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# **Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, November 30, 2010**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Scott Reid**



## Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1310)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** Order, please.

This is the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today, November 30, 2010, we are holding our 35th meeting.

[English]

We are being televised.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are making a study of human rights in Afghanistan.

It is our pleasure this morning to have as our guest Reverend Majed El Shafie, who is the founder and president of One Free World International.

Reverend El Shafie, welcome.

Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I didn't want to interrupt our witness; I just want to clear up a quick piece of business. I believe we have unanimous consent regarding a motion on in camera meetings. There is a small friendly amendment that Madam Deschamps wants to make with regard to translation. I think everybody is in agreement, so we can clear that off.

**The Chair:** Let's just confirm that.

Everybody knows what Mr. Sweet is talking about? I'm going to assume there were discussions. Is there in fact unanimous consent?

[Translation]

Ms. Deschamps, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Chairman, we should check the French wording, which is a cut and paste version of the rules previously established in the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

In French, after “à être accompagné d'un membre de son personnel aux séances à huis clos,” instead it should read: “et d'une autre personne de chaque parti.”

**The Chair:** So you want to modify the French text from the end of the second line, where it states: “aux séances à huis clos et qu'une autre personne par parti soit autorisée à être présente.” Is that correct?

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** Yes.

[English]

**The Chair:** All right, then, in that form—

[Translation]

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** We should add “chaque” in French and “each” in English.

[English]

**The Chair:** All right. With that correction made, is there agreement to adopt it?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We have agreement.

Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet:** There was one other item, since we have an agreement on that. I'm loath to take any time from our witness, as he is a high-quality witness, but this is germane to our concerns right now.

Yousef Naderkhani, on September 21, was sentenced to death in Iran. He was given a verbal sentence of death at that time. Later, on November 13, he was delivered that verdict in writing. And right now the clock is ticking for the 20 days that are allowed for appeal, after which time the sentence is going to be carried out on him. I want to bring this urgent issue to your attention.

MP Sorenson and I have had people e-mailing us regarding Naderkhani's situation. I want to get it on the agenda as quickly as possible after today's meeting.

**The Chair:** I'm assuming there'll be a motion of some sort that will come before the committee for our Thursday meeting, or something to that effect? Okay, good. And if you wish, you could submit witness suggestions as well.

I'm going to turn back to Reverend El Shafie. Seeing that we've taken a bit of Reverend El Shafie's time at the front end, I'll watch the clock very leniently toward the end of the hour. When we've completed the questions, Reverend El Shafie has asked for the chance to make a one-minute final statement. I've told him that this seems agreeable to me, and I'm sure it's agreeable to all of you.

Once we're done with that, we have one other matter. Professor Cotler had a motion on a different subject. He came to me and said there is widespread support for this, so I'd like to deal with it at the end, before we leave.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** We could deal with it right now.

**The Chair:** Actually, let's do that. Then it will all be done.

Everybody knows about your motion, Professor Cotler?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Yes, they do.

The notice of motion is with regard to Sergei Magnitsky. I have accepted the amendment by Mr. Sweet, and also the suggestion that was presented in that regard by Madame Deschamps. So I think the motion has been agreed to by all.

**The Chair:** To be procedurally correct, I have to ask if there is consent to the amendment, and then I'll ask if there is consent. Let's start with the amendment.

Madame Deschamps.

[Translation]

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** Mr. Cotler, is this a new motion or an amended motion?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** It's the same motion, but amended based on the wording proposed by David Sweet and what you told me. So I've added the following:

WHEREAS the Subcommittee takes note of and joins in solidarity with "justice for Sergei" initiatives in the U.S. Congress, the European Parliament, and Moscow-based human rights NGOs.

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** The part that starts with "CALL upon the Russian Federation" is still there?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Yes, it's there too.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'll just confirm that we have agreement to the amendment.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion as amended agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

Okay, good. That is done.

Let's go back to Reverend El Shafie.

Thank you for your patience. As I said, I'm going to have us go a little bit longer to make up for the time we've lost at the front end.

With many thanks for your patience, I would ask you, Reverend, to please begin.

**The Reverend Majed El Shafie (Founder and President, One Free World International):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, respected members of Parliament, for having me this morning to testify about the human rights violations that are taking place in Afghanistan.

My name is Reverend Majed El Shafie. I'm the founder and president of One Free World International for human rights. Our organization works on human rights violations that are taking place

in different places in the world, in 28 countries. We have branches in 28 countries, and one of them is Afghanistan.

