the crisis. The task force is essential for assessing the information coming in and helping to develop recommendations on how the Government of Canada can best respond.

There are essentially three conditions that activate a Government of Canada response to a natural disaster abroad. First is a request for assistance from the government of the affected country. Second is needs assessments from trusted humanitarian partners on the ground. The third is appeals by experienced humanitarian partners. There are a number of other elements that are also considered by the task force. These can include the magnitude of the disaster, the number of people that have been displaced, the number of people with urgent needs, and the existing capacity of the affected country. This is incredibly important. If you have a government that has an excellent preparedness system in place, you won't need to draw on as much international support as you will if you are dealing with a country that's already vulnerable and doesn't have strong coordination capabilities.

If the size and impact of a natural disaster is significant, then with the agreement of the government of the affected country, the Minister of Foreign Affairs can request the deployment of something called the interdepartmental strategic support team, the ISST, which will go out to the affected area. This team is led by DFAIT but it includes colleagues from CIDA and the Canadian Forces. Sometimes it can include the Public Health Agency, as was the case after the Indian Ocean tsunami. This ISST provides expert analysis on the situation and helps to outline options in support of international relief efforts.

With regard to the kinds of options the Government of Canada has at its disposal, we have over the last decade developed a robust tool kit that enables us to undertake timely and effective international responses. My colleague Leslie Norton from CIDA is going to elaborate on some of those tools in a few minutes, but to give you a feel for them, I can tell you that we can draw on financial support. We can provide this support to experienced humanitarian partners—the UN, the Red Cross, NGOs. We can fund and deploy Canadian civilian technical experts, and we can deploy emergency relief stocks.

If the disaster is too great for civilian international or local organizations to manage, then a scalable and modularized response package from the Canadian Forces can also be drawn upon by the task force. This can include a strategic airlift, naval assets, and engineering capabilities. In the event of a catastrophe such as the one we saw in Haiti, we can also draw on the medical and water supply capabilities of the disaster assistance response team, DART. The DART's deployment would be contingent on the ISST identifying it as a need and on discussions with humanitarian partners on the ground and the affected government.

● (1535)

I understand that my colleagues from the Canadian Forces have been invited to appear, so they will discuss this with you in greater depth. If there are any specific questions with regard to Haiti, Leslie and I would certainly be happy to respond to them.

The Government of Canada also has a couple of other tools at our disposal. On an ad hoc basis, depending on the nature of the crisis, we might draw on special immigration measures. We might pursue debt relief. As a tool for public engagement, a matching funds program has been used in the past when eligible dollars donated by individual Canadians to registered Canadian charities are matched dollar for dollar by the Government of Canada. This is not something that is pulled out of the tool kit on a regular basis. It has been for exceptional circumstances in which an extraordinary response from the Canadian public is believed to be warranted. Beyond Haiti, it was most recently used in response to the floods in Pakistan.

So this whole-of-government approach that I'm outlining—the standard operating procedures, the templates, the training, the task forces—has really been recognized as an international best practice. In fact, the latest OECD DAC peer review of Canada specifically cited this approach as something that other donors should look at as a model for whole-of-government engagement. It has proven to be an effective framework for action in successive earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, and the cyclone season. It is something we get a lot of questions about from our other partners around the world, and it's an approach that served us well when the January 2010 earthquake struck.

The earthquake was the strongest earthquake to hit Haiti in more than 200 years. As you know, it resulted in more than 220,000 people confirmed dead and an additional 300,000 people injured. We estimate that about three million people were affected and require ongoing international support. Approximately 800,000 people are still living in camps for internally displaced persons.

In the hours immediately following this catastrophic event, the Government of Canada mounted a rapid and comprehensive humanitarian and consular effort. Although it was coordinated through DFAIT, as I said, the Government of Canada's task force on natural disasters abroad involved a wide range of government departments and agencies, and our objective was simple. It was twofold. First of all, we wanted to meet the needs of Canadians in distress, and then we wanted to make sure that we were supporting the United Nations and the Government of Haiti by being able to respond to the needs of Haitians who were trying to emerge from the crisis.

At the behest of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the interdepartmental strategic support team was dispatched immediately along with the DART recce team. They arrived within 20 hours of the earthquake. Team members undertook a rapid assessment of humanitarian needs, engaging the Government of Haiti, other donors, international organizations, and NGOs already on the ground. When they got there, It was clear to our team that the needs were going to be overwhelming and that a comprehensive, multi-faceted, whole-of-government response was going to be needed. The team's recommendation subsequently informed the contributions that Canada made to the international effort, and in this respect we deployed everything in the tool kit that I laid out for you. We dispatched everything possible that was available to us: our entire relief supply stocks, our expert advisers, Canadian Forces assets, the special immigration measures, and the debt relief. We facilitated the evacuation of some 4,620 Canadians. Ms. Fortier will be happy to follow up with you about that. We can talk about the other efforts in greater detail as well, and Leslie will speak to you about the humanitarian components.

One of the more visible elements of the response was the deployment of the 2,000 Canadian Forces personnel under Operation Hestia to support the Government of Canada's consular and humanitarian relief efforts. The use of Canadian Forces assets had been recommended by the ISST and was agreed to by the Government of Haiti. Their presence in Port-au-Prince, Jacmel, and Léogâne as part of this whole-of-government response made a significant difference.

Stabilization and humanitarian experts from CIDA and Foreign Affairs were deployed alongside the 2,000 forces members in order to engage with local authorities, the UN, and NGO actors. I would say this was an important lesson that we collectively learned as a result of our experiences in Afghanistan—the importance of physically co-locating political and development officers when Canadian Forces personnel are deployed, so that you can have a comprehensive and integrated approach right from the beginning of an operation. This effort of having the three together helped to clarify needs and gaps in the international response and enabled us to work effectively with local actors and with international organizations to make sure we had the right mechanisms in place, and also, right from the beginning, to make sure we transitioned out the Canadian Forces to other international partners.

● (1540)

Canada also played an important political role in support of the Government of Haiti, one that focused on recovery and reconstruction. My colleague Neil Reeder can speak in more detail to the political and diplomatic support that Canada offered throughout the crisis, including the challenges we faced at the time. He can speak to the leadership shown by Canada's decision to convene the Montreal conference in the first weeks after the crisis, which was really a key moment, not only in terms of demonstrating Canada's solidarity with the people of Haiti, but also in terms of how we wanted to ensure that there would be effective international coordination in cooperation with Government of Haiti officials.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

In terms of managing the transition from the emergency rescue phase to the reconstruction and development phase, we had to face many challenges during the emergency rescue phase immediately following the earthquake.

The airport had sustained heavy damage, and flights from and to Port-au-Prince were very problematic.

Our on-site partners, such as the Haitian government, the UN and non-governmental organizations, all suffered heavy human and material losses.

In spite of this, the international community, among others, with the support of donors like Canada, succeeded in providing basic assistance that saved countless lives.

The earthquake resulted in a near collapse of the already-vulnerable security system in Haiti. Against this backdrop, the Department of Foreign Affairs refocused its multi-year strategy and its programs for Haiti in order to take into account the fact that a major part of the country's security infrastructure had been disrupted.

Most of our previously implemented investment projects sustained only slight damage, thanks to the minute attention paid to the construction standards.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has also invested an additional $10 million in the Global Peace and Security Fund, which already had $15 million set aside for reconstruction projects.

We quickly implemented initiatives to respond to the urgent need for stabilization. We did so by providing 100 patrol vehicles to the Haitian national police, so that it could meet its mandate. We also added classrooms to the police academy in Port-au-Prince, provided national police officers with first-aid training and launched local justice initiatives for the earthquake victims.

In addition, to support the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH, we sent an additional 50 police officers to Haiti for a total of 150, as part of the Canadian Police Arrangement, and additional Correctional Service of Canada officers. The two deployments aimed to meet the needs set out by the United Nations Security Council.

My colleague Isabelle Bérard could talk to you about the timely investments made by CIDA for the strengthening of development efforts.

[*English*]

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, more than a year after the earthquake, international assistance is still required, both in the short term, to meet ongoing humanitarian needs—including those that emerged months later as a result of the cholera outbreak—and over the long term, to help the country rebuild not only its infrastructure but also its institutions and systems.

This is something that often gets lost: people forget the catastrophic circumstances that ensued. It would be as if a massive earthquake had struck a place such as Ottawa, all the ministries had collapsed, and Parliament Hill had been significantly damaged. The expectations that are then placed on a country and a government to be able to quickly turn it around and contribute towards reconstruction...it's quite a significant challenge.

In this respect, the Government of Canada has been clear and steadfast in its commitment to help meet humanitarian and reconstruction needs. Despite the political and development challenges that the international community is facing today in Haiti, Canada continues to move forward on the objectives we have set in partnership with the Government of Haiti and with other international entities. In this context, we continue to have at our disposal a robust and effective coordination and response capacity to address major natural disasters abroad, in the hemisphere and elsewhere.

