



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

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

SDIR • NUMBER 006 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, November 28, 2013

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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)): I call the meeting to order.

Today is November 28, 2013, and this is the sixth meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. As per our agenda, pursuant to Standing Order No. 108, we are continuing our study of the human rights situation in Sri Lanka.

[English]

With us today from London is Callum Macrae, who is a reporter—there may be a more grandiose title—with Channel 4 News. He has done work on the killing fields in Sri Lanka and can add, I think, some very interesting testimony.

Welcome to our subcommittee, Mr. Macrae.

Mr. Callum Macrae (As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me.

The Chair: Please take as much time as you want. We'll give you some uninterrupted time to give your testimony, which you can structure any way you want, and then when it's done, we'll go to a question and answer session in which all of the members who are present will have the opportunity to ask you a few questions.

Mr. Callum Macrae: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Callum Macrae: Should I commence now?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Callum Macrae: I'll just introduce myself. My name is Callum Macrae. I am the director of a series of films. I've made three films looking at the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, and in particular, the events of the last few months of the war.

The first two films were made for British television in *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields* series, and then the most recent one is a feature documentary, *No Fire Zone*, which looks at the last 138 days of the war, and in particular, presents the evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both sides, although the vast majority of people who died did die as a result of government shelling.

The films have been cited by the UN as having had a significant role in bringing the attention of the world to what happened. Indeed the most recent film, *No Fire Zone*, was raised in Parliament by

David Cameron, our Prime Minister, who saw it and actually raised the issues in it directly with President Rajapaksa. There is a reason I'm telling you all this; it's fair to say that I'm not a particularly popular person with the regime in Sri Lanka.

I understand that you have had a lot of evidence about particular events and statistics, and material about what's been going on in terms of human rights. I thought it might be most useful, rather than repeating that kind of material, if I could actually describe very specifically what I saw and experienced in terms of media freedom and freedom of expression in Sri Lanka the week before last when I was at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, CHOGM.

The Chair: That would be really great testimony, yes.

Mr. Callum Macrae: I suppose the process and my experiences with freedom of expression first started when I was interviewed by a Sri Lankan newspaper and mentioned that I intended to come to CHOGM, as I had done with the Australian CHOGM, to cover events there. The immediate response of this was a series of tweets by a middle-ranking diplomat called Bandula Jayasekara in Australia, who is significant also because he used to be the president's media adviser. He did a series of tweets in which he said, "I will make sure you don't get a visa." He tweeted 30 to 40 times and accused me of being funded by the Tamil Tigers and of being a propagandist on behalf of terror, despite the fact that quite clearly in the film we condemn the Tamil Tigers for having used acts of terror and suicide bombers, and for having shot at their own civilians. This clearly condemned them as people who have committed war crimes.

That set the tone for an incredibly hostile attitude towards me, which captures the paranoid nature of the regime. I don't use this term lightly as an insult. I think it's actually a technical description, because anyone who criticizes the regime or raises concerns over human rights, war crimes, and crimes against humanity is regarded as either an enemy of the state or a terrorist supporter, or perhaps worst of all, if they are Sinhala, a traitor.

The other thing that was consequent on my saying that I was planning to come was a series of online comments in response to the interview that said things such as, "You're welcome to come to Sri Lanka, but you will leave in a coffin." "Come to Sri Lanka, we will have a white van waiting for you." I'm sure you've heard testimony about the white vans. They're an instrument of terror and are used partly as a kind of act of political intimidation, but also very specifically are used to abduct people who usually disappear subsequently.

Another one said, "Come to Sri Lanka, and we will take you to meet Lasantha." Lasantha Wickrematunge was the editor of the *The Sunday Leader*, the founder of *The Sunday Leader* who, after he wrote an editorial in January criticizing the triumphalism of the imminent defeat of the Tigers, was shot down in the streets by four assailants who have never been found. He subsequently, as you may have heard, published an editorial posthumously in which he identified his assassins as the government.

That was the kind of context in which we arrived. I went and travelled out. I'm actually the director of these movies, but the first two were made through Channel 4, and the last one is co-produced by Channel 4, so I went out with the Channel 4 news team. During the war, the Channel 4 news team was itself expelled for having raised some of these concerns. We were only able to go, and I was only able to be given the visa, because we understand that the British Prime Minister said that unless the media were given free access, he would not go.

We then arrived. We were met at the airport by a large demonstration, clearly orchestrated by the government. Indeed, we hadn't announced what plane we were coming on, so there was clearly intelligence behind it. It was a large demonstration of people with large numbers of banners, condemning us as supporting the LTTE, shouting "Macrae go home", and so on. We then went to our hotel where there was another demonstration with similar posters.

For the next few days, everything we did was monitored. There were intelligence officers outside our hotel, and everywhere we went we were followed by them. I just heard today, in fact, that at one point I went to visit someone from Amnesty International who was staying at a different hotel, and the next day, a whole series of intelligence officers turned up at that hotel and demanded the guest list to see who was there. There was a very intimidatory atmosphere.