Four years ago I visited Afghanistan. When we went there, we were able to connect with local human rights organizations, we were able to connect with different individuals, we were able to build a system, and we were able to build a group on the ground, basically to monitor the human rights situation in Afghanistan during the past four years. But in the past four years, especially in the last two years, the information and the reports about human rights violations in Afghanistan have started to get worse and worse. So we indicated that we have to go to Afghanistan to visit the victims and to meet with some government officials there to confront them about their level of human rights violations.

From June 25 to June 30, 2010, One Free World International went with a delegation of human rights activists, media personnel, and even one of the members of this committee, Mr. Mario Silva, who accompanied us to Afghanistan. We met with the deputy foreign affairs minister of Afghanistan, the deputy minister of education, and with different human rights organizations, such as Dr. Jalal's foundation. We met with Dr. Sima Samar from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. We even met with the president's security adviser in the presidential palace. But most important of all, we met with victims.

On this trip we were able to pinpoint three main issues of human rights violations that are taking place right now in Afghanistan, and it's getting worse.

The number one issue is the abuse of women that is taking place in Afghanistan. To start with, Afghanistan has issues with women's abuse, in that there are forced marriages, exchange marriages, and under-age marriages. But the problem here is that as this has become part of the culture of the society, the Afghani government made it even worse by passing a law last year, on July 27, 2009. This law was the Shia Personal Status Law. According to this law, if a woman refused to sleep with her husband every four days, he'd have the right to starve her to death, to stop the necessities of life to her. This is according to the Afghani law.

Now, I'm not talking about the Taliban; I'm talking about the Hamid Karzai government. According to this law as well, a woman cannot work, cannot leave her home or her apartment without permission from her husband, and it allows a rapist to avoid prosecution by paying blood money to his victim. So basically, if a man rapes a woman, he doesn't need to go to prison if he pays her money. He doesn't need to go to the court. This is according to the law that was passed last year by the Afghani government. This is in contradiction of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which the government of Afghanistan signed onto in March 2003.

When we met with some of these ladies, such as Fatima or Zahira or Ahmadia, they indicated to us that they'd been raped by their husbands and that when they refused they were beaten and all the necessities of life, such as food and clean water, were stopped until they gave their husbands what they wanted. One of these victims said in front of me that the punishment in some areas in Afghanistan was to hang a woman upside down and to beat her with sticks until she soiled herself. One of the victims said that.

●(1315)

Moving on to the second subject is the boy play, or the *bacha bazi*. In the boy play the Afghani rich elite bring little boys, they make them dress like girls, they make them dance at a party, and at the end of the party whoever pays more will rape this little boy. This is taking place right now in Afghanistan. Some members of the government are taking part in these kinds of celebrations.

The United Nations declared this is a form of sex slavery. This contravenes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 4, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 24. There is a law against boy play in the Afghani government, but the enforcement of this law is another story.

When we met with the victims, such as Farho, who is 16 years old and was abused by the age of 14, he told us he would get raped by eight to ten men every night. When he went to the police—this was Farho, age 16.... Muqtar was another victim, 16 years old, and when I asked him why he didn't go to the police officers and inform them of this crime, that somebody was raping him, he said when he went to tell the police officers they did the same thing to him at the police station.

The last subject we were in touch with when we went to Afghanistan was on May 27 and 28, 2010. There was a television news show, and they showed some Afghani Muslims getting baptized and converting to Christianity, 25 of them. This was not the first time. I don't know if you remember, but in March 2006 a gentleman by the name of Abdul Rahman converted from Islam to Christianity. He was put in jail and under international pressure they said he was insane and sent him to Italy. I don't know if you recall this case. But the reason was that on May 27 and 28 Afghani television showed 25 Muslims converting to Christianity and getting baptized.

What has happened is that Mr. Abdul Attar Khawasi, a respected member of the Afghani Parliament, the deputy secretary in the lower house said, and I quote: "Those Afghanis that appeared in this video film should be executed in public, the house should order the attorney general and the NDS"—the intelligence agency in Afghanistan—"to arrest these Afghanis and execute them." He said this in the Afghani Parliament in front of Afghani national television without any shame.

President Hamid Karzai's spokesperson has stated that the president himself has taken on this matter and urged his interior minister and the head of intelligence to investigate. I am now quoting the spokesperson of Mr. Hamid Karzai, the president of Afghanistan: "...to take immediate and serious action to prevent this phenomenon."