I look forward to any questions you might have. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I welcome Ms. Norton.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Leslie E. Norton (Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance Directorate, Multilateral and Global Programs Branch, Canadian International Development Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am accompanied today by my colleagues, Lise Filiatrault, CIDA's Regional Director General for the Americas and Isabelle Bérard, Director General of the Haiti Program.

Building on the presentation by my colleague, I will be highlighting the role of CIDA in response to natural disasters, with specific reference to our experience after the earthquake in Haiti, as well as to natural disasters in the region more broadly.

CIDA is the Government of Canada's lead agency for the provision of humanitarian assistance in developing countries. In this role, our efforts are focused on saving lives, alleviating suffering, and preserving the dignity of those affected by humanitarian crises. In 2010 alone, CIDA responded to 49 natural disasters, big and small, in the developing world.

As noted by Ms. Goldberg, in the aftermath of a natural disaster, the primary responsibility to respond rests with the government of the affected country. When a government lacks this capacity and requires international assistance, CIDA and other donors can consider support through a well-established and coordinated international response system.

CIDA's response is based on needs identified by expert humanitarian partners in a given context. These needs vary depending on, among other things, the scale and nature of the crisis and the pre-existing vulnerability of the affected population.

CIDA can draw on a number of targeted tools to support a Government of Canada response. Our selection among those tools depends in part on whether we are undertaking the sole response by the Government of Canada or are part of a broader, Whole-of-Government response.

CIDA's primary tool is the provision of financial support to experienced humanitarian partners that have proven capacities to deliver the needed assistance in a given crisis in a given part of the world. These partners include United Nations agencies, the Red Cross Movement, and Canadian and international non-governmental organizations. CIDA funding facilitates the quick work of these organizations to meet the urgent, life-saving needs of crisis-affected populations, including food, shelter, potable water, and health and medical assistance.

Over the years, CIDA has developed a range of additional tools to effectively prepare for, and respond to, rapid onset disasters. Among other things, it maintain a stockpile of relief items, such as blankets, tarps, hygiene and family kits, mosquito nets and water buckets, to meet the needs of up to 25,000 people. It supports the deployment of Canadian humanitarian experts to disaster settings, and it works with the Canadian Red Cross to establish a rapidly deployable field hospital based in Canada. Through this initiative, Canada is contributing to a faster, more effective emergency response system.

CIDA has also refined its programming tools to make our responses more timely. We created a draw-down facility with the Red Cross that facilitates the rapid start-up of relief operations for small natural disasters. This allows us to provide funds, generally within 24 hours of a request, to National Red Cross Societies, that is, local actors, from as little as $10,000 to $50,000 per emergency.

We also provide annual funding to flexible pooled fund mechanisms such as the United Nations Central Emergency Fund to enable our partners to rapidly conduct needs assessments and provide immediate support to disaster-affected communities.

● (1550)

Underpinning each of these mechanisms are the partnerships that we have with implementing agencies. We prioritize those who have demonstrated results in the past, have significant expertise, and work in accordance with established international principles, guidelines and codes of conduct. CIDA also coordinates our official response with the international community to ensure that there are no duplications or gaps in the global response effort and that the global response is proportionate vis-à-vis crises everywhere in the world.

[*English*]

Turning to Haiti, in response to the 2010 earthquake, the first CIDA staff were on a plane within 12 hours as part of the government's initial assessment team, as mentioned by Elissa—the ISST. As Elissa also mentioned, not only did the Government of Canada use all of its tool kits, but CIDA also used all of the elements of its response kit.

CIDA's humanitarian response to this earthquake was the largest in its history. Over $150 million in humanitarian assistance was provided within the first few months of the disaster through UN agencies, the Red Cross, and Canadian NGOs, to meet urgent and ongoing needs on the ground. This included emergency medical care, food, water, sanitation, shelter, and support for the logistics and coordination of the international response. Funding for protection services also addressed the heightened risk of abuse, exploitation, and sexual and gender-based violence for the most vulnerable and precarious camp environments.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, CIDA drew on its emergency stockpile of relief supplies to support the work of implementing partners and funded the deployment of 12 humanitarian experts to UN organizations and the Red Cross movement. CIDA complemented this assistance with the deployment of eight humanitarian staff to the field during the first five months of the response. These officers, including four CIDA staff who were embedded full time with the Canadian Forces during their deployment, played a key role by liaising with and advising Canadian Forces on humanitarian issues, supporting coordination efforts, engaging with international partners and monitoring programming, and informing future funding recommendations and decisions.

As the second-largest bilateral donor following the earthquake, Canada, through CIDA, has contributed significantly to the following achievements of the international response. A few examples are: 4.3 million Haitians received emergency food assistance; 1.7 million people were provided with safe drinking water; 300,000 families received emergency shelter materials; access to health and medical services was significantly improved; and children received protection and educational support.

In more recent months, CIDA has provided $7 million in additional humanitarian assistance to address the ongoing cholera epidemic that has resulted in over 4,500 deaths to date.

Canada's humanitarian assistance complements our long-term engagement in Haiti and has generated mutually reinforcing results. It is important to note that Canada has provided development assistance to Haiti for over four decades. Haiti is one of CIDA's countries of focus and the largest recipient of development assistance in the Americas.

CIDA's thematic priorities—namely, stimulating sustainable economic growth, securing the future of children and youth, and increasing food security—guide CIDA's work in Haiti. CIDA's longer-term development assistance program in Haiti is implemented in collaboration with trusted Canadian and international partners and is designed to meet the needs of the people, reinforce the Haitian government, foster stability, and improve security and access to basic services.

In addition to our immediate and considerable humanitarian response following the earthquake, Canada also demonstrated its commitment to Haiti in the medium and long terms by making a two-year, $400 million commitment to support the action plan for national recovery and development of Haiti and toward funding the priorities of the Haitian government. The action plan called for the creation of two coordination mechanisms: the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission and the Haiti Reconstruction Fund. Canada is a proactive and strategic member of both of these bodies.

The Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, or CCRIF, a regional risk pooling facility, is an essential part of CIDA's multi-year, $600 million commitment to the Caribbean. The CCRIF paid out nearly $8 million U.S. to Haiti immediately following the 2010 earthquake.

As I noted earlier, I am joined today by Lise Filiatrault and Isabelle Bérard, who can answer any questions you may have on CIDA's development program in the Caribbean and Haiti.

While the 2010 Haiti earthquake was a catastrophic event, there were also many smaller-scale disasters to hit the Caribbean region in the past years. Since 2007, we've provided over $12 million in response to natural disasters in the Caribbean. CIDA's response to humanitarian crises in the Caribbean region reflects our principled approach and demonstrates our efforts to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of our assistance.

In recent years, CIDA has provided relief to those affected by hurricanes and tropical storms in Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and throughout the lesser Antilles, including Barbados, St. Lucia, and Saint Vincent and Grenadines. CIDA has responded to flooding in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua, as well as the 2009 earthquake in Honduras.

● (1555)

CIDA has also made significant investments in reducing disaster risks and vulnerabilities in the Caribbean region. I'll give you a few examples.

For over 20 years, CIDA has been supporting the Pan American Health Organization, or PAHO, for its emergency preparedness and disaster relief program in the Americas. Canada is currently managing the Caribbean disaster risk management program to strengthen regional, national, and community-level capacity for the mitigation, management, and coordinated response to natural hazards. Canada has also contributed towards the capitalization of the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, established to reduce financial vulnerability of participating countries to catastrophic natural disasters by providing access to insurance. Since 2007, the CCRIF has made over $33 million worth of insurance payouts to eight Caribbean countries, including, as I mentioned earlier, the almost $8 million U.S. to Haiti.

These are all examples of our commitment to providing a timely, effective, and appropriate response to meet emergency needs and to reducing the vulnerability of people affected by natural disasters. They also highlight CIDA's consistent efforts to strengthen our disaster response tool kit to remain well placed and well prepared to respond to humanitarian needs in the Caribbean region in the years ahead. Although catastrophic-scale disasters, such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake, shine a temporary spotlight on CIDA's humanitarian assistance, we are constantly responding, behind the scenes, to the many less visible crises where humanitarian needs are no less urgent and assistance is equally life-saving. It is this variety of crisis situations, large and small, and across many different contexts, which drives us to constantly adapt and refine our tool box of response mechanisms.

Thank you.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move right over to start with the Liberals.

Mr. Pearson, seven minutes, please.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Let me just say at the outset, welcome, but I don't envy the tasks you've had in the last year. I realize it's very complex, and we appreciate how much you had to try to do to deal with all the subsequent difficulties that also happened after the earthquake in Haiti.

I'd like to start broadly, and I'll let some of my colleagues winnow down some of the more specific things.