At one point, we tried to go to the north to see if we could get to the former war zone, because we had been invited and told we would have free access to do our job.

• (1315)

We left the hotel at six in the morning, discreetly without announcing we were going, and we were immediately followed onto the train by intelligence—military intelligence, we understand—who sat on the train. After about four or five hours, the train was suddenly stopped by a large demonstration of several hundred people all carrying very similar posters, which obviously either had been organized at very short notice when it was discovered we were getting on the train or had been organized earlier, if perhaps intelligence had been listening to our telephone calls or monitoring our conversations in our rooms, which we suspect now was also happening.

That demonstration—again, there were the same slogans—prevented us from travelling north. The train was stopped. We sat there for about two hours and were eventually bundled off the train by the police. There was a slightly curious incident, in fact, where we were bundled by the police into a van, with police motorbikes in front and the police van behind, and we were sent indirectly back to Colombo. Then the next day all the papers ran a story saying we had refused to pay the taxi driver and he had lodged a complaint with the police. This was a farcical situation, and it went on for about two or three days, in which the press was obsessed with the fact that we tried to avoid paying a taxi fare. The fact that it's generally regarded as inappropriate, if you're bundled into a van by the police, to offer them money didn't seem to wash.

Rather more seriously, however, clearly there was an orchestrated attempt to prevent us from doing our job. Rather more seriously, while we were trying to get up north, there were three busloads of relatives of the disappeared trying to get down south to attend a human rights vigil and event, and they were stopped by the police. They were prevented from travelling down to the south. Some who did get there were then surrounded by police who would not let them leave and threatened to arrest them saying that there were suspected terrorists there.

There was also an orchestrated demonstration, this time led by the BBS, we understand, which is an ultra-Sinhala nationalist organization that has been responsible for a series of violent demonstrations and violent attacks on Muslim business and also on Christian churches now, increasingly in the south, led by saffron-robed Buddhist priests. The leader of the opposition party, the UNP, tried to attend this vigil also and his car was stoned.

Subsequently, my colleague Jonathan Miller was also stoned in a demonstration, apparently spontaneously organized, when he was interviewing somebody. He went to interview some businessmen, actually some Sinhala businessmen, to talk about progress in the country. When he came out, there had been a demonstration organized and stones were thrown at them.

There is an incredible culture of repression, and I have to say, absolutely no evidence of any kind of freedom of expression in the country, something that was really brought home to us. Also we spoke to the media. I did speak to quite a few journalists, and they have an enormously difficult job. It's necessary, because of the threats and because so many media workers have disappeared, to use self-censorship or to use mechanisms for telling the truth, for example, slipping in bits of information dressed up in clearly uncritical pro-government rhetoric, but actually with news slipped in there. The work of journalists is very, very difficult. There are many journalists who are trying to do their best in extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Equally, there are state-sponsored, state-owned newspapers, *The Daily News*, for example, which is a Sri Lankan newspaper, that are utterly slavish in their commentary, and also television as well. For example, I was interviewed and repeatedly made the point that I regarded the Tamil Tigers, those people who used acts of terror and who committed war crimes, as a reprehensible organization. I noticed on one news report that the people of Sri Lanka were being told that Callum Macrae, the Tamil Tiger supporter, was there causing trouble. It actually showed footage of me making that speech with the audio turned down and with a commentary that simply described me as a Tamil Tiger supporter who was there to tell lies about the government.

It is a very, very difficult situation.

• (1320)

I'm not quite sure how much more time I have before I should answer questions. Please do let me know if I've spoken for too long.

The Chair: I have no objection to your going a bit longer, if you have something else that you think will help wrap things up. I can tell you, however, that I think you'll find the questions and answers quite helpful as well in allowing you to expand on the things that are important to you.

Mr. Callum Macrae: Okay, I'll just make one final point, which may be useful. It is a perception that I had, and it may or may not be useful to you. I'll do it very briefly.

What seems to be happening in Sri Lanka is that the government knows it has to stay in power or it's all over, as it were. The regime is very much a nepotistic family-run regime with a great deal of corruption, a great deal of family business tied up in it, a great deal of financial and business interests linked with the family. Of course, there are these war crime allegations and the very serious evidence of war crimes hanging over them, so they know in a sense that they have to stay in power or it's all over.

I have discussed this with Sri Lankans whom I managed to have conversations with when we were fairly sure we weren't being listened to, and it seems that the regime is increasingly reliant on a very—I mentioned the word paranoia earlier—xenophobic, paranoid, increasingly ultra-nationalist, and increasingly, in conventional terminology, ultra-right base which they use to maintain their support, and to maintain a rather dangerous support of organizations such as the BBS.

They increasingly seem to be less concerned about taking with them the Sinhala liberal establishment, if you like, the lawyers, the law society, and various.... I use "liberal" in the British sense of the word, rather than the North American sense of the word.

They don't seem to see the need to preserve the illusion of a broad democratic liberal process. They are increasingly happy to rely on this rather dangerous ultra-nationalist, xenophobic, and violent culture to hold on to power. That is a cause for deep concern.