I'm not talking here about a debate about religion. I'm not talking about one religion being better than another. This is not a debate about religion. This is about freedom of religion and being free to convert to whatever religion you want.

After that they shut down two churches, Church World Service and Norwegian Church Aid, which had nothing to do with the conversion of these 25 people, and they shut down 13 Christian NGOs.

●(1320)

Next week, next Sunday, one of the 25—and the 25 are subject to torture and rape in the prison—one of them, Mr. Said Musa, will have his tenth trial in the Kabul court.

Our organization succeeded, through our work underground in Afghanistan, to basically be able to get inside the Afghani intelligence security system. I hold right now in my hand a document signed by the minister himself and his colleagues and the Afghani police to arrest Ali Walid Rida, Salim Walid Mohammed Nasim, Shukrullah Walid Nedra Ali, Rahmatullah Walid Kareem Bakhesh, and Ali Mizrai Walid Hasan Shah. These are some of the people who converted from Islam to Christianity. They order their arrests and to stone them to death.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Mr. Chair.

●(1325)

**The Chair:** Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet:** I would ask that we obtain a copy of this document and verify its authenticity and translate it, please, so we can assure the veracity of the evidence.

**The Chair:** At the end of the proceedings, Reverend El Shafie, we'd be grateful if you could table a copy with us that we can have.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Absolutely.

There was a copy given to the Prime Minister's Office as well, to Foreign Affairs, to the Treasury, Mr. Stockwell Day, and to the Minister of Immigration, Jason Kenney.

These are the three subjects, Mr. Chair. I would love to now take questions, if you don't mind.

**The Chair:** We have, according to my watch, 35 minutes. This allows us to have eight-minute rounds for each of the four parties.

We'll start with the Liberals. I gather that Mr. Silva and Professor Cotler will be splitting their time.

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to thank Reverend El Shafie for being here. I have to say, Reverend El Shafie, that of the time I've been on this committee, which is many years, this is probably the largest gathering I've seen. This means there's great interest in this issue and there's great interest also in your findings. I was also part of the delegation that went with you into Kabul.

The fact that we're having this televised will hopefully shed some light as well to the Canadian public. I think what you have just said and what we witnessed was quite shocking and horrifying. And also what's written in your report, which is very detailed as well, is sort of a new perspective that we don't hear a lot about in the media about what's taking place on the ground in Afghanistan. It was good that it was instilled through different bureaucratic channels, but we spoke with individual victims, victim groups, organizations, and human rights groups.

In your report you talked about Afghanistan at a crossroad, and I think that's a very important way of putting that into perspective, because we are sacrificing Canadian lives. We're putting a lot of money into Afghanistan. I think you came on the right date, because today there is also the vote on Afghanistan that has been sponsored by the Bloc in the House of Commons.

Beyond that, I think the most important thing is if we're going to allow more soldiers to be in Afghanistan for training purposes and humanitarian development—which is fine, and I'm okay with that—what are we going to ask in return from the Afghan government?

I think one of the compelling things about your statement is that we have to ask for tangible, concrete steps from that government. We can't sacrifice lives and spend money in that place without asking them, "Where is your stand on human rights?" We as a Canadian government, we as members of NATO and as members of the UN, have every right to ask for accountable measures from that country and that government.

It upset me when we saw the sexual violence that was perpetrated against women, the gang raping of children. We also saw the victims as well. It was very troubling to see that there are also laws in place, government-sponsored laws, that actually take away and claw back women's rights. Every women's group we talked to spoke about the fact that things are getting worse because they're clawing back those rights, and the laws are making it more difficult for women. That's an important message to get out there. We need to have accountable measures and to make sure we go after the Karzai government and ask it where it stands on issues of human rights.

We managed to talk frankly about all issues with the government. The only issue we've had a difficult time speaking to the government about was on Christian conversions. That was the one taboo issue that they refused to talk to us about, and they gave us very little cooperation. I think it's shocking how many sacrifices we are making, but we can't even talk about religious freedom in that country because they refuse to talk about it. They know there are Christians in prisons who are being persecuted, yet they refuse to do anything about it.

So I ask you again—and they are part of your recommendations right here in this detailed report—what are the concrete steps that we want right now from the Karzai government in order for us to continue supporting them through our humanitarian missions, if we're to go beyond 2011?

• (1330)

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Thank you, Mr. Silva.

