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Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): I call to order this meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, as we continue our study on Canada's support for international democratic development.

I understand that our second witness, Thomas Axworthy, is still getting through security. In the meantime, I want to welcome, from the International Development Research Centre, Arjan de Haan, who studies inclusive economies.

Mr. de Haan, maybe I can ask you to start to provide your testimony and then we can loop in Thomas Axworthy when he arrives. Then we'll go to members for their questions. Please take 10 minutes. You're free to proceed.

Mr. Arjan de Haan (Director, Inclusive Economies, International Development Research Centre): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good morning, committee members.

My name is Arjan de Haan and I am the director of the Inclusive Economies program, which includes the Governance and Justice program, at the International Development Research Centre.

[*English*]

We are honoured to appear before the foreign affairs committee today, as we did in 2007, to provide testimony for an updated democratic development study.

IDRC is a Crown corporation that plays a key role in Canada's foreign affairs and international development efforts. Our approach to democratic development is based on the belief that researchers and policy-makers should be empowered to address the barriers to democracy in their own country with tools and solutions rooted in local realities.

An ongoing illustration of this approach is an initiative with Global Affairs called Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar. This supports democratic transition through policy research. The intent is to nurture a new generation of state and non-state actors who will engage in open public debate, generate sound research to support evidence-based decision-making and encourage the voices of women and other vulnerable groups in government.

Besides the initiative in Myanmar, I'd like to share three examples that demonstrate how IDRC supports research that bolsters the building blocks for democracy. The first example is how reliable sources of information contribute to democratic processes. Fake news and misinformation are alarmingly commonplace around the world. Just last week, in anticipation of this year's election here, Canada announced $7 million for literacy programming to improve Canadians' ability to critically analyze online news and reporting.

Rumours of false information can be dangerous. They prevent people from making informed decisions; they stoke hostilities and generate suspicion; and at their worst they cause violence and conflict. For example, in southeast Kenya in 2012, false rumours about clashes or imminent attacks fuelled violent conflicts between two ethnic groups. As many as 170 people were killed and 40,000 people were displaced.

IDRC teamed up with a Toronto-based NGO called The Sentinel Project to determine how these rumours were being spread and how they could be eliminated. The lack of reliable information in the region was primarily to blame. In response, a mobile phone app called Una Hakika was launched to help restore peace. It's a simple concept. When a worrying rumour is making the rounds, subscribers report it to the service for verification. Community volunteers and local police investigate the rumour and report back via text message, voice calls and Facebook. In only two years, an estimated 45,000 people were regularly using the free daily service for accurate information. Word spread, and in 2017 Una Hakika services were used to reduce tensions during Kenya's general and presidential elections.

Today, this crucial service is reaching an additional 250,000 people in Kenya, and it's also being scaled to a similar extent in Myanmar where a sister project is dispelling anti-Muslim rumours. Its popularity continues to grow, and now our partners will be adapting the service to local contexts in seven countries in Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

The second example I'd like to share is about encouraging women's voices in government. Even though women's perspectives are crucial in the development of truly democratic societies and governments, they still aren't being appropriately represented. In parliaments worldwide, women's participation has been stagnant at only 24%. The international group called the Open Government Partnership promotes accountable and responsive government, yet even among their 3,000 commitments, women were the focus of only 1%.

This is why IDRC is supporting the new feminist open government initiative. It builds on these existing commitments to help women raise their voices in government. It will support research that investigates the social and cultural factors that limit women's political involvement, and it will identify solutions to increase their participation. The goal of the feminist open government initiative is to ensure that by the end of 2019, 30% of the 79 member countries will take concrete actions, policies and practices to raise the level of women's political participation.

The third example I'd like to share is how improving crucial services can help to stabilize the lives of refugees and the host countries that welcome them. Stability is key to developing democracy, of course, but with more than 68 million people on the move worldwide, it is difficult to achieve. Of these people, 25 million have had to flee their country and are considered refugees. Developing countries host 85% of internationally displaced people, but they have limited capacity to support and integrate them. The social and economic burden of this is heavy. Citizens often perceive new arrivals as a threat to their well-being. This stokes tensions and breeds populist movements that can destabilize countries and indeed entire regions.