We had the Red Cross in here on February 28, and they were telling us of many of their difficulties, but they were saying every dollar that's put in towards preparedness equals seven dollars in response. That makes sense to me. I've seen that elsewhere as well. I wondered if you could help me to understand how much CIDA is working towards that, and also how much of your ODA is put towards that particular aspect of preparation, especially in the Caribbean. I realize we've been in Haiti for decades. What are some of the lessons learned there?

It doesn't matter who answers.

Ms. Lise Filiatrault (Regional Director General, Americas Directorate, Canadian International Development Agency): Maybe I can start to give an answer, and my colleague can complement the answer.

Obviously you've heard about the disaster response, but as you rightly pointed out, we also work on the sustainability and building the capacity of countries to be able to respond to those disasters, or prevent them as much as possible.

In the Caribbean program, one of our objectives under the development program is indeed to contribute to the region's ability to respond to those disasters. So we have a component that's called disaster preparedness and disaster risk management, which is one of the components of our ongoing programming in the Caribbean. It's through that component that we fund initiatives such as the CCRIF, which Ms. Norton mentioned, as well as a program that we have called the Caribbean disaster risk management program, and under that program, we provide a different type of support, a different mechanism. One is working at the community level to help the community deal with their resilience. Another component deals with supporting the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency to actually strengthen their own capacity as well as that of the countries to deal with disaster preparedness as well as risk response and better equipment to deal with it.

We also give some support to the Pan American Health Organization, looking at the health dimension, equipping the countries to look at health risk assessments—for example, how prepared the hospitals are to respond to risks.

Finally, we also work with the Canadian Red Cross under that component. So we do look at both the preparedness dimension and the disaster response, which is provided through the international humanitarian assistance program.

● (1605)

Ms. Leslie E. Norton: I would just add a couple of things. Sorry, I was expecting about three questions from you. That's why we sort of paused. I'm used to getting many questions at once, not just one.

We don't have immediately available the percentage of ODA that's committed to disaster risk reduction. We'll have to crunch some numbers and get back to you on that.

The numbers that were provided by the Canadian Red Cross are the numbers we have heard as well with regard to the importance of risk reduction at the outset. That's why Canada was very active in 2005 in the Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction. We were very happy to see that a lot of the Canadian language actually made it into the final document. So we are very actively engaged internationally on this. One of the commitments out of the Kobe document was to mainstream disaster risk reduction throughout all of our bilateral programming, and that's something we are actively engaged in. Every donor country, all the signatories of the Kobe document, are actively engaged in that.

From the humanitarian side, we don't focus on all of the elements of disaster risk reduction; we focus on the preparedness component. The Canadian Red Cross, for instance, might have mentioned the first responder initiative, which is the hospital that has been deployed into Haiti to help assist in the cholera response now. As part of that overall program, we're working to build a capacity of some of the national Red Cross societies in the Americas. It's one component of a three-pronged project. We also fund the preparedness activities of PAHO, the Pan American Health Organization. So we do have a number of projects, but we don't have a percentage for you.

Mr. Glen Pearson: You said there was no target amount of money for ODA. I was in Washington recently speaking with some U.S. aid officials. They're looking at the environment and what is being said, and they realize there's going to be an increase in disasters as time goes on. I know you're better aware of that than I am. They are looking at more targeted responses to them

Considering how much we've invested in Haiti over four decades—this emergency was so terrible, and it's hard to prepare for something that is so devastating and that ruins that much infrastructure—I would like to know whether you'd consider more targeted funds in ODA towards preparation and development, specifically because of a growing frequency of natural disasters that will likely take up more and more of CIDA's budget as time goes on, especially as Canadians respond to these disasters.

I'm just wondering whether you think one of the lessons learned from Haiti is that there is a need to establish a more targeted fund out of ODA. That's just a question—one question.

Ms. Lise Filiatrault: The one thing I would say is that there are many components to preparing for or preventing disasters. Some are related, for example, to better watershed management or natural resources management, and others are related to building the capacity of institutions that are directly related to disaster preparedness. I think the whole issue of better preparing and preventing disasters is one that has many ramifications. Through our ongoing programs with a number of countries under the bilateral program, we do address, depending on the focus of our assistance, one or another dimension of the countries as the countries assess themselves and the needs they are confronting.

For example, because the Caribbean is 12 times more prone to disasters than other regions, it came up as an area that was very interested in having Canada's support, and we are responding. In other areas, they may be asking for that kind of support from other donors, or they may be asking us to focus more on certain dimensions. I'm thinking of the Central America region, where we also provide some support, but it is linked more to issues of watershed management, for example. So depending on the specificities of the different regions, we may use different approaches.

With regard to having a specific fund, we are certainly aware of that suggestion, but as I said, there are many different responses that can be provided with the assistance we're providing.

Ms. Leslie E. Norton: I would just follow up on that by saying it's not always about money. Oftentimes, it's about how you do your programming. When we started speaking about gender 15 or 20 years ago, we had to make sure that gender was mainstreamed or integrated within our development work. It's now very much the same thing; we have to make sure we look at everything with a disaster risk reduction lens. So again, it's not always about money.

With regard to the commitment to targets, I think it's a policy decision for our minister to make. I just wanted to put on the table that it really is not always about money but about how we do our programming. It's about smart programming.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Pearson.

We're going to come back for another round, so we'll get to the good doctor in the next round.

We're going to move on to Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today. Clearly, we have many questions about the events that have transpired since the earthquake.

I would like to go over a small part of your presentation, Ms. Norton. You said that, when the earthquake struck in 2010, CIDA used all the tools available in its emergency response kit. You also said, and I quote: "Funding for protection services also addressed the heightened risk of abuse, exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence for the most vulnerable in precarious camp environments."

The Subcommittee on International Human Rights is currently studying the issue of sexual violence against women in countries in conflict or countries affected by a natural disaster.

I don't know whether you are familiar with Concertation pour Haïti, a roundtable on Haiti. This is an organization that brings together NGOs, civil society members and individual Quebeckers involved in international cooperation and human rights promotion. This organization's representatives said that, the day after the earthquake, CIDA called in all of its partners and told some of them that human rights and women's rights projects would no longer receive funding because those issues were no longer a priority in the earthquake's aftermath.

Could you clarify this for me? There seems to be a contradiction between what Ms. Norton is saying and what Concertation pour Haïti reported.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard (Director General, Haiti and Dominican Republic, Canadian International Development Agency): Ms. Deschamps, I will first answer part of your question. Then, I will let my colleague, Ms. Norton, talk about issues related to violence against women.

We are vaguely familiar with Concertation pour Haïti. We know that it brings together a few NGOs, which meet to discuss certain issues.

We did hold a meeting with our partners following the earthquake. We wanted to do it after the earthquake struck. We met with all of our partners, told them that we were faced with a major disaster and discussed the appropriate course of action.

First, we asked for their suggestions and comments on how we should proceed. We wanted to figure out the best way to work with them. Then, during the meeting, we told our partners that our programming would be interrupted for a short period of time. Of course, I am talking about long-term and not emergency programming. We also said that we would determine how we could or wished to realign certain initiatives.

I don't remember exactly whether we discussed human rights or related topics. However, we had actually already told our partners that we wanted to look at how we could continue delivering our programs and meeting the population's immediate needs, given the circumstances. That is what we have done. We resumed our long-term activities very quickly, and most of those initiatives have continued. There were no particular issues in this regard.

Ms. Leslie E. Norton: In order to address the lack of protection in the camps, CIDA provided funding to the United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF, since these two UN organizations address violence issues.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: In addition, the Department of Foreign Affairs is collaborating on a project with the United Nations Development Fund for Women, in partnership with the Haitian national police, so that the latter can ensure monitoring in internally displaced persons camps. The cost of this project was about $1 million.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Another issue making the headlines is the famous police academy, the construction of which was actually announced before the earthquake. I think that it was part of the $550-million five-year plan for 2006-2011. The construction of the police academy was announced three months after the earthquake, and Canada was supposed to provide $18 million for this initiative.

Last March, we learned that the project was not going ahead as planned, since there were several bidders, but none of them met the requirements. Have any other bidders come forward? After all, this project was planned before the earthquake struck. It was the minister's priority a few months after the earthquake.

● (1615)

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Actually, the first call for tenders for the police academy was issued in December 2009. There was to have been a meeting of bidders on January 13 or 14 in Port-au-Prince to answer questions.

Obviously, we had to suspend that exercise, given the events. It was reissued in April 2010. As you pointed out, the initiative itself was identified in the Haitian government's five-year plan for the reconstruction of Haiti.

So, we reissued this call for tenders as quickly as we could, given the situation. There were two bidders. For technical reasons, the process had to be cancelled.

We are hoping to relaunch it as soon as possible because it's considered a priority. Our wish is to move ahead with this project. We are going to do it as quickly as possible.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I would like to understand a little more about how this works in terms of the financial framework. From the outside, it seems like a complex situation, when we aren't very closely involved.