In our report we present a recommendation. In any of our reports we don't only mention the problem, but we present what can be the solution. Now, our recommendation will not solve the problem of Afghanistan between day and night, but that's what I call a beginning.

Number one, the Canadian government needs to confront the Afghani government directly and in the international fora. I'm really saying that this problem is not just Canada's problem. As well, through NATO and the United States and the United Nations we should push the human rights envelope.

Sadly, our Canadian government did not push the human rights envelope in Afghanistan enough, and this is the fault not only of the Canadian government but also of the opposition. Because when you are the opposition, you're supposed to hold the Canadian government accountable.

The only subject that I heard about in the media was Afghani prisoners. That's the only thing I heard in the media. That's an extremely important subject, but what about women's rights, what about children's rights, what about freedom of religion?

Second, in order to push the human rights envelope, the Canadian government needs to connect their aid and their support and their military mission to the improvement of human rights in Afghanistan. So let's not just say we will be staying after 2014, and we'll cut the mission in half so everybody is happy, and they'll be behind the wire. Behind the wire, in front of the wire—it's still wire, so who cares?

My question is if we are going to stay any longer in Afghanistan, there should be preconditions with regard to the improvement of human rights violations in Afghanistan, including the cancellation of the law of abused women; including the immediate release of the 25 Christians from the Afghani prison and the securing of their lives; and including that Canada should open its immigration doors to the victims in Afghanistan, because once you are abused or raped, the Afghani society rejects you. You cannot be part of the society any more. So we need to open the door as well to some of these victims to come here to Canada.

That's my answer, sir.

**Mr. Mario Silva:** We had an opportunity to speak with both Dr. Jalal, who was a former candidate for the presidency of Afghanistan, and Dr. Sima Samar, from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. It was an interesting perspective.

We always talk about the progress in Afghanistan vis-à-vis what happened during the Taliban period, and we always put it in the context that in terms of cultural sensitivity it would take time, for example, for women's rights to be improved and so forth. Yet many of them told us that when they were young, they had full freedom in terms of education. They didn't have to wear the head scarf. They could go out in public without any problem. What happened was much more restrictive with the Taliban. But they did have more progressive attitudes towards women some time ago.

So I think we in the west sometimes make the mistake of saying we have to be culturally sensitive to them, and it takes time. I think that's a false argument out there, and I think it's perpetuated by a male-dominated society in which the males want to have control over the females. So they project to the west and to the leadership of the west that in fact it does take time to bring about change, which is not the case.

I think all of them are saying that if we're going to bring about change, more women have to be involved. But they were also concerned about the Taliban. We know the Taliban is in cooperation in some parts of Pakistan as well and in the border areas. There are a lot of concessions being made towards the Taliban that really concern women's rights, because they know that every concession the Karzai government makes to the Taliban is basically at the expense of women's rights. It's always about taking women's rights away. It's never about doing anything for women. So that was their plea.

I would also argue—and I think you would agree with me, and I wanted to get confirmation of that—that the women's groups we met also would like Canada's presence there. They actually felt that it was beneficial for Canada to be there. They had issues with some other NATO countries. They had issues about some of the military operations. They had severe issues with the Karzai government.

They also mentioned the fact—even though now it's in the news, Dr. Jalal mentioned it a long time ago—that Karzai was receiving cash money from Iran. Also, Dr. Jalal mentioned in testimony before this committee as well that only recently is it coming out in the papers, but we knew that evidence long before.

So there's corruption going on in the government, but I think all of them, I would say, that—

• (1335)

**The Chair:** Mr. Silva, you're at nine minutes now.

**Mr. Mario Silva:** I apologize, and I will conclude. I wanted to ask a question, but I will conclude by saying that all of them also mention that Canada is helping the situation in Afghanistan. We just have to demand more from them.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Absolutely, and I agree with you. Our Canadian troops are doing a great job.

**The Chair:** I think that was more of a statement than a question.

[Translation]

I'll now hand over to Ms. Deschamps.

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Reverend El Shafie, I'm going to speak to you in French.

I see my colleague Mr. Silva has a very great passion and a great preoccupation.

I know you a little. Can you tell us about your organization? You are established here in Canada. How do you operate?

You have ties with other organizations in the field that work with the affected population in Afghanistan. The war currently underway there is having a profound impact on the population and creating more corruption and poverty. With the enhanced military presence in Afghanistan in mind, I imagine the problem of violence against women and children that is being used in the name of this war is becoming endemic.