In a sense, that is what I think lay behind Navi Pillay's comment that the country was sinking into authoritarianism. I found it quite disturbing and quite sinister. It's certainly an indication that things are getting worse rather than better.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Before we go to questions from the membership of the committee, I have just a brief one myself.

In regard to your videos on the subject, your documentaries, if we wanted to find them online, given the fact that our committee operates in both languages and we have members of the committee who speak only French, is there any availability of French subtitles or anything of that sort for your videos? If so, could you give us the address for it?

Mr. Callum Macrae: Yes, I did actually send to your committee clerk two links that I am more than happy to make available to your committee members. I think she has that information already, and she could perhaps pass it on. There are links to both the English version of the film and a version with French subtitles. These are password protected, because obviously, we're still trying to sell some of the films, trying to raise money to pay for them, so we can't make them completely available, but for your members, I would be more than happy that they be given the address and the password so they could look at either the English or the French-subtitled versions.

• (1325)

The Chair: That's excellent. If you could send that to our clerk, I'll undertake that we give that information to the committee members, and they will undertake to not make that generally available.

Mr. Callum Macrae: That would be very kind, thank you.

The Chair: Let's go now to Mr. Schellenberger. You have six minutes for questions and answers.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Mr. Macrae, for your testimony here today.

How do you believe the international community can be most effective in pressing for accountability and reconciliation in Sri Lanka?

Mr. Callum Macrae: In a sense, the next key event which is coming up is the United Nations Human Rights Council.

I think the problem is that the international community has for the past four years said, quite correctly, that the state should first investigate the allegations within the state. This would be in line with all international norms, in any case. The problem is that the Sri Lankan government has not done so for four years, and I believe is not capable of doing so.

It did launch a thing called the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, LLRC, which you may have discussed, which entirely failed to deal in any respect with allegations of war crimes or crimes against humanity. It did make a few good suggestions in terms of responsibility to search for the disappeared or to trace the disappeared, responsibility of getting the Ministry of Defence to withdraw from civilian administration to the extent that it is involved just now. These kinds of recommendations, although good ones, were completely ignored. The trouble is that Sri Lanka does have a record of producing endless investigations and presidential commissions which are often never published at all. Even when they are published, nothing is done on them. I think that in practice they've shown that they are not willing.

I'm sure you will also discuss this, but the removal of the chief justice, the impeachment of the chief justice, and this is what the law society of Sri Lanka, the Bar Association of Sri Lanka, is also saying, has effectively gone some way to destroy, if not actually to completely destroy, the independence of the judiciary. I would argue that they have demonstrated they're not willing, and in practice, they are no longer capable because they do not have an independent judiciary for managing such an inquiry. For that reason, I think that the pressure and the demands for an international independent inquiry are overwhelming.

I think it should have happened a long time ago, but I certainly think it should happen in March. I think it's extremely important that in March at the United Nations Human Rights Council that call be made formally. Navi Pillay has said that if nothing happens before March, that should happen. I think that David Cameron has now also said exactly the same thing.

I think that is very, very important. I'm slightly concerned that there is some discussion or suggestion that South Africa is suggesting helping setting up some kind of form of truth and reconciliation commission. Obviously, in principle, I'm absolutely in favour of such a thing. I think that South Africa is absolutely the best country to help advise on such a thing. The problem is that we know from the pattern of the past that this would be seized upon by the Sri Lankan government as an excuse for putting off the international inquiry, which I now believe is the only way forward. It would not actually be, given what we know about the way Sri Lanka operates, a useful way forward, and I think it needs to be shown as not being a sensible way forward.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Prime Minister Harper did not attend the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Sri Lanka because of the country's poor human rights record. Some close Canadian allies, including Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, chose to attend.

In your view, what was the effect of the decision by Prime Minister Harper, and the prime ministers of India and Mauritius, not to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting? What is your assessment on the impact of British Prime Minister David Cameron's efforts to call attention to continuing impunity in Sri Lanka in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting?

• (1330)

Mr. Callum Macrae: I think that both approaches were significant, and I think, actually—this may seem to be a curious

thing to say—the approaches were quite effective. I think that the decision of your Prime Minister early on to say, “Look, unless you deliver, I'm not going to come”, was important. I wish actually that, in fact, other countries had done that. I was unhappy personally that David Cameron had so early on said he was going. I think that kind of undermined the pressure that could have been built up in advance of the Commonwealth meeting for some kind of progress and some kind of improvement.

I support both of them, in a sense. I didn't support my Prime Minister's decision to announce that he was going so early. Having said that, it is certainly true that he did speak out quite boldly and quite firmly when he was there. Given that the meeting was going to go ahead, this also helped, and he then, I think, was clear and unequivocal in the concerns he raised.

That's not a very satisfactory answer, but I think in a sense he did, if you like, in my personal view, redeem his decision to go by raising the issues very firmly, and given that it was then happening, that was useful. But I would have hoped that more people would have supported your Prime Minister's position earlier on and used that not just as a kind of negative, “I'm not going”, but to use that as a way of exacting pressure.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Sure.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Schellenberger.