● (0850)

In Lebanon, a country that itself had to rebuild after the war, one in six people is a refugee. There, IDRC supports research to develop an understanding of how to make the best use of precious limited resources in health care and other services. Poor-quality health data makes it difficult for decision-makers to accurately assess needs and provide services. For example, refugees often have distinct mental health needs.

The research we support is identifying where resources are needed most and how to use them in the most efficient, effective and equitable way. This support helps to ease the health care burden and stabilize the situation in Lebanon while improving care and services for the refugees who desperately need this.

In conclusion, IDRC thinks about research as a long-term investment that builds evidence and promotes informed decisions. It also identifies opportunities to create societies that are supportive of equality, equity, diversity and prosperity. IDRC believes that this can be achieved, as I hope I have illustrated, by providing reliable sources of information to contribute to democratic processes, to encourage women's voices in government and to address the factors that could destabilize already vulnerable states.

As I hope our testimony illustrates, multisectoral research can help to promote democratic development. Our approach focuses on supporting the building blocks for democracy by equipping local researchers and policy-makers with research data and tools to generate the evidence that can help build prosperous and democratic societies. We think that research, with the right care, can help to usher in a new era of hope and change.

● (0855)

[*Translation*]

In closing, I'd like to sincerely thank the committee for having invited the IDRC to testify on this key study.

I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have on our work and to provide further information to your offices.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Welcome now to Thomas Axworthy, public policy chair at Massey College, University of Toronto.

Professor Axworthy, if you would like to give us your 10 minutes of testimony, we'll then immediately open this up to questions from MPs.

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy (Public Policy Chair, Massey College, University of Toronto, As an Individual): That's good. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for inviting me.

I have written a paper that I'd be happy to distribute to the clerk once it's properly formatted. I'll speak to that paper extemporaneously and it will be a more substantial offering that you're free to peruse in your own time.

I'm delighted that the Foreign Affairs committee is picking up the standard of the 2007 Foreign Affairs committee and its landmark report. I want to comment on some of the recommendations of that 2007 report, why I think they are still valid and to make some comments on what has changed in the decade since that report and urge this committee to return to the central findings of your predecessors for Canada at this critical time in the world to make a very clear statement not only about its values but also by creating agencies and institutions to give them effect.

The first point and the absolute centrality of the 2007 report is that democratic development is a crucial part of overall development. It is hard to reduce poverty. It is hard to increase life chances if governments are authoritarian, corrupt, and are working to create division as opposed to creating opportunity. Beginning in the early 1990s, the World Bank made that fairly obvious point, but it was a breakthrough at that time to state that governance had to be considered part of the overall development approach.

The committee in 2007 argued for the centrality of democratic development and that it should become a major priority and motivating force in Canadian foreign policy. It had always been part of Canadian foreign policy—I'll speak in a moment about Mr. Pearson—but it had never been central. It had been part of the overall approach, with more than lip service, but never was a motivating or guiding force for either resources or the activities of the men and women who made up Global Affairs and our foreign policy infrastructure. Your predecessor committee said that it should be. They did so for two reasons, both of which I think continue to apply today.

First was the critical issue of morality, that freedom, liberty and equality of opportunity are central to Canada's identity and our traditions. But it is not enough for democrats here to enjoy their liberty. It is equally important to try to do our best to ensure that others in the world are in a position to do so. This important finding is that it's not enough to talk about our values; one has to act on them and put the power of government and civil society behind them.

Second, in 2007, the committee argued that not only was democratization a moral issue, but that it also had definite security implications. We know there are very few laws or semi-laws in international relations. One of them is that democracies very rarely, if ever, fight against each other, that if one brings citizens into the decision-making, the appetite for adventurism, certainly against another democracy, is very much diminished. There are also security dimensions to improving democracy and human rights around the world.

We know through international relations that the best policy by far is to prevent crises from occurring rather than dealing with their aftermath. That's what human rights and democratic development do, if they succeed. By creating a culture of liberty and pluralism, the system itself allows dissent. Dissent, therefore, does not have to inch over into civil war and violence. Therefore, as well as a moral argument, there is a security argument why democratization should be at the centrepiece of our foreign policy. That was the argument in 2007.

● (0900)

Does it apply today? When the committee made its report more than a decade ago—if we look at the various waves of democracy—it really made its report at one of the high points. There was definite progress on governance and democracy on virtually every index that measures international relations. It was the high noon of the democracy movement.