I'm asking a lot of questions because I would like to get to know you more and to know how you work. How are you supported? Where does the funding for activities come from?

[English]

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Sure. One Free World International is a human rights organization. We're based in Toronto, Canada. We've been here for the last seven years.

My background is Egyptian. I was born in Egypt. I converted from Islam to Christianity back home in Egypt when I was 18 years old. I was tortured and imprisoned because of my faith back home in Egypt. Through the United Nations and Amnesty International, I came to Canada eight years ago as a landed political refugee. That's why I'm passionate about what I'm doing, because I've been there.

Our organization has 28 branches around the world. Most are in Middle Eastern countries, Africa, and some of the communist countries. We do not operate publicly. A lot of times we operate underground, with what we call intelligent resources, which means we operate through another organization or through other individuals. They are part of the society; they monitor the human rights situation, and they inform us. Once we get the information, we send an action alert. Our members send letters to their embassies or their government to promote human rights and to free the people who were arrested. We have taken over 300 cases and never lost one. We have helped many individuals who were arrested or tortured.

We also work a little on the immigration side for the people who come here. We write an expert opinion for them about the situation in their country and their culture. We are funded by private supporters. We are not funded by the government, and we don't want to be funded by the government. They can keep their money.

[Translation]

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** In my preamble, I asked you whether having a strong presence of military troops from various countries didn't exacerbate violence against women and children. In the current context, it's very difficult to impose good governance on the government in place. We agree that there are serious problems there.

Witnesses have told us that civil society was not involved in eliminating this endemic. Civil society isn't being consulted and reconstruction and humanitarian aid efforts in Afghanistan are poorly coordinated.

A lot of effort is still being made by military personnel. The military is very much present, but the international community is making very little effort to switch from the military aspect to reconstruction and then humanitarian aid.

• (1340)

[English]

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I don't think that our military presence in Afghanistan is the main reason why we're seeing these problems happening right now in Afghanistan. These problems existed way before our military existence in Afghanistan. That's number one.

Number two, when I met with the people—and I'm not talking about politicians now, I'm talking about people in the street, people you sit down with and have a meal with and you ask them questions from heart to heart—actually in the beginning, they had hope in us. Actually in the beginning they thought that we would be able to bring real changes.

The problem is that year after year after year after year—nine years—there is no change. What they found was that instead of us bringing a righteous government, a free government, a government that really wanted to work on the human rights issues and wanted to work on anti-corruption and anti-drugs and all of this, they find us putting a corrupted government. So they start to give up hope on us because now we seem like we are with the Hamid Karzai government in the mud; we are both together in the corruption.

So now, actually, our support of the Hamid Karzai government is the one affecting our troops and our image in Afghanistan. But in the beginning of the war they actually were hoping that we would really be able to bring peace, because they want to live in peace, and they understood the difference, that we are not coming like the Soviet Union. They understood that we were coming for a period of time and we are leaving. They understood. They are extremely smart people. They understood, but I think the main issue here is the corruption of Mr. Hamid Karzai and his family, not the existence of the foreign military troops in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps:** The problem, as you said so well, does not stem from the presence of troops there, but rather from the culture, and that's been established for hundreds of years. I'm thinking in particular of what is being imposed on women. Moreover, we're seeing these old traditions come back. I'm trying to find a logical explanation for all that, anthropological, socio-logical, and from all standpoints.

What could the international community do apart from sending in soldiers? How could all that be coordinated by the international community, and with whose participation in Afghanistan? Would it be civil society, the NGOs, women's groups? I'm asking you.

[English]

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** All of the above. All of the above. Actually I was just talking yesterday with an immigration lawyer by the name of Chantal Desloges and was actually talking about that it has been year after year after year. And I was in a church, or a school portico, last Sunday, and there was a man who stood up and said, "Well, you know, nobody thought that the Iron Curtain would fall. Nobody thought that the Berlin Wall would fall, but it did fall."

Nothing is impossible. Even if this has been year after year, it doesn't make it right. We have to start from somewhere. And you would think that after nine years, we at least put the seed for the beginning and we are not making it worse.

Here is how I think we will make a big difference. When the international society and the international community and the government and the NGOs start really to work on the improvement of human rights and putting Hamid Karzai accountable for his actions and for his government, that's how you close the corruption.