Mr. Marston, it's your turn.

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

Mr. Macrae, welcome. We're pleased to hear from you.

Looking at this situation, we see the LLRC clearly has been a failure. It's been pretty much window dressing. What would you like to see the Commonwealth in particular, or the United Nations do to draw attention to the government's attack on the media?

Mr. Callum Macrae: I'm very concerned about the damage that will be done to the Commonwealth by what is going on, by the fact that Sri Lanka is chairing it. It is an almost breathtakingly contradictory situation. You have a country that is appalling in its record on freedom of expression allegedly chairing an organization committed to freedom of expression.

It is incumbent upon members of the Commonwealth, and particularly through CMAG, the ministerial action group, to put continuous pressure on Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, of course, that committee is now chaired by Sri Lanka. Also, considerable pressure has to be put on the secretary-general of the Commonwealth, who I believe has played a deeply unhelpful role and has in a sense enabled this to happen.

One of the problems is that when the Sri Lankan government committed their final offensive, they used very much the language of the war on terror to justify what was happening, and to buy silence. The Tigers, leaving aside the ethics of what they did, also played into that by their continuous use of terrorist tactics. This has allowed the Sri Lankan government to represent what was going on as part of the war on terror.

At the end of all this, the president made a very clever speech to the United Nations in 2010, in which he basically claimed to have solved the terror problem and then demanded that everyone back off and let Sri Lanka come up with a culturally legitimate, homegrown solution. Ironically, that speech was written by a British public relations company, Bell Pottinger, which is run by a Conservative supporter. There was indeed a kind of irony that they were adopting this almost anti-imperialist rhetoric.

The thing is, it does ring true with a lot of non-aligned nations. It rings true with many nations in the Commonwealth, Asian and African countries. At the same time, other countries on the United Nations Human Rights Council, including North American countries, grow suspicious when the west lectures a small independent nation on human rights.

Getting the word out within the Commonwealth could be hugely important to these countries. It's important to make people understand that this is not a question of the west ganging up on a small independent nation. It is in fact a question of fundamental international humanitarian law and human rights. This is a process of discussion and argument, constant vigilance, and raising the issue within the Commonwealth and the Human Rights Council.

I'm not sure that's a particularly useful answer, but this is an important issue with a context that has to be taken into account.

• (1335)

Mr. Wayne Marston: The point that you've been making about the shame on the Commonwealth for having this country in the chair is just unbelievable. Sometimes it's very difficult to even envision the future there.

This is a country that's been in civil war for 30 years, with a dictatorship on power on the government's side. There were controls on the media, and controls on messaging. Hate messages were repeatedly delivered. The people are going to be a long time before starting to reflect on the damage now occurring, compared with the damage that they felt they were receiving during the war, and until that happens, I don't think we'll see a lot going on internally in the country.

As to some kind of international inquiry, do you think that would have an effect on them?

Mr. Callum Macrae: I think the international inquiry is the only way ahead on that, but I appreciate that it's not a simple question of setting one up. It's an enormously complex process.

In the process of calling for that, the process of saying that this ultimately is the only solution if justice is to be done, I think not only does that message begin to get through and begin to be taken seriously but also it has an effect within the country as well. Not just Sinhala businessmen and Sinhala democratically minded people will begin to be concerned about the increasing isolation of Sri Lanka and

begin to be concerned about the nepotism and corruption of the government, it will be part of a process of strengthening the opposition.

I think it's worth mentioning that although there is this very solid, hard-core ultra-nationalist...and they're encouraging this kind of base that they have, which will mean that they will continue to win elections. It was very significant when we were in Sri Lanka that actually, increasingly we noticed that people would give us thumbs-up signs discreetly. A large number of people came up to me when they had the opportunity to shake my hand very warmly.

I think there was quite a considerable constituency within the country, not just Tamils but also among Sinhala people, who were very glad—I mean, we were front-page news throughout the entire event—to see us raising questions in a way that the local press couldn't.

In the local press, I think there were many journalists who were quite glad to be able to report on what we were saying, because it was a news event and they could do it without.... It also let them raise these issues.

Mr. Wayne Marston: They were happy to shake your hand despite the fact that you didn't pay your cab fare.

Mr. Callum Macrae: Indeed.

We actually did pay the cab fare, in the end. We said, look, if the police won't pay their driver, we will pay him, so we did actually pay, and we tweeted a photograph of us paying him.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Grewal, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Macrae, for your time and your presentation.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recently stated that the Sri Lankan government was moving toward an authoritarian system. Do you find this to be a fair assessment?

Mr. Callum Macrae: I'm afraid it is absolutely a fair assessment. I think things are getting worse. I think there is a strengthening of a kind of, as I say, xenophobic ultra-nationalism. The problem is it's very difficult. This war was so horrible and there is no doubt there's a generation of Sinhala people who grew up scared of bomb attacks, scared of terror attacks. There was this real culture of fear, so in a sense you can understand to some extent the relief that the war is over. The trouble is that what is happening is very dangerous, because many people hoped that despite the events of the last few months of the war, a hand of friendship and reconciliation would be held out.