What has happened since? Ladies and gentlemen, it's all straight down. For 13 consecutive years, according to Freedom House, on all of its indices of democracy and freedom, there have been declines. Its 2019 report came out a couple of days ago. In 2018 it reported that about 39% of the world's population was free, 37% was in authoritarian repressive societies, and another 37% was partly free.

We have nearly 40% of the world living under authoritarianism. By the various indices we see, for example, in the last year that Turkey declined by 35%; Venezuela by 27%; the Central African Republic by 30%, and the list goes on and on. The point I'm trying to make to you is that if democratization was a useful and important initiative in 2007, it is desperately needed now. Never has the need been greater. We've had more than a decade of tremendous difficulties in that area.

In terms of the security dimension, I hardly need to tell you that this week in Ottawa we had the meeting of nations on Venezuela. That is just the latest in the crises to show what happens when authoritarianism grows and takes hold of a society with conflict arising. Three million Venezuelans have fled—almost 10% of the country. A million of them are now in Colombia, another country that has tried hard to move democracy along and is having tremendous difficulties in coping with the refugee crisis. In Syria, we know that there have been six million refugees and hundreds of thousands of lives lost. It is a destabilizing conflict not only in the Middle East but is having an impact across Europe. Both those dimensions are more important today than they have ever been.

What has caused this tremendous decline in the last decade? I'll address that and then wrap up on what Canada can do about it by endorsing some of those central recommendations in the 2007 report.

What has happened? One of the first and critical elements is the new self-confidence of authoritarian states. Russia is now a great disrupter. Helping that disruption is another aspect that is different from the situation 2007, namely, the efficiency of the tools of cybersecurity and cyberwarfare. It costs virtually nothing to have a series of analysts get together to destabilize a country, to create emotion, to use Facebook. These tools are very supple and are being used by people who do not share our value system.

China has a belt and road initiative, the largest economic development plan since the Marshall Plan—maybe a trillion dollars. It has many good aspects. It's certainly fair to say that human rights and democracy are not among the many goals of the belt and road initiative. As China increases its sway in the world, the authoritarian camp is ever more strengthened.

● (0905)

Second, there has been an ebb tide in democratic support. When we look at those who led the democratic effort for many years—but also in the mid-2000s when the report was made—we see now that Europe is convulsed with the impacts of the debates over refugees and immigration, in part resulting from the Syrian crisis.

Populist nationalism is making many countries turn inward. The outward-looking goal of improving others has declined as nations are fighting to maintain their democratic standards at home.

Then, of course, we have the example of the United States, which created the National Endowment for Democracy in the early eighties, but now has a president who gives, if not support, at least acknowledgement, to authoritarians around the world while he attacks many of the institutions of democracy, such as a free press and a free media.

Thomas Carothers, the great democratic theorist, says that with the United States now, there is an “autocratic relief syndrome” for dictators, given the oral abuse by the president. But suffice it to say that those who used to support democracy have declined. We have a bigger problem and we have less support. It's very different from 2007.

Lastly, Chair—and not to take up too much time—what can Canada do? We've already started to do some things. We have a long tradition. In 1949, when NATO was created, one of the great initiatives of Canadian foreign policy, with Mr. Pearson and a variety of others.... We should never forget that it was Mr. Pearson who put in article 2, which committed the NATO nations to strengthen their freedom-loving institutions. So, right from the start, when we began to build the post-war world in Canada, freedom and those institutions were at the heart of it.

We then moved along with the Mulroney government, which responded very favourably to the joint Senate-Commons committee by creating the Rights and Democracy agency, a very welcome initiative by that government in 1988.

What I'm trying to say here is that support for liberty and democracy and economic opportunity is a multipartisan commitment in Canada. Nobody is opposed to this. We have many examples of when we have moved. There's the Pearson initiative, there's the Mulroney initiative. In the mid-1990s, Mr. Chrétien brought out a handbook on democratic governance to be one of the themes of CIDA. Over the next 10 years, he dispensed something like $1.5 billion or so to 900 projects with democratic governance at their heart. So, we began to use some substantial moneys in CIDA.

Then, with Mr. Harper's government—

The Chair: Dr. Axworthy, if I could just—

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Yes.

The Chair: Because I want to have time to get a round of questions in, perhaps I could get you to just—

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: It's this sentence right here—

The Chair: There we go.