In the last election, Hamid Karzai had.... The results of the election were not clear. There was talk from NATO and the United Nations that there were a million votes. Now, we met with Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who is the head of the opposition in Afghanistan, and this man said this guy cheated in the election. But NATO and the United Nations gave up. They said they would not do the election again, they would not.... You are encouraging the corruption. You are encouraging the corruption. If the man lost the election, he needs to go.

So I think it's very important that we hold the Afghani government accountable and we work side by side with the NGOs on the improvement of human rights. I think that could be a good beginning.

•(1345)

**The Chair:** We move on now to Mr. Marston.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's good to see you again, Mr. El Shafie. We've met a couple of times, and I always like to put that on the record when we're talking.

This is comprehensive, what you're laying out today. There are a number of things that draw me towards a particular question, but just as I get it set, you come up with something new. In the last part of your presentation, what you're really saying is that NATO—and I won't say Canada—has failed in Afghanistan. It's clear. NATO installed Karzai and maintained him. It is very troubling. All of us, no matter what the view is, whether we should or shouldn't be in Afghanistan, have had a certain amount of belief that there were some positive results there. It's depressing to hear stories of boy play. You're saying—and I want to be cautious here—that government officials partake of this. Do you have direct evidence of any member of Karzai's government having taken part in boy play?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** We're working on this right now. We've succeeded in pinpointing some of the MP's.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Okay. I'm going to be specific, because I don't want to make unsubstantiated accusations. At this point, you don't have direct evidence but you have some indication of this?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** That's correct, and we have witnesses as well.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** We should be cautious when we're in a hearing and we're talking about participation. It may be true; it may be lower officials. But I want to be cautious on that one. Irrespective of the level of government, it's reprehensible that anybody could be involved in such a disgraceful thing.



I'm sure the committee is tired of hearing this, but I was once in Saudi Arabia for six months. It was a fairly restrictive society. I was there in 1979, and there was talk of such things happening there at the time. The status of women in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan is very similar, and the way you have described this is concerning. You talked about the 25 converts who were arrested. We had evidence at our committee that a refugee has to pretty well get out of the country before he can be processed. Really, the only hope for these 25 is some kind of release. Has there been, to your knowledge, any NATO intervention on behalf of the people involved, particularly these 25?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** None.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** I was hoping for better news than that. I think you hit on it when you said that NATO has given up on the Karzai government. That's troublesome, because they installed this government. By abdication, they allowed them to stay in office, when Abdullah Abdullah believes that they won the election. I'd like to hear more about your preconditions. My belief is that Canada should come out of there; our military forces should come out of there. But if we're going to ask for preconditions, how in the world could we guarantee that? What's the measuring stick? Where do we say that the preconditions have been met? We're already there, and we are supposed to come out next year. You're saying we should set preconditions: if we don't see something happening in ten months, we should come out.

● (1350)

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I'm saying to connect it.

In the last nine years we've given \$1.5 billion to the Afghanistan mission. Forget about the money. The money is not as important as 150 Canadian soldiers. If we did not succeed in putting conditions, and we saw the reality and the fruit on the ground.... It's easy to see it; it's not that hard. You go to Kabul and you know where the location of the police station is. I was there for a few days and I succeeded, without intelligence, to pinpoint different positions just in Kabul, the capital, the most secure area, of boy play.

We went inside and we filmed. That's the tape I wanted to show to the committee, but we couldn't work it out. I think everyone received the tape of the evidence. We succeeded to get inside and monitor. We knew where it was. We knew which police station did this. When we say "corruption", we see in the paper, and that's evidence, of people who basically are arrested by the Afghani government. This is hard-core evidence in front of you. It's easy to know when there are changes.

The improvement of human rights in Afghanistan should be connected to our existence in Afghanistan. How much are we spending on the mission and how many troops are putting their lives in danger, if they are not improving human rights?

Your idea is very good. Make it connected to a timeline. Within this timeline, if we did not see improvement, if we did not see free elections, if we did not see free people, if we did not see that this law is cancelled from the Afghani constitution, I think we should save our money and our soldiers' lives and we should get out of Afghanistan.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** On the point you've just made, how many years have we been there?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Nine years.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Nine years, and we haven't had successful elections. We haven't put a stop to any of these things. We haven't changed the culture. Madam Deschamps is correct. These are systemic, ingrained, cultural problems. They're not political. The abuse of children and the abuse of women is a cultural thing. It would take a huge change of government thinking in this country. I'm not so sure it's possible.