In fact, what is happening is an absolutely brutal repression of the Tamils in the north. There has been a consolidation of this thing that underlay what happened at the end of the war, which is that the Tigers and the civilians were regarded as indistinguishable, and the Tamils are still regarded as the enemy. Even though the Tigers are utterly destroyed, the perception that the Tamils are in a sense all supporters of terror and all dangerous to the state is very much part of what motivates people.

There's also a kind of brutalization as well, because the reason the war ended as brutally and violently as it did.... I don't think any previous president had the courage, if you like, to sacrifice so many of his own people to end the war. There was an absolute brutality. It should never be forgotten that an awful lot more soldiers in the Sri Lankan army, Sinhala soldiers for the vast majority, died than did Tiger fighters in the last two months in terms of actual combat deaths. There was a brutal contempt and disregard for the health, safety, and well-being of their own soldiers. There's a kind of brutalized culture within the Sri Lankan army, which I think is also playing a part in the repression of the Tamils in the north.

This is very dangerous because quite clearly, what will happen is.... If you're able to look at my film you will see lots of photographs of very sweet, damaged six-, seven-, eight-, and nine-year-olds mourning and crying and in a terrible state. At the moment those are just utterly destroyed and damaged individuals. It's impossible to stress how awful and how traumatized the community in the north is. There is nobody there who hasn't lost people, who hasn't seen their mother, father, brother, or sister blown up in front of their eyes. They are now growing up watching their parents—if they survive—and their brothers and their sisters being repressed and brutalized and allowed no freedom and allowed no political agency. What's going to happen to these kids when they're 15 or 16 if there isn't justice, if there isn't an international inquiry, if there isn't a sense that the international community has taken this seriously?

There's an awful inevitability about what those 16-year-olds will think. They will think there is only one way to achieve justice and that's to take it into their own hands. The potential for history to repeat itself is just too awful to contemplate. This is why I think the whole question of setting up an independent inquiry or finding some mechanism for ensuring there is justice is not an academic exercise in historical accountability; it's an urgent task if further bloodshed is to be avoided.

• (1340)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Yesterday there was an article on the BBC website which stated that the Sri Lankan government would conduct an island-wide census to determine the number of dead and missing people, as well as to assess the damage from the civil war. In your opinion, will this help in the process of reconciliation? How does this reflect the current government's attitude towards reconciliation?

Mr. Callum Macrae: I haven't actually seen that, to be honest. It doesn't surprise me. It's the kind of thing that they say they will do all the time. They've set up commissions into the disappeared that constantly promised to give information to the relatives and that never did.

The trouble is that there is a pattern of the government making these kinds of announcements. It's what it does. They never turn out

to be true. You have to remember that this government, during the war, said that not a single civilian had died. At the end of the war, they said they had rescued all of the hostages. They said that not a single civilian had been injured as a result of government shelling. Now, since then, they've revised that to 7,000. They will no doubt revise that up.

It is an appalling indictment that we don't know how many people died. There are a lot of figures circulating. The UN suggested 40,000. The Panel of Experts report suggests in the subsequent internal review that it could be as many as 70,000. The World Bank, I think, has estimated that something like 120,000 people are unaccounted for. That doesn't mean they're dead, of course. Many of them will have left or have gone to India or whatever.

Four and a half years later, the fact that nobody knows is astonishing. This is a country that has censuses, that has votes. It's not a country where they don't know who they have. The fact that nobody knows this late and that the government is leaping from no dead to 7,000 dead is an absolute indictment.

If I believed I could take this latest government announcement seriously, then I would think it was good. The trouble is that there is absolutely no evidence. There is such a historical pattern of these kinds of commissions of inquiry being announced, coming to nothing, and not being reported or just being sheer fakery from the word go, that I'm afraid I'm deeply cynical about it.

• (1345)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Grewal.

Professor Cotler, you're next.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Macrae, I want to thank you for your reporting, and particularly the courage that underpins it.

I read recently your article in *The Guardian* of November 16 on how you became, as you discuss today, Sri Lanka's most hated man, but I will quote from the end of the article:

But look behind these threats and hysteria beyond the front page banner headlines that read "End of the road for Callum Macrae" and you detect a different current underneath.

You made reference to that during our Qs and As. I'm concerned because, as you just mentioned, the fact that nobody really knows what happened is in itself such a serious indictment. What did you find in terms of the people themselves and their appreciation both of what happened and also of the importance of the kind of reporting you're doing?

Mr. Callum Macrae: The problem among ordinary Sinhala people in Sri Lanka is that they are fed lies. I know I keep saying that I don't use these expressions lightly, but I don't. They're quite clearly just fed categorical lies.

There was an article in the government-sponsored *Daily News*. There was a full-page investigation into me that quoted e-mails I had been sent by my Tamil Tiger commander instructing me to make these three programs. It described meetings that I had with Adele Balasingham, who is the wife of one of the Tamil Tiger leaders, in my office in Channel 4. This material is believed in Sri Lanka.