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Mr. Harper's government responded very favourably to the 2007 report. The Speech from the Throne called for creating the kinds of institutions that the 2007 report had recommended and, indeed, created a panel to give a specific blueprint on how it could be implemented.

All that work is done, ladies and gentlemen. I commend to you that the rationale of the 2007 report is as important as ever. There have been decades of work on this issue. The need is now. We need you to pick up that banner your predecessors unfurled.

Thank you very much.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Let's go straight into questions. We're going to go to a guest on the committee today. We have MP Kusie for the first one, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thought I would be second and the government side would go first, but that's fine by me.

Monsieur Axworthy and Monsieur de Haan, thank you both so much for being here today. It really is a pleasure for me.

Monsieur de Haan, I was actually in Kenya this summer. Their work at devolution has really been something for their democratic processes there. They are moving government closer to the people as they devolve.

Prior to being a member of Parliament, I was at Global Affairs Canada for 15 years as a foreign service officer. I had an incredible career abroad, largely based in Latin America. I served as a deputy head of mission twice. Certainly democracy was a big part of that.

Most recently, and the reason I'm here today subbing for our shadow minister for foreign affairs, Erin O'Toole—who I think has done a wonderful job of truly standing for democracy for the official opposition and Canadians—as the shadow minister for democratic institutions.

Mr. Axworthy—and, as well, Monsieur de Haan—you touched on technology, and specifically cyber-dispersement. Of course it is a great concern to me as we go towards the 2019 election that we guard our electoral processes from negative foreign influences, which we saw in previous elections. In fact, the Communications Security Establishment has indicated that they believe a significant increase will occur in 2019 from the level in 2015. Of course, we certainly saw this in both Brexit and the United States' democratic process, with their president.

As well, I am very proud to be a member of the Trilateral Commission, along with Madame Laverdière here. At our recent meeting in Silicon Valley, they did indicate that they thought 2018 was really known in the world as a time when democracy took a turn for the worse.

With that, it's very interesting, Mr. Axworthy, that you said that actions speak louder words. We are here, of course, as the official opposition Conservatives.

I want to comment, first of all, the government for bringing forward this Conservative, Harper-era initiative, when the government at the time I believe absolutely stood for democracy abroad. I think of my predecessors, Jason Kenney, whom I followed in my own riding, and John Baird, for whom my husband worked for a significant amount of time. These were people who took a strong stand for democracy both at home and abroad.

With that, we talk about action speaking louder than words. However, isn't it the actions and the words of our greatest leaders that have the greatest impact on democracy abroad?

Mr. Axworthy, you mentioned all of the falling democracies in the world right now. Who, ultimately, is responsible for Venezuela? It's Maduro, on the heels of Chavez. It's a big part of that. In Russia, it is Putin who holds the keys to democracy—or not. In Turkey, it's Erdogan.

As I mentioned, I'm very proud of the history we have as Conservatives, with leaders who truly stood for democracy. Therefore, I would like to pose the question—perhaps to you, Mr. Axworthy. Do you think that when our current Prime Minister does things like praising China's dictatorship that it perhaps has a significant negative influence when it is heard internationally? Perhaps it could even possible negate an incredible initiative such as this.

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Leaders of many words make many statements. With regard to the statement you referred to about China, I could also produce hundreds of press releases lauding a democracy, human rights and values. One of the strengths of the history that I'm describing is in fact that it hasn't been partisan. All parties agreed with these values, and the role of parliamentarians and the government is to find an effective means to bring them about.

I can mention, for example, my own work in democratic development as a volunteer for NDI and others in Ukraine and other places. There, we had former NDP, Conservative, Liberal, local councillors, men and women who fought bitterly in the partisan way when they were in Parliament or their provincial legislatures. However, when they were abroad, they worked to bring more equality for women to enter parliaments, and supported parties. There we find everything that unites us and you find the Canadian core of advisers from different parties as an internal democracy caucus within the various organizations that we work in.

I don't deny that words are as important as actions. There is an enormous consensus in this country and in the foreign policy community that this is important, and what divides us politically in Canada unites us when we go abroad.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much to both of you.

My particular questions are for Professor Axworthy. Our first conversation about this was when I was working for the first minister for democratic reform when Paul Martin was Prime Minister and the minister at the time was looking at this. I think you had a proposal called Democracy Canada.