Our intervention has been in a fight with the Taliban, and I absolutely believe our forces conducted themselves in an exemplary fashion. But the rest of this is happening. Our troops are so-called "inside the wire". They go outside of the wire for the patrols and what not, but they're removed from the society. You would have found that when you were there. I'm not so sure there's any way, especially in a short timeframe, to say we can accomplish this.

I think the international community has a responsibility to come up with some way of doing it, but I'm not so sure connecting it to our troops is a way to do it. Connecting it to aid and dollars may well have a stronger influence.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I think both of them will have a strong influence.

I disagree with you about something, about just leaving without even trying. I understand that we've been there for nine years. The only problem is, if we left right now without trying until the last minute, we would have shed the blood of these 152 Canadian soldiers in vain. That's how I look at it.

I will just finish my statement, though.

What I am really saying is, if we give up on the people of Afghanistan, how will this help the people there? If we say okay, we're pulling out and we're not trying, how will this help the women who get raped there, how will this help the children who get raped there, how will this help the people who want freedom of religion there? What I am really saying is that we should focus with different strategies on the mission in Afghanistan. This strategy is not coming from giving a blind eye to what Hamid Karzai is doing.

● (1355)

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** I'm not suggesting NATO should pull out. I'm saying that the commitment that Canada has given over nine years that cost us 150 lives is a more than reasonable contribution to what has happened there. There's a significant increase, a surge of American troops that are in there. If we withdrew and we went from the aid side—of putting pressure on in that fashion—I think it would be a reasonable way, again after being there for nine years.

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to interrupt at that point. We're up to nine and a half minutes on an eight-minute round.

I turn now to the Conservatives. Is it Mr. Hiebert or Mr. Sweet?

**Mr. David Sweet:** I'll begin and then I'll share my time, Mr. Chairman.

With the blood that Canadian sons and daughters have spilled in that country, with the millions that has been spent on schools, with the millions of children in schools over there—a large percentage girls—with the high percentage of women parliamentarians there, with the millions of dollars spent on infrastructure, it's difficult for me to contain my frustration when I hear this testimony.

Don't get me wrong, Reverend El Shafie. My frustration is with the content of your testimony, not with you. I'm very grateful for what you've done here, but it's frustrating. I agree with my colleague, MP Silva, that measurable progress in a reasonable time needs to be made here.

It's reprehensible with the women, this abdication of responsibility to protect women. It's reprehensible that this boy play.... This is abominable, as far as we're concerned. And this whole notion that Christians would be persecuted to the degree that they'd be put to death....

You know, Mr. Chairman, Hamid Karzai came here himself and he walked through arches out here that say "Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son", and "Where there is no vision, the people perish", and "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea". He had to walk through those arches. That's what we placed on there on the Peace Tower. I just.... Like I said, it's hard for me to contain my frustration. But let me get to a question and then move on to my colleague.

You sat down with the independent human rights commission that the Government of Canada funds. Have they confronted the Afghan government there with these concerns you've had? What was their response to you about the kind of reception and feedback they got from the government there?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I believe they confronted the Afghan government with these issues. I don't think they confronted them about the freedom of religion. I didn't hear this in the meeting. I think it was more about the boy play and Shia law—the women's status law—in Afghanistan.

What I got was that it was completely dismissed by the Afghani president. The main thing when I met with Dr. Samar, she asked me where Canada is in all of this. She was asking me where Canada is in all of this, where is the west in all of that. And it was a legitimate question.

**Mr. David Sweet:** So they have confronted the government officials and on every count they've just dismissed them.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** On every count. I think there was actually a meeting. She shared with me that she went to a meeting with Mr. Hamid Karzai himself, and he told her he would take a look at it, this and that. After that, he passed a law. He completely dismissed and ignored her.

**Mr. David Sweet:** So this law was passed, this law that forces a woman to have sex with her husband on his command, this was passed after their last audience with Karzai and his government?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I would assume so. I don't know the exact scheduling of meetings with him. But actually it was passed before the last Afghani election.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'll just turn the rest of my time over to my colleague, Mr. Hiebert.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. El Shafie, for being here.

I have to say that your testimony is compelling and detailed. Your submission as I've reviewed it is an excellent document, with detail far beyond what I would normally have expected. It makes me deeply concerned about the situation in Afghanistan, about the abuse and the persecution of Christians and religious minorities, and about the abuse of women and the sexual slavery of boys. It's abominable. We deal with a lot of difficult issues at this committee, but this one really strikes a chord in me.