The government announced an envelope of $400 million. Of that amount, $110 million went to the matching fund, $33 million to debt relief, $30 million to reconstruction funds, $10 million to Foreign Affairs, $5 million to the Department of the Environment, $20 million to the world food program, $30 million to Canadian organizations, $7.2 million to five municipalities selected by Canada, and $5 million to fight the epidemic.

This is all very confusing, even on the website. Now I know what the journalists went through when they tried to break all that down.

With little or no information, it seems that you have given barely a third of this money. In fact, it's felt by the organizations that get lost in all that. Perhaps you can be accused of lacking transparency and accountability.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I'll answer you on the amounts, but not on the transparency issue.

This is very much a question to consider. We had to discuss these questions with journalists and others who have many questions. We are trying to find the simplest way to provide the information.

It's true that there is a summary of financial data on our website. Everything we have done so far is on the site. In short, the site tries to explain two very specific things: funding, or the credits that we receive from the government to fund activities, and this commitment to match the donations collected by Canadian organizations.

As for the funding that can be found on the website, which anyone can consult—which you obviously did, Ms. Deschamps—we are talking first about this envelope of $555 million that was promised in 2006 for five years. The details about that can be found on the site. There are the details on the humanitarian assistance, as it was delivered, and my colleagues, Leslie and Elissa, spoke to you about that a little earlier. All of that is detailed as well. On March 31, 2010, we announced $400 million in additional funding for reconstruction, which basically extended Canada's involvement by one year—since our original involvement went to 2011, and we are committed until 2012—and to supplement the funding that had already been announced previously.

At the conference in New York, the minister finally announced that the funding provided by Canadians to Canadian organizations was $220 million. At that point, Minister Oda committed to matching those funds.

Now, when we talk about the amount of $555 million in humanitarian assistance and the amount of $400 million, we are touching on credits that they did not provide. As for the matching fund, we are not receiving funding for that. So it needs to be funded. It is funded through the humanitarian assistance and through the $400 million. It was during the meeting in New York that Ms. Oda said that at least $110 million, or half the funding, would be matched in the coming years.

So, we need to make a distinction between the $555 million, the humanitarian assistance and the $400 million. These are all sources of money, and this mechanism allows us to match the donations of Canadians.

If you visit the website, you will find a list of activities that have been funded with the $400 million. You have mentioned a few of them, and the list is now complete. It includes all the initiatives that have been committed, including $202 million out of the $400 million, and the matching fund, which comes out of the humanitarian assistance and the $400 million. Those initiatives are on the site, as well.

In short, it's as if the fund was funded through the humanitarian fund and the reconstruction fund. We are identifying initiatives within this matching fund. The initiatives as such are also there. So there is a juxtaposition between the initiatives funded from the $400 million and those that are part of the $110 million.

● (1620)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm always concerned when an MP tells me it's just a little question. It's always a big question with a big answer.

We're going to move to Mr. Lunney.

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

And thank you all for being here today for this important discussion. I want to start with a comment that I heard come out of this. First, I think I heard about 49 responses that CIDA was involved in—and maybe leading up to—Haiti in that year. Haiti of course has had the biggest whole-of-government response until maybe the present time—I think you said about 14 departments.

I heard a remark about the comprehensive integrated response of CIDA and the military, for example, working together, and I saw that. Ms. Golberg, your current position is DG of the stabilizing reconstruction task force. I had the privilege of travelling with the defence committee to Afghanistan, and I think I heard you remark on lessons we have learned in Afghanistan.

When the defence committee was there I was very impressed with our provincial reconstruction team, and Ms. Golberg was the head, the rock representing Canada in Kandahar. There were provincial officials around the table, elected officials, and our top general of the day I think was General Thompson, but it was Ms. Golberg who was in charge.

I think it made a real statement to the people in Afghanistan to see the way our government responded. I want to say on the record that as a member of that committee I was very impressed to see how this was playing out with our efforts at provincial reconstruction.

Picking up on that, I hear the OECD applauded Canada's strategy in early response. I think it's a good place to start. We have other questions, but it is important for us to understand how you have put together this ISST. You had people deployed very quickly to evaluate the situation in Haiti, and maybe you could take a moment to describe how that played out, who you sent over, and how that actually worked.

● (1625)

Ms. Elissa Golberg: Happily. The idea of the ISST actually goes back several years, as part of the standard operating procedures that I was talking about before. Those have been a work in progress for over 15 years.

I'm sure that Mr. Goldring will recall that we didn't have them once upon a time. It was as a result of our lessons from Hurricane Mitch that the government decided it needed to have standard operating procedures. Enough of this making it up every time something happens: you needed to have things in place so that people knew what was expected of them, what every department was supposed to do. Making sure, for instance, that we train together beforehand, that we do tabletop exercises, that we do reviews after major crises so we can learn the lessons.

The ISST has evolved over time. As we've been deploying not just the DART but other Canadian assets into theatre, the decision was made that we needed to have a whole-of-government analysis that would go to catastrophic events.

The idea is that the team is led by Foreign Affairs, but it includes colleagues from the Department of National Defence—usually the commander of the DART, but not necessarily only the commander of the DART. There are a wider range of Canadian Forces' assets we might wish to draw on. Sometimes the DART might not be the right thing to take out of the tool kit. We might need to use engineers from the Canadian Forces or to draw on their airlift instead.

So it's DFAIT, National Defence, a colleague from CIDA, usually from Leslie's shop, the humanitarian assistance shop, and sometimes from the bilateral.... It depends on the nature of the circumstances at play. As I mentioned, depending on the kind of crisis we're looking at, we'll sometimes include other colleagues from the Government of Canada. For instance, after the tsunami, we brought along a colleague from the Public Health Agency, PHAC; we thought that was going to be a particular requirement given the number of dead and injured.

This ISST is pre-identified. All the colleagues know who is going to be on it. It's usually led either by me or by my director of humanitarian affairs and disaster response. That team trains together beforehand. There's an exercise that happens every year. We try to make sure we have a lot of staff interaction and contact with one another. We have our checklists and our preparation sheets. It's based on international best practice.

When the team is deployed, the idea is not to have Canada duplicating.... This is one of the other risks you run into when you have an ISST. We're careful about when we dispatch it. As Leslie said, Canada already invests millions of dollars into an international multilateral system. All of our UN partners, the International Red Cross and others, also have assessment teams.

When the Government of Canada decides to send in the ISST, it's because we anticipate it's going to be a circumstance where civilian organizations might need an additional set of supports from bilateral partners such as Canada. When that team goes in, we make sure its job is to liaise with the affected government, figure out what they want, and plug into all of the other assessment teams that have been deployed. We're not creating an additional burden, but we're getting a feel for what's required in that particular circumstance and what the Government of Canada can bring to the table.

Mr. James Lunney: I appreciate that, and I heard from people in Kandahar that they appreciated the Canadian approach of going in and asking them what we could do to help, rather than telling them what they needed.

We've helped some 4.3 million Haitians, according to what we've just heard. We supplied 1.7 million people with safe drinking water, shelter materials, and access to health services. Children received protection, education, and support at the beginning.

We went into a country where the institutional capacity was nearly neutralized—the structures of government collapsing, buildings destroyed, offices in disarray, people missing. The international redevelopment effort has been criticized for slowness in delivering, in spite of the mega-dollars available. There was criticism from Oxfam, among others. The IHRC came into being about April 2010, and I understand they've approved some 74 projects.

Maybe I could ask you to address the challenges of working in that environment—cholera epidemics, reduced institutional capacity, domestic chaos—for outside international agencies trying to deliver services.

● (1630)

Ms. Elissa Golberg: I'll start and then transition over to Lise.

A number of organizations sometimes express frustration about the speed of reconstruction, but I think Canada was clear from the very beginning that this was going to be a marathon, not a sprint. Given the extent of the devastation, the Prime Minister talked about 10 years. That's important, because it draws on lessons from other international crises. The international community tends to front-load all of its assistance and then it gets bored. It suffers from attention deficit disorder, and it forgets that these kinds of things take many, many years to reconstruct.

I'd mentioned the impact on the government in Haiti. It lost a significant portion of its senior officials in line ministries; it lost the entire ministry devoted to planning. Buildings collapsed. People who were our key partners died at their desks. To be able to come back after that human capacity deficit, you have to figure out who are going to be the new people you're going to work with.

The same was true for the UN. The UN deserves kudos. They lost 101 people as a result of the earthquake. It's the largest single loss of UN personnel killed in a single incident at one time, including the UN SRSG.

We lost Canadians Doug Coates and Mark Gallagher, as well as eight other Canadians who worked for the UN mission. That also created a capacity challenge for us in figuring out who we were going to plug into. So we've been trying over the last several months to re-establish linkages with colleagues within those institutions under the leadership of Prime Minister Bellerive, who has been quarterbacking the Haitian effort. He's been an excellent partner for Canada. This is just to give you an idea of the scope we're talking about.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: As you rightly pointed out, Elissa, the government lost 17% of its public servants. They were in the buildings at 16:53 on that day. They were mostly the managers and the directors, those with whom we normally have interactions. And 40% of the government infrastructure was destroyed. So we're dealing with massive destruction, as we pointed out a number of times.