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I did.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: This was very similar to some of the 2007 recommendations. Is it still relevant? You've answered that question very clearly that, absolutely, it is.

The next question would be on some of the specifics of what you call the blueprint for this institution. We've heard testimony that it should be something under Parliament. It should be something that is well-funded and that could really mobilize some of the expertise and NGOs that we already have.

Could you elaborate on that and on what was proposed in your 2009 advisory panel? Is that blueprint still relevant? I believe you recommended something along the lines of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy. Could you elaborate a little bit on that?

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: We just had a discussion a moment ago about the good work that Global Affairs has done for many years on this file. The argument of the 2007 report, and the 2009 panel report, is that in addition to that work and that background, a new and more flexible instrument was needed, namely, a standalone agency that would report to Parliament but would independent from the government. It's another tool that can be added to the kit bag when one is trying to promote a democracy and human rights. Ambassadors are very busy people. They have a host of activities. They have to, yes, we hope, promote democracy and human rights, but they also are promoting trade, they're also dealing with a series of consular activities. They're very busy folks. What one needs is an instrument that is working daily on the kinds of issues we've enunciated.

I would call the Venezuela issue high politics or high democratic politics. It's engaging the foreign minister and the Prime Minister. However, most of what you do in democratic development is low politics. You're building democracy brick by brick by working on judicial systems, by working in villages. Therefore, you need an instrument with men and women who can speak to opposition leaders who may not be in favour with the government, who can talk with civil society.

There are things that an independent instrument can do that ambassadors cannot. As I'm sure your committee has heard—I know that NDI and the International Republican Institute spoke to you—we have tremendous capacity in Canada. Canadians everywhere are advising on a charter of rights, on the court system, on federalism, on party development. The whole world is employing Canadians on this except Canada. We haven't brought them together in a dedicated instrument to work. It's something that we have lost by not having such a flexible instrument. So that's important.

How does one then do that? Yes, it should report to Parliament. It should have a board, a relatively small board, but be advised by a much larger advisory group. I would call that a democracy council, where you would bring in practitioners. The board should not just include Canadians, but others who are the recipients of the program, from the countries we are trying to help. The members of the board should be the result of multi-party consultations. Everybody should be consulted about who should make up the board.

In our panel report we actually did alternative budgets at differing levels to show what could be achieved with a $30-million annual appropriation, and a $50-million and a $70-million one. If we look at NDI and some of the European foundations, they are at about $100 million to $125 million. They are substantial when they're in the $100-million range. We recommended that we start at $30 million, build to $50 million and get to $70 million over a multi-year period.

We have models on how this can work. One of its cores should be working locally. You can't make democracy work by having consultants come in and out. You really need people on the ground. For that to happen, we recommended that there be field offices in countries of particular importance that would do the daily work that ambassadors can't do. However, field offices cost between $3 million and $5 million to keep them going. So depending on the number of field offices you have, as well as the program side and donations to other organizations, that mix determines how large your budget is.

We actually did the blueprints for budgets for three different kinds of funding, with specific suggestions on the structure of the board, the membership of the democracy council and the programs the centre should undertake on evaluation, research and so on.

● (0920)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

You mentioned there are Canadians all over the world doing this work except for Canada. Especially in today's world, where we see a bit of a retreat from this area by the Americans, who have always led this effort, what is Canada's unique position in this? What is our niche? Is this something that Canada could really make central to our identity in the world and our foreign policy?

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Right.

The Chair: Dr. Axworthy, we're out of time on this question, but maybe there will be an opportunity to address that later.

With that, I'm going to move to MP Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both of you for your presentation this morning.

Mr. Axworthy, you described the situation in a way that reminds me of an expression I like to use:

[*English*]

democratic development is not only the right thing, but it's the wise thing to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Yes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: However, I am not entirely in agreement as to the non-partisan aspect of the commitment to democracy of the type of institution you describe. You spoke about the organization Rights and Democracy, which had non-partisan roots but was shut down and eliminated by the Harper government. We have to remember that and learn from the lessons of the past.

I'd like to get back to the matter of China.

Indeed, in the case of China, there is more involved than the new silk roads. We were also talking about Venezuela. We know that the Chinese have a very strong presence there. The basic tool China uses is, of course, money. The Chinese arrive and invest everywhere.