You've given some excellent suggestions on what our government can do. You pointed out in your testimony and in this document that good laws exist in Afghanistan. But the good laws are not being enforced and the bad laws are not being repealed.

You also show that there is a lack of will to enforce some of the constitutional rights that women, children, and religious minorities are supposed to have. You also document the need for public education. I hear you saying in your testimony that you still have hope, that you haven't given up entirely. You're not suggesting that we leave now. Because if we do, we would be abandoning them to this state, and that's simply not acceptable.

Our government will be persisting in its efforts to reform the country over the next couple of years, and I hope we'll have the opportunity to bring about some of the changes that you've suggested. I can assure you that I will be raising these concerns with my colleagues in government, and I thank you for forwarding this document to them.

You mentioned in your opening testimony that you'd been successful in 300 cases over the years. Could you elaborate on how you were successful? What were the most effective things that you've been able to accomplish through those cases? Is it hiring lawyers within the country? Is it raising the issue in a political situation or in the media? Help us understand how you've been so successful.

• (1400)

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I am not able to discuss all the cases, because some of them are confidential. But I can speak about a few.

An immigration lawyer by the name of Chantal Desloges recently testified here. She and I took the case of Mr. Magde Youssef. He was an Egyptian who faced persecution back home in Egypt, and he was facing deportation here in Canada. He was deported, and he was tortured. Through the intervention of the immigration minister, we were able to bring him back here after we presented evidence. So we saved his life.

Another story was on *W5*, on CTV. A little girl by the name of Neha was two years old when she was raped because her father refused to convert to Islam. We were able to help them to get out of Pakistan to come to Canada.

Some of the cases we worked on underground. There was a gentleman from Saudi Arabia. He is a Muslim who was teaching his students about freedom of religion. He was arrested, and he received a sentence of 750 lashes. We were able to build a campaign and stop the sentence, and now he lives in peace in Dubai, in the Emirates.

There is another from the Iranian Muslim community. Two girls were arrested, and we were able to free them from an Afghani prison, but they are still under house arrest.

So there are many cases, sometimes underground here in Canada, and sometimes underground in other countries.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Thank you. Hearing how you've been effective will help us to be more effective as well.

Again, I want to thank you for your testimony and for being here today. I appreciate all that you've provided to this committee. Thank you.

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

I said at the beginning that at the end of the questions we would ask Reverend El Shafie to make some concluding remarks. I now invite him to do that.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of you so much for this opportunity.

I want to thank Mr. Mario Silva for working with me and for coming with me to Afghanistan. It was a brave action you took by coming all the way with me to Afghanistan, and I thank you for that.

Mr. Chair, I came here to Canada eight years ago. As I mentioned to Madame Deschamps, I was tortured back home in Egypt. I know what these 25 are going through. I still have my scars under my suit. Don't let the suit fool you. I still have my scars under my suit. I know the torture and the persecution these people are facing every single day.

We have the opportunity to do something. Don't make this another committee meeting. Don't make this another hour that you just come and you listen and you leave and you get busy in your normal life. Let's do something to help these people.

I came here to Canada, and I believe in Canadian values. I do believe that Canada is the temple of human rights and the conscience of our world. I do believe this. When I accepted citizenship, I knew that I was a citizen of a great country, a great nation.

What I really need is to help these people. What I really desire is to free these prisoners and do something to help them. I was one of them one day. And I know that if we fail, we will fail the Afghani people. I know that if we fail, we will fail 152 Canadian soldiers who spilled their blood on the ground of Afghanistan for their freedom.

There is a time for the oppressed when dark becomes their only colour. Silence becomes their language. And tears and crying from the pain and the persecution becomes their national anthem. This day, we can stop this circle. We can stop this circle.

I thank you for your time, and I appreciate your hard work.

God bless you.

• (1405)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Reverend El Shafie.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Mr. Chair, I just wanted to state for members of the committee, and also for people who are present, that Reverend El Shafie will be able to show that video tomorrow at six o'clock at the Government Conference Centre. Hopefully, all members will be there. It's at six o'clock tomorrow night. It's an opportunity to actually meet some members who were in the delegation and also to see the video and hear testimony as well.

**The Chair:** Is the Government Conference Centre the old railway station?

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Exactly.

**The Chair:** All right.

Thank you very much, Reverend El Shafie.

Thank you to those who came to listen in, and of course thank you to our committee members.

We are dismissed.

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