The IHRC was set up, as you said, in April of last year, right after the New York conference. We've met five times since then. I say "we"; David Moloney, the executive vice-president of CIDA, is Canada's representative to the IHRC.

We were very lucky, in some sense. At the very beginning of the IHRC, we had the opportunity to meet with the former executive director of the reconstruction commission in Indonesia, the reconstruction commission that dealt with the tsunami. Just so we're clear, the reconstruction commission in Indonesia was set up to deal with a very small portion of Indonesia, with a fully functional government in its capital. The IHRC is totally different, and from that perspective, we're working in a very special situation. It's unique. We've never had the opportunity to work within these kinds of parameters.

The executive director of the Indonesian reconstruction commission was very clear about that. While their commission in Indonesia became fully functional after 18 months—it took them 18 months to get fully functional—a year later the IHRC.... It's not perfect. But you have to remember you're bringing around a table 14 Haitian representatives, governments from different countries, multilateral organizations, as well as donors whom I would qualify as non-traditional donors, countries that have never participated in development and want to share and be part of the experience. It's great, but it does make it a little complex.

That being said—as I said, we've had five meetings—the IHRC has a strategic plan. We have very specific objectives. We've approved projects. If you go to the site, you can get much more information on the IHRC.

We are starting to see the results of the preparation that started last April. For instance, if you look at debris removal, the objective for next October was the removal of at least 40% of the debris. We're doing well. We are halfway there. At its last meeting, the IHRC increased the target from 40% to 60%. We're convinced that with further financing, if other donors are interested in putting in some funding, we can achieve that.

On water and sanitation, we're reaching the targets that were set up last August and—

● (1635)

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off here. We've gone over time.

We're going to move to Mr. Rafferty. Welcome to the committee.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and welcome, everyone. Thank you for being here today. I have met some of you before, and I look forward to asking you some questions.

In my short time available, I'm going to try to ask each of you a question, because I don't want you to have come for no reason at all.

Ms. Fortier, I haven't quite figured out what I'm going to ask you yet, but it's going to be something.

I'm going to ask a question or two about Honduras. One is, very quickly, how would you evaluate the political and economic situation right now? Not a big treatise, just a quick overview.

Mr. Neil Reeder (Director General, Latin America and Caribbean, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): In 10,000 words or less, exactly.

On the positive side, we can look at the elections yesterday. I think there was a big sigh of relief internationally. The elections went pretty well. There were some security incidents. Mr. Aristide came back. He did not make pronouncements on the election. He did not send his people into the streets. Generally speaking, Haitians voted. There were irregularities. Haitian electoral systems aren't perfect. But we think that overall it was a transparent, generally well-organized election. So on that side we feel good about Haiti.

If you had asked me on Saturday, no one was really certain where this was going to go. And obviously in that respect, we'll now look forward to the vote, to the count, and to the installation of a new president.

Mr. John Rafferty: I thank you for that great answer, but I was actually asking you about the political situation in Honduras.

The Chair: John, we're going to spend a half an hour from 5 to 5:30 on Honduras. You'll get a chance to ask away.

Mr. John Rafferty: Okay. I'll leave my Honduras questions then.

Mr. Neil Reeder: Yes. I'm wearing a Haiti hat right now.

Mr. John Rafferty: Okay, we're doing the Haiti hat.

Mr. Neil Reeder: It was a pretty good answer, though.

Mr. John Rafferty: It was; it was a great answer, and I appreciate it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Neil Reeder: We didn't get to the economy, which is something else, but I'll pass.

Mr. John Rafferty: Okay, my Haiti questions.

Canada's commitment and Canadians' individual commitments to Haiti were enormous—this being one of the most generous populations of all countries in the world—but the total commitment and matching and everything still remains elusive for a lot of people. I wonder if you can assure Canadians that their financial giving has been matched, first of all, and that it has been spent, and that it has been spent in a worthwhile fashion.

Perhaps Ms. Norton or Ms. Bérard could respond.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: As you said, Canadians were very, very generous. They gave $220 million to charitable organizations. We are not responsible for the money that was given to those organizations. Each organization is responsible for reporting to those who have donated to them. We have committed to match those funds through our various commitments, so there's the $400 million for reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. As we speak, 88% of the matching funds have been allocated to various initiatives. We have to wait until March 31 to give you more precise information on how much has been spent, and we can get back to you on this. But I would say that certainly half of it will be spent by March 31.

Mr. John Rafferty: Ms. Norton, here's a question for you. As far as Haiti is concerned, has someone in the Harper government ever written “no” on any request that CIDA has had? It's a rhetorical question.

So this is like an interview question. You know when you go to an interview and they ask you, what are your weaknesses—they do that in interviews, I think they still do—and it's always the most dreaded question. In terms of the reconstruction what have been the key challenges, not necessarily your weaknesses but the key challenge that you've really struggled with?

● (1640)

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I'd say that the first one is certainly capacity, the capacity of our interlocutors, mostly government but also local organizations with which we work. This is by far our most important challenge.

Of course, on the reconstruction itself, land titling and debris removal have been mentioned before. I'm sure you've heard that those are still important challenges we have to face.

Mr. John Rafferty: There'll be another storm season coming up in 2011. Do you feel Haiti will be prepared at that time for hurricane season, in the work you've done to prepare? I'm just thinking of the actual reconstruction and—

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Is the question about whether or not there'll be a storm?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: What we can say is that we're very conscious of the fact that Haiti is disaster prone. We've been dealing with it over and over again. In terms of this coming hurricane season, the UN, for instance, has already—for a few months now—initiated its preparedness activities. It's been doing its contingency planning. It's been trying to think through how it would respond. That's one of our main partners. The embassy has been liaising closely with that team that's been pulled together to do the preparedness and the contingency planning.

Will it be able to weather it better? I would expect, and we should all expect, that it's going to face significant challenges. You still have several hundred thousand people who are without permanent shelter. You still have people who are in disaster-prone areas, in low-lying areas that are deforested. So the same challenges we had before the earthquake still exist.

What we're trying to do is make sure we're reinforcing the capacity of our international partners on the ground, but also our Government of Haiti partners on the ground, so they can at least be in a position to be more responsive to the events when they occur. This means better evacuation procedures and making sure the municipalities know what's expected of them.

A project that my team has been pursuing with St. John Ambulance is making sure we provide first aid training for all Haitian National Police so that in their role as first responders they're better capable of managing these crises.

What we're trying to do collectively is reinforce the institutions that are going to have to deal with a crisis, because a crisis is going to come.

Mr. John Rafferty: Speaking of that, and governance in particular, you talked about the displaced people and there being hundreds of thousands, and that's unfortunate. One of the things I'd like to hear about from you is progress on tenure and land rights in the country. With the latest election, is there some hope that there will be some progress on that front?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Land tenure is definitely a huge challenge, as I said. Of course, because of the electoral situation, since last November it has been a little bit challenging to engage the government on this issue. This being said, the IHRC has already approved—I'd have to look at my numbers—around five to seven different projects related to housing. Of course, built within those projects are initiatives related to land titling.

Yes, we are waiting for the new government to come in and to then start having a conversation, a more systematic conversation, on how to deal with this. But there are initiatives going on right now on setting the milestones so that we can move forward once we have....

Mr. John Rafferty: Would you say that this is probably the biggest stumbling block to placing displaced people?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: It is an important one, as is disposing of the debris, which is another big issue.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, John.

We're going to end at that. We're going to move back over to Mr. Van Kesteren for five minutes....

We'll go to Mr. Goldring.

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

And thank you for appearing here today.

I first have to highly compliment the minister and everybody involved in responding to this disaster. It must have been a horrific scene to initially approach it with so many missing, probably including colleagues.

I know that I was there in 2006, and I may very well have been interacting with some of the people at that time too. It was just a tremendous effort, and it shows what the Government of Canada can do in a bad situation.

I'd like to discuss a little further the issue of housing. When the Red Cross was here, they identified that there was a need for housing for some one million people. They used a number of approximately five persons per household. Doing the math, that would mean that there would be a need for 200,000 homes. And these homes really are, when they say transitional, plywood shoeboxes. This is just for transitional housing. They haven't started on the permanent ones yet.

My understanding is that they have supplied some 30,000 units to date. If we do the math on that, it really means that we would still be providing transitional housing five years from now. The type of shelter they do have, these hundreds of thousands of people, is tarpaulins, I suppose for the weather. I would suggest that there could be a huge disaster coming up if another bad hurricane blows through. It would be a very high-risk area.