The fact is, I don't have an office in Channel 4. I'm a freelancer. I have never met Adele Balasingham in my life. The idea that the Tamil Tigers would pay me to call them war criminals who use terror tactics and shoot civilians and child soldiers is laughable, but actually it is believed in Sri Lanka, and people are denied access to anything resembling truth. That's one of the great problems in terms of getting people to question what the government is doing.

I'm sorry, but I've forgotten the second part of your question.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I might ask it in a different way.

We have been discussing also the culture of impunity in the face of the war crimes and crimes against humanity. While there may be a prospective investigation in March by the United Nations Council on Human Rights, that's still part of the way off.

My concern is not only about the investigative capacity and accountability, but about what can be done to protect journalists like you so that in fact the information can be known, so that in fact the people in Sri Lanka can be exposed to the truth, and so this culture of intimidation and harassment of the media will end. Is there anything the international community, or we as Canadian parliamentarians can do in that regard?

Mr. Callum Macrae: It is a very difficult problem because the press is so tightly controlled. There are lots of journalists of goodwill trying to work, but they have to self-censor themselves or they will be either disappeared or have to leave.

It is a question of constantly monitoring. I think it is useful if people go on fact-finding missions. The problem is that if you go on a fact-finding mission—and this is very much the problem for us. I can go to Sri Lanka. I can announce that I'm going to go there to try to cover what's going on, but of course I can't meet anybody, because if I do, I know what will happen to them afterwards. Indeed, Navi Pillay found exactly the same thing when she spoke to people. Once you leave, the danger is not actually to the foreign journalist; the danger is to the people you meet.

That is a very difficult situation. There is no simple solution except to constantly raise it, to constantly try to keep informed and to monitor what is happening, and to lend support when necessary.

For example, recently a Tamil writer from Sri Lanka, in exile for several years, went to visit his mother-in-law's grave and was arrested. It's important to raise these issues as soon as they're heard about.

One of the problems we have—and the British media and all the media are guilty of this, as well as government—is that in the past, we have ignored the cries of protest coming from Tamils in Sri Lanka, partly because the government had so very successfully identified all Tamils as Tamil Tigers. Internationally, the justifiable suspicion of the Tamil Tigers meant that nobody listens to the cries of democratic Sinhalese oppositionists or Tamils.

I think international scrutiny is absolutely vital. I know that's a trite and easy thing to say, but in the past, the international community failed to exercise that scrutiny and to listen to the news coming out of there. We have to do it much more carefully in the future.

I appreciate that's a rather platitudinous answer, but I can't think of a better one.

● (1350)

The Chair: You have one more last question, if it's brief.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Macrae, it is a brief question, but I know it will take more time than you have to answer it.

I get a sense that the whole issue and the question of the Sri Lankan tragedy and the horrors that befell the Tamils has fallen off the radar screen. Apart from the reporting you are courageously doing, it doesn't seem to be part of international attention and involvement.

Is that a fair inference to draw?

Mr. Callum Macrae: Yes. I think the problem is that it was completely ignored at the time.

In its first meeting after the end of the war, I remember that the United Nations Human Rights Council extraordinarily and shamefully passed the resolution congratulating Sri Lanka on ending the war.

In a sense, the truth is beginning to come out, in that the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, which was so surprisingly and appallingly held in Sri Lanka, did actually focus attention to some extent on what's happening.

I hope that perhaps there is a low-level growing awareness of what went on and that the news is beginning to get out. As I mentioned earlier, the problem is that it's seen as a question of historical accountability rather than an urgent matter of addressing human rights abuses and ensuring that this doesn't happen again.

That urgency is what people don't appreciate. There is a growing awareness, in an academic sense, that terrible things happened and that perhaps in the due course of law and justice something should be done. However, I don't think there's an awareness of how potentially dangerous and volatile the continuing oppression and the continual denial of human rights is, and of the trouble and potential violence building up for the future which is represented by that. That is the message that has to be got across; in particular, it's a message that has to be got across to the non-aligned countries.

For example, I showed the film to one African delegation, and I sent it to South American diplomats, and they were truly and genuinely shocked and taken aback. If that kind of message can be got out... I'm hoping that we can raise the funds, because at the moment, we have absolutely no funds whatsoever, despite what the government says about our Tamil Tiger funding. We're hoping to do a tour of Latin American countries and some African countries in the buildup to the UN meeting, to show this film to people just to get the word out.

It's a difficult low-level process, which I think is slowly getting through, but whether people understand the urgency and the importance of it, I'm not sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Let's go now to Mr. Sweet.

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

Welcome, Mr. Macrae. It has been good to hear your testimony.

Since you introduced us to Bandula Jayasekara, who I must disclose to the committee I know from his being a consul general here in Canada, I went to Twitter and I went through some of the history. It's rather unusual for a diplomat of his stature to spend, and I haven't been able to get through all of October, but certainly all of November it seems, on a campaign to make sure that your reputation was entirely destroyed.