In the meantime, in Canada, we make these nice speeches on the promotion of democracy and all of that, but we are somewhat like the class dunces when it comes to development and investment in international development, including democratic development.

Do you think it would be a good idea to set a deadline with regard to reaching the 0.7% objective we committed to?

[*English*]

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: That's your centre.

Mr. Arjan de Haan: Ah....

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Should we get to that 0.7%? Say "yes".

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Arjan de Haan: Madame Laverdière, I did not think the question was directed at me; hence, my slight surprise.

Of course, as a Crown corporation, we do not express views on Canada's government policy, including the 0.7% commitment. The work of the IDRC is, of course, as the guardian of the commitments that the Canadian taxpayers have made in the best possible way.

● (0925)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Okay, but let's assume that if you had more money, you could do more.

It's presumably a fair statement.

Mr. Arjan de Haan: We manage the budget appropriations from the Canadian Parliament, and it is our pride to do that in the best possible way.

When I listen to Mr. Axworthy, I see many reasons to do more. With regard to the ideas put by Mr. Axworthy, I see complementarity with the IDRC, because we would be working, and we have the network to work, with local partners to promote those, which I think you called the "low politics".

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I didn't want to put you in the hot seat, but I understand from Professor Axworthy's comments that he agrees that this schedule to get to the 0.7% would be a good idea.

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Yes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I'll come back to another issue. I don't do this very often, but I'll tell a personal story.

I remember being in Dakar, Senegal, when there was a democratic election that saw the transition from Abdou Diouf to Mr. Wade. The next morning, people would call me and say, “Oh, Hélène, thank you to Canada for the democratic transition.” I started asking them, these very high-level people, “Why are you thanking us?” It was because we had a journalist training school in Dakar and people felt that it was the work done on the ground by all those journalists who had been trained by Canada that had really made a difference.

In Dakar, at least, that program closed, unfortunately. If we look at the tool kit, because that was one part of the tool kit, what do you see as the main gaps currently in democratic promotion in general?

Mr. Arjan de Haan: Sorry. We weren't sure whether the question was directed to both of us.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: It was to both of you.

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: There are so many aspects that one can work on in democracy, and different societies need different emphases. There's not a one size fits all. I will say that among the many areas where the least useful work has been done is party management and party organizations.

Parties are the essence of democracy everywhere. They're sometimes unpopular with the broader public, but to have well-functioning democracies, you need fairly run parties. We have a strong tradition in human rights. We have a very strong tradition in local government. We have a strong tradition, through IDRC, in the broader theories of how to work on development. When I look at the broad range of things that need work, I see that the least work has been done on party systems.

I'll bootleg part of a response to the earlier question, which is that, as Canadians, we should be enormously proud of our general activities around democracy. We were one of the first to have an independent boundary commission so that there would be no gerrymandering. We have Elections Canada, an absolutely excellent organization. In almost all indices of how a democracy should be operated by institutions, Canada is very near at the top, because we run fair systems. We've done it for a long time.

One area that we are good at, but very few work on, is the management of parties, in particular how one encourages gender equity in parties.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move to MP Wrzesnewskyj, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, gentlemen.

I'd like to put my first question to Mr. de Haan and zero in on some of the nuts and bolts of how we do things.

The Sentinel Project is tremendously encouraging. It addresses what I assume in most cases are these organic inter-ethnic rumours that lead to, as you said, suspicions, which then lead to potential conflict and violence. The success of this type of project is encouraging.

What happens when a government methodically, meticulously begins the process of inter-ethnic conflict, as opposed to that happening organically?

I'd like to turn to the work we were trying to do in Myanmar. We had huge hopes. It was almost euphoria. We were granting citizenship to individuals, and a few years down the line we had a genocide. Clearly, we got it wrong. We hadn't identified the processes that were already being put in place.

Do you have any idea about a different style of project? And I'd like to turn to a different part of the world. We've had a parliamentary internship project for some 25 years with young Ukrainian students or postgraduates. It's not a government project; it's actually a diaspora project. There are I think over 1,000 of these individuals who are now at all levels of government: municipally, oblast-level, provincially, federally. We've had ministers, mayors, and the experience they had here was invaluable.

Do you not think that perhaps your body, or another body, should be set up that focuses in on these emerging democracies, countries in transition, to do...?

It doesn't happen overnight. We thought it would start in Myanmar. It's a long process. To disrupt democracy is very easy. Putin is finding it incredibly easy.