It seems to be around land tenure and removing debris. Looking at the housing unit, I would suggest that it's very portable. So I don't understand why land tenure should get in the way of building these houses. If you do the math on the 30,000 that have been built, that's roughly 100 a day. A crew of 10 people can put plywood sheets together and housing on that basis.

I'm very much concerned that if it is land tenure, can they not somehow get beyond it and get these houses built? Who cares where they're going or who owns the land? Straighten that out later. Is this not something they can do?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: There are two parts to this. One is political and one is the actual doing.

On the political side, I'll just say that land title is an issue, because major landowners within Haiti own the vast majority of the land. One of the things has been to try to figure out whether the individuals who are displaced actually have the paperwork to demonstrate that they own the land, because in many cases they want to go back to that particular plot of land. They don't want to go somewhere else in the country. That's an issue we have to sort out.

Once you've sorted that stuff out, there are also questions about whether government can just expropriate vast pieces of territory, can just nationalize it and take the land and say they're going to put all kinds of people on the land. In the absence of having a government, that's been a more difficult conversation in the last couple of months. Now we'll see how the presidential elections and the aftermath unfold. Hopefully, that conversation can now come back onto the table and we can deal with both things at the same time: the individual landowners as well as government's ability to expropriate land and take larger tranches to put people on.

Ms. Leslie E. Norton: First, they are temporary houses, so they can be moved.

The Canadian Red Cross committed to build 30,000, but they have not built 30,000 yet. They've built 1,400 to date.

Mr. Peter Goldring: How many have been built to date in the country?

Ms. Leslie E. Norton: I don't know, but I can tell you that 3,130 have been built to date with CIDA's assistance. We have three key partners: the Canadian Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross, and World Vision.

Within the humanitarian community, on the recovering and reconstruction side of things, there are challenges with land title. They're looking at other housing options, which might mean that they will be repairing houses. They're trying to take a second look at the approach. If we can't build this many because we don't have the land to put them on, perhaps we should be looking at other opportunities, which might mean the repair and reconstruction of some of the existing housing.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Is the problem with the governance of Haiti? I can't imagine a landowner having a total lack of compassion and not at least moving people and buildings onto land on a short-term basis.

Mr. Neil Reeder: There's no easy answer to that one. The land title system is not at all clear or transparent. It's not properly codified. No one is really certain who owns what, so in clearing the rubble, that's the first problem.

The second problem is that despite what one might think, it's not a certainty that individuals who own the land will be willing to give it up or have it nationalized or purchased outright by the government. That is a whole other discussion that has to go forward.

As Elissa said, some of this has been in suspension because of the elections. Once we get through the elections and have a new president and a new cabinet, certainly job one for Canada as a government in that relationship will be to advance that land issue, because that's holding back relocating people and clearing the rubble.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Peter. That's all the time we have.

We're going to have World Vision here next Monday, Peter, if you want to talk to them about housing.

Dr. Patry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much. I have a very short question for Mr. Reeder. It's probably hypothetical.

You spoke to us about the second ballot, which went fairly well. Have you looked at the possibility of a legal challenge following this second ballot result? This challenge would not be the work of one of the two current candidates, but of former President Aristide, who came back, and whose political party, the Fanmi Lavalas, was barred from elections. Have you looked at this possibility?

Mr. Neil Reeder: I have no news about this. I must say that, since his arrival, and even yesterday, Mr. Aristide's comments have been fairly cautious. He has not asked his people to take to the streets, even though he complained that Lavalas had not been part of the campaign. I have no news about this.

If this were the case, I think that he would have thought to do it before the vote or to intervene during the vote in one way or another, but he did not. So, I think that we can work adequately with him. Let's wait for the results of the second round. It may be that he will appeal but, for the moment, I have no information about that. With everything that happened with Mr. Duvalier and Mr. Aristide on the ground, we were very happy with yesterday's process. We must now wait for the results, the final vote, and so on. Under the circumstances, Haiti made progress yesterday.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you. That's all I wanted to know.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Does anyone have a final question? If not, we'll go on to the five o'clock session. We'll give the witnesses a chance to move from their desks. We'll leave Mr. Reeder there, and we'll get started again so we can finish on time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Neil Reeder: A second round in the hot seat, is that it?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll suspend for a few minutes.

● (1650)

(Pause)

● (1655)

The Chair: If we can get all the members back to the table, we'll get started.

We're going to have an opening statement from Mr. Reeder. He tells me it's seven or eight minutes. I think we'll be able to get in one round from each member. Depending on the statement, we'll probably try to go six or seven minutes for each person. I will be a lot tighter on the time in this round because we don't have as much of it. I will be cutting you off at six minutes, so I'm just warning you in advance, because we are limited with our witness here.

I'm going to turn it over to you, Mr. Reeder. You have an opening statement.

Mr. Neil Reeder: Mr. Chairman, again, it's a pleasure to be here with my colleague, Jean-Benoit Leblanc, who is director for regional trade policy in Foreign Affairs.

[*Translation*]

I am going to make some comments in English and some in French, and I will be pleased to answer your questions in the official language of your choice.

[*English*]

As you know, on June 28, 2009, the democratically elected president of Honduras, José Manuel Zelaya, was forcibly removed from power. Although political tensions in Honduras had been mounting in the months leading up to this event, few anticipated such a dramatic outcome.

At that particular time, I was Canada's ambassador to Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and I happened to be in Tegucigalpa on that day as Canada was about to take over the presidency of the G-16 group of donors in Honduras, Honduras being one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere.

The international community, including Canada, quickly condemned the *coup d'état* and called for President Zelaya's immediate reinstatement. Our then Minister of State for the Americas, Peter Kent, issued a strong statement condemning the coup and calling on all parties to show restraint and to seek a peaceful resolution to the situation that respected democratic norms and the rule of law, including the Honduran constitution. Several days later, on July 4, a special session of the Organization of American States took place in Washington, attended by Minister Kent, at which the OAS members, including Canada, unanimously moved to suspend Honduras from the organization. Canada was to play an active role in the debate at the OAS, carving out an important role for our country in the coming months.

I thought it was also important to come today, Mr. Chairman, after having heard the comments from the Honduran non-governmental organizations and the Canadian non-governmental organizations, to provide a bit more perspective on Canada's role.

[*Translation*]

During the political impasse, the international community, including Canada, worked diligently to resolve the crisis and help Honduras get back to democratic and constitutional normality. To that end, two high-level OAS missions were sent to Tegucigalpa in August and October 2009, and Canada took part in them.

Canada lobbied in favour of a negotiated solution to the political crisis in respecting the rights of Hondurans and asked for peace, order and good governance.

[*English*]

Canada also joined the international community in initiating sanctions against the de facto government, which took over power after President Zelaya left the country, including by pausing our military cooperation with Honduras and pausing government-to-government official development assistance.

Despite this concerted effort by Canada and other key players, the extreme intransigence of the de facto government, and I believe the actions and rhetoric of President Zelaya, prevented a compromise solution from being reached.

On November 29, 2009, five months after the crisis began, Honduras held regularly scheduled general elections. Despite less than ideal conditions, the elections took place in a relatively peaceful and orderly manner and were generally considered free and fair by the international community. Porfirio Lobo, of the opposition National Party, emerged the clear winner in the elections. In those elections, about 50% of eligible voters took part. The election totals, in terms of the numbers of votes received by President Lobo, were the highest for any election in Honduras' history since the 1980s when the country returned to democratic rule.

Since his inauguration on January 20, 2010, President Lobo has taken a number of important steps towards re-establishing democratic order and achieving national reconciliation. This includes the formation of a multi-party unity government that includes presidential candidates from the opposition parties. It also includes the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission, which will determine what led to the coup and what human rights abuses took place during the political crisis.

Canada continues to have concerns regarding the human rights situation in Honduras and over the level of impunity. Although tensions have subsided somewhat under the Lobo administration, as we heard a couple of weeks ago, human rights abuses have continued and formal complaints have actually increased. Our officials continue to receive reports of civil society organizations being harassed and of attacks on social leaders who are often identified with the opposition to the former de facto government.

Furthermore, at least seven journalists were murdered in 2010. Canada is very concerned over these cases, and we've said so publicly, not just for the human impact but also for the negative effect it has on freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

We maintain an open channel to express our concerns to the Government of Honduras, both publicly and privately, regarding the human rights situation in that country. We've undertaken formal statements of concern during the United Nations universal periodic review of human rights in Honduras. We're in regular consultation with the range of actors in Honduras on this situation, and we raise our concerns. Our new ambassador to Honduras has met with key Honduran officials, including last week with the new Minister of Justice and Human Rights, which is a new cabinet position created by President Lobo, as well as with the Attorney General of Honduras to discuss the human rights environment and Canada's views.

Finally, as a member of the G-16 group of donors, Canada works closely with other like-minded partners such as the European Union, the United Nations, and the United States to monitor and improve the human rights situation in Honduras.

After the inauguration of President Lobo in early 2010, Canada took the decision to normalize relations with Honduras. We believe that continued isolation only hurts the most vulnerable people in the country and that engagement rather than isolation is the best way to promote change in that country.