He mentions a book that was published regarding exposing the corrupt journalism industry. Can you tell us a bit about that?

• (1355)

Mr. Callum Macrae: Yes. This is an extraordinary publication, which I am hoping to try to find time next week to do a detailed rebuttal of.

Our journalism has been under absolute constant attack by the Sri Lankan government since we started this. We have an independent television regulator in the U.K. called Ofcom, the Office of Communications, to which any member of the public can submit a complaint if any television program is, in their view, unfair, misleading, misrepresenting, or whatever. It's an independent regulator, and a regulator that is more than happy to find TV broadcasts at fault if they are indeed at fault.

The Sri Lankan government orchestrated—quite clearly they orchestrated—over 100 complaints about our first two television programs, including what I think is the longest complaint that Ofcom has ever received, allegedly from a member of the public. In fact, it was 600 pages long, written by lawyers, and an incredibly detailed attack on which a lot of the content of this book is now based. Every single one of those complaints was considered by the Ofcom regulator. Obviously, we had to submit at great length long defences to all of these allegations. Every single one of them was rejected, and that's extremely unusual. Not a single damn point was upheld in any of the complaints by the independent regulator.

The fact is that our journalism has stood up to the most extraordinary scrutiny. They have continued to do this. They published a 220-page book, a full, large book, which I have a copy of, which they initially were going to distribute to every single

journalist. I've had various academics and journalists here in Britain phone me to tell me that they've now been sent it. It is an absolutely scurrilous and unsubstantiated document full of the most.... Ironically, they call it, *Corrupted Journalism: Channel 4 and Sri Lanka*. It is, in fact, in itself the most appalling piece of journalism, with misrepresentations, and so on. It does things like quote at great length Jaffna University teachers.... I can't recall exactly what they call it; I don't have it in front of me. It quotes documents at great length that it cites as supporting their case, which, if you actually read the document, completely condemn their case and indeed back up everything that we have said.

It is an extraordinary, very expensive exercise in public relations, which has clearly been funded. We don't know who funded it, but it certainly is impossible to imagine who else would want to fund it besides the Sri Lankan government. It's a disgraceful and appalling document, which I am hoping to find time next week to try to do a detailed rebuttal of. It won't be that difficult, but it will take time.

Mr. David Sweet: We'll look forward to that, Mr. Macrae.

Mr. Chair, if my colleagues would agree, I'd suggest that the researchers spend a bit of time on this particular diplomat, who is from New South Wales, a diplomat from Sri Lanka, Bandula Jayasekara, who also in many of his comments says that Canada is guilty of exporting terror. That gives you an idea about what's on here. If they would extract some of the tweets that are pertinent to our investigation, that would be very helpful, at least in my regard. I hope my colleagues will agree to that.

Mr. Callum Macrae: If I could, I would say one other thing on Bandula Jayasekara. On one level, his tweets are clearly libellous and demonstrably libellous. The idea that I'm funded by an organization I condemn as guilty of war crimes is absurd. That manner of speaking was extremely dangerous. I was not able to walk on the street in safety in Sri Lanka because of that kind of material, these kinds of lies, which are, in the context of Sri Lanka today, quite clear incitements to violence and incitements to hatred. I was considered to be partially responsible for the death threats that were made against me. On one level, one would sort of laugh off his comments because they're so absurd, but on another level they are actually quite dangerous and extremely irresponsible.

• (1400)

Mr. David Sweet: I concur.

I wanted to ask you about the militarization of the public service. One of our witnesses mentioned that pretty well everywhere you go, there's a militarization of the public service in just about every dimension. Did you witness that when you were on the ground in Sri Lanka?

Mr. Callum Macrae: Even in Colombo you can see that, and I think that the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission did say that the MOD, should withdraw from inappropriate civilian administrative activities. Their response to that, I think if you look up the website of the Ministry of Defence of Sri Lanka, you will see that it is called the ministry of defence and urban renewal. I think it's urban renewal, but it's a phrase along those lines. Again, it's kind of laughable on one level, but really quite sinister on another.

It demonstrates the increasing...the regime is based on the military. The regime is based on its military loyalty, and if you look at what's happening... Another sort of key factor... Actually last year, the Ministry of Defence's budget—this is the fourth year after the end of the war—went up something like 25%. There are huge, huge numbers, and I wasn't able to get up there to see because I was stopped, but there are huge numbers of military in the north.

The military is taking over. There is a massive land grab going on there. There is something like 7,000 acres of land subject to legal proceedings just now. The military are building bases on Tamil lands. The military are running hotels and whale watching trips for tourists. The military are running shops; they're running groceries. They have a huge military with not a lot to do, and they are being used to, if you like, destroy the ethnic identity of what are seen as the Tamil homelands in the north. The vast majority of the military are back up in the north, in the northeast and in the Tamil areas. They have been given a bonus for having a third child, a quite clear and open and blatant attempt to ethnically re-engineer the north, a really quite sinister process.