Should we not be looking at those types of projects? Then, when it comes to the parties, should we not have parliamentary internships for these countries, where parliamentarians would come and spend time in our offices, just as these young leaders did who then turned out to be national leaders in their countries?

I thought I'd put that question to you.

● (0930)

Mr. Arjan de Haan: Of course, the genocide in Myanmar makes one shiver and wonder if we got it right. Thank you very much for that question.

For both the IDRC, both in The Sentinel Project working in Myanmar and the examples of training journalists that could be there, as Madam Laverdière was talking about, are all options that we want to support and we do support. The Sentinel Project is an example, as I mentioned. We work with a Canadian organization that is committed to digitalizing the technology, and IDRC then focuses on working with local partners who can address those issues, because, of course, you're not going to do that from Canada. So we work with local organizations to carry forward those democratic principles that we have here in Canada and see how we can support local activists to carry forward the same.

The program in Myanmar was started before the genocide at the time that we.... It was in 2007 when there was the hope of growing democracy. Of course, there was an enormous backslide, and we are constantly thinking about how we can best respond to that in that context. The response to that is, and we often.... I think that the Honourable Bob Rae, when he spoke to a meeting on this at IDRC on Myanmar, compared the work that Canada did in the transition from apartheid where, after the transition from apartheid, we found that half of the members of Nelson Mandela's first parliament were people who had been involved in Canadian projects.

These were all projects that didn't say this is what kind of democracy you set. These were all projects that created the building blocks of democracy, the processes for supporting it.

● (0935)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

Just because of the limitation on time, I'll interrupt.

Mr. Arjan de Haan: I'm sorry for that.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Do you think these types of projects, including parliamentary internship projects, would be worthwhile? Just give a quick yes or no.

Mr. Arjan de Haan: Yes.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: From the nuts and bolts to the big picture, you talked about it being a slide straight down over the past 14 or 15 years in terms of democracy globally. Two days ago, we had the president of IRI, Dr. Twining, before the committee. Afterwards a group of us had an opportunity to chat with him. A question was posed to him: If there were one country that we had to work in, if you had to make one choice—I know it's a tough one—where would you choose? He said it was a tough choice, but if he had one country to choose, it would be Ukraine. Then he made the case for that.

Obviously, I—

The Chair: MP Wrzesnewskyj, your time is up. I think you're posing a question to Professor Axworthy.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Correct.

The Chair: Professor Axworthy, would you like to answer that question of which country, and then we'll move on?

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I've worked in Ukraine, so I would agree.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

MP Saini, please.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you for coming today. I just want to correct the record. The Rights and Democracy organization was cut by the former Harper government. The then foreign minister, John Baird, cut that organization, because he said he wanted to find efficiencies. For a $1.9 million organization in a $300 billion budget in a $1.7 trillion economy, I don't know where the efficiencies are. But being non-partisan, I'd like to ask you a more important question.

When we talk about demographic governance, there are certain elements from the the past that still exist, where there's fluidity of borders and ethnic tension and tribal warfare. Those elements have always been there, but there are new elements emerging. I'm talking about the Visegrad nations specifically, where you have political entities that are weakening institutions even in the guise of being democratic.

You also mentioned the rise of social media, which we never saw before. More importantly, and this is a question nobody has effectively answered yet, the biggest thing—and you talked about internally displaced people—has to do with climate.

There are certain structural problems we can fix. We can go in and can make countries more peaceful. We can put in institutions. We can create the economic opportunities that populations require and put in a monetary system, a fiscal system, a system of taxation that any country requires, but there's one question that we have not answered. In those countries where the population is being internally displaced because of climate change, how do we impact democratic governance?

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: Climate change is one of the contributing factors to disruption and stress and one that every society will face, specifically what one will do when desertification of the land, floods, and extreme weather occur. Every country will face that.

We've talked about China. China is threatened by climate change, almost more than anybody else, because as the sea level rises, it will affect their cities that are all along the coast.

However, I'll make this argument. Where environmental or planetary concerns put burdens on peoples across the board, how do you respond? Is the sacrifice equally shared? Is it equally communicated? Are individuals or minorities blamed for the problem, when it is caused by the collectivity putting too much CO2 into the atmosphere?