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Canada also feels that the time has come to welcome Honduras back into the OAS in order to strengthen the Honduran democratic institutions, to promote a political dialogue, to deal with human rights violations and to help Honduras achieve its security and development program. The forcible removal of former President Zelaya created one of the worst political crises in Central America in several years. We were extremely disappointed that the coup could not be reversed, and that President Zelaya was not reinstated before the end of his term.

However, on many fronts, Canada's role in Honduras was a considerable success in very difficult and tense circumstances. There was a very real threat that the situation in Honduras could spiral out of control, leading to serious civil unrest, and a much greater death toll.

Neighbouring countries were also concerned that the conflict could destabilize the rest of the Central American sub-region. But the sustained efforts of the regional and international community and the constant call for calm by countries like Canada helped encourage peaceful demonstrations and ensure that both sides continued to dialogue rather than turning to more violent means.

● (1705)

[*English*]

It's noteworthy that today Hondurans from many walks of life comment very favourably on the Canadian role during the crisis. They have described Canada as having a balanced and positive position that sought to be constructive at all times. Canada worked very closely within the G-16 donor group as president of that group for the first six months of the de facto government to influence the process of reconciliation, to dialogue and engage with civil society and with the members of the congress in Honduras. I mention this because the donor group is very important. Honduras, being one of the poorest countries in the Americas, receives 18% of its national budget from official development assistance, and the total assistance is somewhere in the order of $600 million annually. After Haiti, which we just spoke about, Honduras is the second-poorest country in the Americas. So the donor role was very important, and Canada played an important role, including trying to advance the process of reconciliation between the de facto government and Zelaya's people, which was a process led primarily by the OAS but with support from Canada and other countries.

Canada's role did not go unnoticed by Hondurans, nor did it go unnoticed by our partners in the region, including the Lobo government. This is evidenced by the nomination of a Canadian, former diplomat Michael Kergin, who was our ambassador in Washington, among other important postings, as an international commissioner on the truth and reconciliation commission. This commission has been supported financially by Canada, and we see it as a very important step as it prepares to release its report on what transpired in the next several months. The commission has an important role to play in assisting Honduras to achieve national reconciliation and in allowing Hondurans to regain a sense of confidence in their country's institutions. We very much look forward to the commission's report, which is scheduled to be released this coming May.

Finally, if I could, Mr. Chairman, with our new Minister of State for the Americas, Diane Ablonczy, ongoing Canadian engagement will help ensure that Honduras returns to the inter-American community and moves closer towards national reconciliation. Through efforts in Honduras, we have advanced the government's Americas strategy. By enhancing our engagement in the Americas, we strengthen bilateral relations with our partners in the region, and with the OAS we've consolidated our reputation as a constructive multilateral player in the hemisphere.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, I would be pleased to answer any questions the committee members may have. Mr. Leblanc is with me to answer any questions about trade.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have about 20 minutes left. Let's go with a five-minute round for each party.

We'll start over here with Dr. Patry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have a very quick question for Mr. Leblanc, and one for Mr. Reeder.

Mr. Leblanc, will the final free-trade agreement include, among other things, environmental protection measures and measures dealing with human rights and labour rights?

Mr. Jean-Benoit Leblanc (Director, Trade Negotiations 2 Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): As we have done in all our free-trade agreements, we intend to negotiate parallel agreements on labour and the environment that will be basically the same as those included in our recent free-trade agreements, including the one with Panama, for example.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you.

Mr. Reeder, on March 9, you were present during the appearance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a non-governmental commission created by a civil society coalition. You spoke to us about the other commission, the governmental one.

Mr. Scott, who is Canadian and a member of that non-governmental commission, is very concerned about respect for human rights in Honduras. He told you that. I am also very concerned, and I even wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs about this to ask him to ensure the safety of the witnesses who appeared before this committee. That shows how worried I am.

Canada is currently negotiating a free-trade agreement with Honduras. Do you not think that signing this kind of an agreement would send a clear message to certain countries in the regions, specifically that Canada not only condones a *coup d'État*, but that we are rewarding Honduras with a free-trade agreement and future reinstatement in the OAS?

Is there not a threat of contagion in countries in the region because of something like this?

● (1710)

Mr. Neil Reeder: Thank you for your question.

We feel that, where Honduras is concerned, we need to recognize today's many challenges. We need to work with the government to improve the human rights situation, for example, but we should not deny the people of Honduras the opportunity to benefit from a free-trade agreement with us. There is a lot of interest in this project in Honduras. There is a lot of potential for them to profit from Canadian markets, in that they can export their food products to Canada.

We saw this with Costa Rica, for example, or in the small Central American countries that have huge export potential, which helps the national economy, creates jobs and attracts Canadian investments. This is already going on in Honduras, but I think that a free-trade agreement will increase confidence.

No, it isn't an ideal situation. Yes, there are a lot of challenges to overcome, but I think that we must get involved with this country. It's involvement, not isolation, that will help Honduras move forward, both within the OAS and through various trade agreements. Honduras has also signed the CAFTA with the United States. It has regional agreements with the Europeans and agreements in Latin America. So, this is nothing new for Honduras but, overall, it's agreements that provide big benefits to these countries, especially the small ones that now have access to a market of 33 million people open to their exports.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you, Mr. Reeder, but the free-trade agreements with the United States, the CAFTA and with the European Union were made before the *coup d'État*, under former President Zelaya.

You spoke about future interests for Honduras, and there are a lot of mining interests. I am very concerned about that because mining interests mean the displacement of the local and native populations of the region and a lot of problems regarding human rights. Don't you think that we should pay careful attention, not only to the food issue, but also to new Canadian companies in the mining industry?

Mr. Neil Reeder: Mr. Chair, I must say that I don't agree with everything expressed two weeks ago before this committee by our friends from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I visited the Canadian mines, and I respect that industry. The mines provide good jobs and good opportunities to Hondurans. A number of MPs have visited these mines. We are requiring Canadian companies to respect the laws of the country and the community. The social responsibility strategy of companies from Canada is in place in the Americas. As a department, we're asking our ambassadors to monitor mining activities very closely. If there are problems in the communities, we are accountable. Our ambassadors can come to us and we will require the companies to respect the local laws.

In the case of Honduras, which has a long mining tradition, like Canada, there are a lot of interests in these communities to profit from Canada's mining presence to create jobs, and offer training, education, and so on.

In a way, sir, it's as if the Canadian presence has sort of replaced the local government. For example, the El Mochito mine in Honduras has hospitals, schools and looks after infrastructures, irrigation, roads, and so on. All of that is paid for by the Canadian company in the region. The El Mochito hospital provided care to 20,000 Hondurans last year. It's there because the State isn't there. Our role and obligations toward the community are really very important. When I met with the people from the non-governmental commission, I told them that I had another point of view and that people need to be on site. A lot of them were very happy with Canadian investments and asked us for even more investment in the mining sector.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move over to the Bloc, to Madame Deschamps, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you, Mr. Chair. How much time do I have? Five minutes? That's not much.

I would very much like to react to what you just said. I have looked into the whole issue of the social responsibility of companies. There was a huge debate on the issue during this session, and even before. But my perspective is not as rosy as yours. People came to testify before us last week. We must give some credibility to organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The last universal periodic review, which dates from January 4, 2011, states that "Canada noted allegations of intimidation, harassment and death threats against members of civil society. Canada expressed concerns towards the sharp increase in murders of women and journalists, and its negative impact on freedom of expression in Honduras."

I can believe in your great theories that the companies there are following a framework of social responsibility. As a believer, I, too, can also apply good theories, but from time to time, I am greedy or commit some small sin. Even though these companies are abiding by the country's laws, we know that there are problems in the Honduran government, that it's corrupt. I didn't make this up. Witnesses have told us so on many occasions, and civil society organizations there have told us about it. It was also mentioned in the periodic review.

I don't know what stage the free-trade negotiations between Canada and Honduras are at. Nor do I know if anyone is taking into account the repercussions of these negotiations on human rights. If they are, I would like to know what measures are going to be taken to ensure that those rights are respected and so that impunity stops. Nothing has been resolved since the *coup d'État*. The Honduran government is committed to trying and sentencing people who have committed abuses, but nothing has been done.

● (1715)

Mr. Neil Reeder: We are still putting pressure on the Honduras government. As part of the universal periodic review, Canada was very clear on this. We are, too. I spoke earlier about the dynamic surrounding Canadian mines. That's one of the issues. The other is the human rights situation, which is still very complicated in that country. As for the Canadian mines, you are fully entitled to invite representatives from Goldcorp or other Canadian companies to appear before you.