The military are also the power base of the president's brother—the defence secretary—who is seen by many as the power behind the throne, and has played a critical role in the conduct of the war, and is now playing a critical role in the conduct of the country.

Mr. David Sweet: Chair, I know that you're going to go to Mr. Jacob, but just one other thing. If I could ask again, with the agreement of my colleagues—I don't doubt Mr. Macrae—but just so that we can have independent verification that the military budget has gone up 25% after the conflict. I think that's an important thing for evidence.

Mr. Callum Macrae: That is my recollection. I'd be more than happy to have that confirmed, but I believe that to be the case.

The Chair: I'm just going to confirm, Mr. Macrae. I was told that you actually have a tight schedule, but we can go a tiny bit over our normal time if our committee agrees. Do you have any issues, or can you stay for a few minutes further?

Mr. Callum Macrae: Yes, I am actually supposed to be at an event, which started three minutes ago, but I could perhaps spend another few minutes, not too many, unfortunately. I'm very sorry.

The Chair: I appreciate that you've been very accommodating with us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacob, go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Macrae, thank you for appearing before our committee this afternoon.

I'd like to begin by asking you the following question. What do you think is the best tool—

[*English*]

Mr. Callum Macrae: Thank you for inviting me to speak.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: What do you think is the government's best tool for media censorship?

[*English*]

Mr. Callum Macrae: I'm so sorry, I think I missed the beginning of that question. Would you mind saying it again?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: What do you think is the government's best tool for media censorship?

• (1405)

[*English*]

Mr. Callum Macrae: What does the government use to censor the media?

A voice: That's correct.

Mr. Callum Macrae: The censorship of the media in Sri Lanka is done by a combination of methods.

The primary method is that literally journalists die, disappear, or are forced into exile. There is a very good organization, which you might want to consider taking testimony from if there is time, called Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka, which is an organization of exiled journalists, Sinhala, Tamil, and I think Muslim journalists who have been exiled from Sri Lanka. It is an organization of very brave people who monitor what is happening to the media. The most immediate method of controlling the media is that. It is the threat of violence and the threat of expulsion and the threat of the white vans.

The second method is literally attempts to control. They have in the past had regulations where anything on security had to go through the defence media censorship committee. That was during the war. That's no longer the case, as I understand it, but it still operates on a kind of unofficial basis.

There is also, for example, *The Sunday Leader*, a newspaper that was, as I mentioned, actually founded by a Sinhala journalist, Lasantha Wickrematunge, who was a personal friend of the president and who was subsequently gunned down in the street. Since then, one of his journalists was shot, and indeed, the woman who was editing it has now been forced into exile, and the paper has been taken over by someone who is very close to the president. I won't say more precisely than that, because I'm not absolutely sure of his precise relationship, but I know that the ownership of the paper has shifted. Certainly the perception in Sri Lanka is that the government has, if you like, nobbled that newspaper in a certain sense, although there are still some good journalists trying to do good journalism on it.

Self-censorship is in a sense the key weapon. I know that many journalists would like to be able to do more and cannot. I have to say that I hold those journalists in the greatest of respect. Equally, there are many journalists whose slavish adherence to the government is actually comical if you're an outsider, but not comical if that's your only source of news and you believe the nonsense you've been told, as in this totally fictitious article which is written about me, for example. It wasn't just that there was innuendo; it wasn't just that assumptions were made about what I believed; but actually there was very specifically invented evidence, e-mails that clearly did not exist, and utterly constructed nonsense.

It's a combination of all these things that they use to control the media.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Thank you, Mr. Macrae.

I have a second question for you. Where does access to the Internet stand in Sri Lanka? How does the government control Internet critics?

[*English*]

Mr. Callum Macrae: The government has regularly prevented access to certain websites. It has limited certain websites. It has tried

very statutory things. It has tried to introduce systems, with varying degrees of success, where websites had to register with the government. Also it has specifically blocked websites as well. It's uneven, and some external websites do manage to get through to Sri Lanka. Others are blocked and stopped. It's an uneven picture.

The problem is that the overwhelming message from the pro-government media is believed over and above websites anyway, in a sense that the government is able to marginalize websites and just tell lies about them, although on occasion, it also specifically blocks them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Jacob, I'm sorry but you're out of time.

[*English*]

I just want to say to Mr. Macrae that I'm very grateful to you for letting us run over your time in this way. It's been very helpful to us, and I do apologize for making you late for your next engagement.

Mr. Callum Macrae: Don't worry. I'm glad to be able to help.

The Chair: All right, we really do appreciate it. Thanks so much.

• (1410)

Mr. Callum Macrae: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Goodbye.

Mr. Callum Macrae: Goodbye.

The Chair: We have lost Mr. Macrae. I hope we haven't messed him up too much. I was going to say to him that if anybody doubts this somewhat preposterous story that he was in a committee on another continent, just call us and we can confirm that's his reason for being late.

I do want to say, for the rest of you, thanks very much. We will be back, hopefully in the Centre Block on Tuesday.

That's it. The meeting is adjourned.

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