I visited the Gildan mines. Mr. Rafferty was there with the delegation from the OAS summit. That was in June 2009, three weeks before the *coup d'État*. There was Mr. Rafferty, a senator and Hedy Fry. What we saw of Gildan's presence was very impressive. I'm not here to defend Gildan or the other companies, but we need to have a balanced perspective of these operations. Gildan employs 15,000 people in Honduras. It's the largest private company. They are offered very good health conditions, and there's a maternity program for the women. Every day, between 100 and 200 people gather outside the Gildan factory, trying to get a good job. Gildan's salaries are 20 to 25% higher than the average in Honduras. It isn't black or white. I find that Canadians have made good investments and that this is also to the advantage of Honduras.

Thank you, madam.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go over to the Conservatives, and we'll give Mr. Van Kesteren five minutes.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

And thank you for appearing before us. I want to keep on going. I want to talk about free trade agreements. They are being initiated in the western hemisphere. In Costa Rica, I think we've finished that. There is also Colombia, Chile, Peru, Mexico, and I think there are some others too.

These agreements benefit the middle class. Mr. Goldring and I went to an African country just a few months ago. We saw the spinoff, what happens when companies are allowed to move and are encouraged to sell their products and get an opportunity to move beyond their own boundaries. It grows, and it encourages people to involve themselves in the economy; it generates wealth and a spinoff in employment.

Small and medium-sized businesses obviously are the first and probably benefit the most from this. I know that on this side of the House...I think even our Liberal friends would agree for the most part that these are methods by which we can certainly grow GDP.

You mentioned Gildan. I don't want to correct you, but I don't think it's 15,000; it's 16,000 employees. Gildan is a Quebec company, and they weren't here to defend themselves, of course. Neither were the mining companies when we were told that Canada —and I was frankly just incensed when I heard the charge that Canada makes off with countries' natural resources without any concern for society. Again, we didn't have the opportunity.

We really need to set the record straight. I think one of the things we have to recognize, and I don't know how far we want to get into politics...but the very fact that the coup took place was because the country was drifting toward Hugo Chavez, that type of a regime, and the influence that he's exerting on a lot of southern.... Let's make no mistake about it. A real power struggle is taking place, and it's what we believe in as a free society; that's to have freedom of goods, what we call the unguided hand, as opposed to total government control or freedom versus totalitarianism, prosperity versus poverty. I feel very strongly about that.

I feel very strongly about free trade agreements. As I said, they don't necessarily influence me as an individual; they influence us as a nation, and they influence other nations. There's a real war going on I think throughout the globe. There's a disagreement as to what free trade does and where free trade leads.

I wonder if you could explain to us the process involved in constructing a free trade agreement and perhaps outline for us the free trade agreement with Honduras and how we go about that.

● (1720)

Mr. Neil Reeder: I'll just make a very quick comment first, sir, and then ask Jean-Benoit to speak.

I think these are important agreements. We wish to pursue them in the Americas. I would point out that we have considerable trade with Asia-Pacific, but if you look at the web of free trade agreements, they're heavily in the Americas, interestingly enough. Our foreign direct investment in the Americas is three times what it is in Asia-Pacific. Trade promotes exports up to Canada, which is good for the economies, but it also attracts investment.

What I see in the region is that once we've signed free trade agreements...investment tends to follow trade. Now we're seeing, in the case of Chile and Costa Rica, which are mature free trade agreements, huge Canadian investments: Scotiabank, the mining sector. We have $75 billion in direct Canadian investment in the mining sector in the Americas. These are big numbers. We're the miners of the world, essentially. We're not here to defend the miners, but my point, as I was saying to your colleague, was that there are some serious benefits, and I think we monitor our Canadian companies very carefully. We expect them to have a good code of conduct, and if they don't, we follow up with them. We're engaged with the community, and these are important investments we want to sustain. It also reflects the image of Canada, and if they don't respect our expectations under corporate social responsibility, then it affects our image and our interests as well. So we certainly monitor their presence very closely.

The Chair: Just a final comment. You're out of time.

We're going to move over to Mr. Rafferty, but go ahead, Mr. Leblanc.

Mr. Jean-Benoit Leblanc: Thank you.

If I may, I will just offer you a bit on the status of where we are in these negotiations to bring you up to speed. As you probably know, we launched free trade negotiations with the four Central American countries in 2001: Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

After nine years of talks we decided to pursue this with Honduras alone. Why? Because we thought that of the four it was with Honduras that we had the better chance to close in the short term. That's why we focused on Honduras.

We had a first round with Honduras here in December, in Ottawa; another one in February in Tegucigalpa; and now our officials are in close contact to try to resolve the remaining outstanding issues.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move to Mr. Rafferty for the last five minutes.

● (1725)

Mr. John Rafferty: Thank you very much, Chair.

I have a question for each of you, or maybe more if I can fit them in.

Let's just stay on trade for a second.

Mr. Leblanc, I wonder if you can answer a question for me. Contrary to what many people around the table might think, New Democrats do believe in trade and think it's important, absolutely. But there's a problem with this free trade agreement and others, and I wonder if I could have your professional opinion on this, Mr. Leblanc, and perhaps yours, Mr. Reeder, very quickly. There are these two side deals that happen in all the free trade agreements with this government, one on labour and one on the environment. One of the things we've been calling for, and that I believe in firmly...why should they be side agreements? Why are they not in the body of the agreement where they'll have a mechanism for enforcement, some teeth, instead of being side agreements? If you could answer that it would be wonderful, because I can tell you that there would perhaps be more cooperation from other parties if those two things were not continually side deals, which we feel are not enforceable.

Mr. Jean-Benoit Leblanc: Thank you.

I think what is key as we look at these labour, environment, or trade agreements is that we try to focus on the substance. Whether they are as a chapter or as a part of the agreement, the substance of what we do and what we've done in the past would be the same.

You would note that both the labour and environmental agreements have their own mechanism of enforcement. They are different. I'm not personally the expert because these agreements are done by Environment Canada and by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, which are the departments that negotiate these, but I would say they have enforcement mechanisms. But obviously the question you might ask is if you want in the future to have them within or without the free trade agreement, which is a fair question. But I think the question is more, what is the substance, not so much the placement.

I'll give you one example. In our free trade agreement we often have investment chapters, just talking about investment. We also have stand-alone foreign investment protection agreements, which are negotiated with many countries. Essentially, although sometimes they are part of a free trade agreement as a chapter, and sometimes they are outside, the substance is the same. So I think that is more the key we have to focus on.

Mr. John Rafferty: It just seems to me that it would be a fairly easy thing to do. And I understand that both of those issues are contentious in many of these countries. But if they were put in the main body, where the mechanisms for enforcement have teeth, it seems to me you'd have a much stronger agreement. That's just my comment.

I have a quick question for Mr. Reeder. You talked about the truth and reconciliation commissions and that there are reports coming soon. How would you characterize the progress on those commissions, and what can we expect in the report?

Mr. Neil Reeder: I'm not certain I can say what to expect in the report. But essentially what they're going to tell us is a good sense, as best they can, of what transpired before the coup; what took place at the time of the coup; who said what to whom, which led to President Zelaya being forced out of the country; and then what was the situation in what we call the de facto period under Roberto Micheletti, which was an interim government until President Lobo was elected.

That's basically what they're going to look after, including the human rights situation, especially under the de facto period. That's their intention in terms of what they want to look at.

Mr. John Rafferty: Before the coup, one of the issues that came up was not so much the security issues with the commissions and so on, but it was the question of funding. There was a question of actually having those commissions work, and so on. Is it your sense that—and I know you're not going to know what we're going to see—we can trust what we're going to see when we—

Mr. Neil Reeder: I think we can.

On funding, I should mention that Canada has given about $400,000 to the official commission to help them out, including covering Mr. Kergin's costs. We're expecting a very solid, transparent document. Michael Kergin is well known to our department. If he is sitting on that commission, I expect them to come forward with a very good document.

Mr. John Rafferty: Do you have a non-governmental side?

Mr. Neil Reeder: The problem we have is that we have a non-governmental commission, which has never accepted, as you heard, a whole series of premises that we accepted. They've created a non-governmental commission that isn't recognized by the Honduran government and, I would say, by significant numbers of the Honduran public.

Honduras is a very stratified society. It's divided by differing views of what took place during the coup. It's divided by class. It's divided by rural and urban. There are many tensions in the country, and the non-governmental commission does not have full, broad support in the country, I would say. And the official one may not either. They're both playing a certain role. Unfortunately, they're not talking to each other. I made this point to the NGOs. I said if you create your own commission, why can't you engage with the official one? They said, oh no, because they're from a government they don't recognize. They do not accept the Lobo election as legitimate, and therefore they've completely disengaged from the government. We've said that it's not the best approach.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you very much for keeping the second round on much better time than the first round.

Mr. Reeder, thanks for coming back. I know you had to reschedule to be here today, so it worked out that you were on the first panel as well.

Thank you, Mr. Leblanc, for coming. I think a lot of these questions are trade questions. But we'll see you at the trade committee, I'm sure, on some of these other issues. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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