One of the tremendous advantages of democratic systems, in dealing with stressful crises, is that the element of representation allows one to talk freely about how a burden is shared. My argument is that pluralism and democratic systems can sometimes soak up resentments that can be expressed and, therefore, if we had a world where there was more democratic governance, it would be a world that would be better able to respond to and share the sacrifice that is necessary as a result of the degradation of the atmosphere caused by humanity.

● (0940)

Mr. Raj Saini: Mr. Axworthy, the reason I ask that question is that we are talking about countries where there is no system of democratic governance. However, the key geopolitical point is the fact that we now have established democracies that are being weakened by the internal displacement of people. We can look at Brexit. We can look at the rise of populism in Italy and the rise of the far-right in France. I'm sure you've observed the latest Swedish elections, where the Swedish democrats.... Also, in Germany.... Not only do we have issues with those countries that have weakened systems, but also those established countries are now feeling the attack.

What's the process going forward? If you were to advise us as a committee, where do we put our resources to be more efficient in making sure that not only do we stem the tide of what's happening there, but also that the established democracies do not rise up in a negative way?

Mr. Thomas S. Axworthy: I have two quick points, Chair.

The first—and you've put your finger on one of the largest issues in international politics—is that we know that prevention is better than emergencies, but to get the world to actually work on preventive diplomacy and preventive measures is one of the most difficult things, because, alas, our systems seem to respond to crises. They don't really work in a forward manner.

The problems in Syria were advertised long before the Syrian civil war. In almost every area, there are people, like international crisis organizations and so on, who are forecasting problems, but to get states to move on that—we have a former representative from Global Affairs—and to get states to look at the prevention agenda, which is an investment agenda when there's not a crisis and to persuade the public that's important to do, that's a real difficulty in democracies.

On your second point, you're absolutely correct. We are seeing an ebb tide in established democracies that work on these issues because they're bedevilled by internal divisions around immigration, migration and refugees at home. That's all the more reason, Chair and members of the committee, for Canada, at this point in time, to take the lead. We have to offer some encouragement and optimism to the democratic community around the world.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On that note, we shall conclude the first of two panels today.

Gentlemen, I just want to thank you both for your very thought-provoking comments and with that, we shall suspend for two minutes while we get our new panellists in place.

We are suspended.

● (0940)

(Pause)

● (0945)

The Chair: Members, we will resume.

Before we begin our second panel, and with the agreement of all parties around the table, I will say this. We learned yesterday with great sorrow that Paul Dewar, a man who had graced this particular committee, had died after a battle with brain cancer. It was a loss for Canada and for the cause of human rights around the world. In his honour, I want to take a moment to ask MP Hélène Laverdière, a colleague of Paul's—indeed he was her predecessor as the critic for the NDP—to please reflect on Paul.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak about a colleague who was well liked across party lines; he had friends in all parties. Our colleague played an absolutely enormous role on this committee.

I remember, among other things, that he was the one who insisted that our committee conduct a study on child labour abroad. Today, we are talking about democracy and human rights. He was always the first to stand up to promote democracy and human rights, and to work on issues such as blood diamonds.

He took the message of federalism to the four corners of the earth. He was a very strong member in this committee and in Parliament, but also on the ground. He had an easy rapport with people. He had exceptional courage. At the end of his life, he showed that courage again by creating a new foundation to encourage the involvement of young people. This is a lesson we all need to learn.

We will miss Paul enormously, as will everyone who knew him. I want to take this opportunity to extend my condolences to his wife Julia, his two sons, and to everyone. His spirit will live on.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I know you speak for all members of this committee in sending our condolences, thoughts and prayers to his family.

With that, I would like to ask us to rise for a moment of silence in Paul's honour, please.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

Thank you.

● (0950)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Chair, if I may, could I just say a quick couple of words about the passing of Mr. Dewar?

The Chair: I think it's important now.... I asked MP Laverdière because she was a colleague of his. We do have witnesses waiting, so if you don't mind, we can move on with the committee business.

We shall now begin our second panel with Kevin Deveaux, president of Deveaux International Governance Consultants Inc., as well as Pearl Eliadis, human rights lawyer from Eliadis Law Office, who's joining us from Montreal. Mr. Deveaux is joining us from Bangkok, Thailand.

With that I would ask you to provide your testimony, please, starting with you, Mr. Deveaux. We know that sometimes these international video links fail us midway through.

Please proceed.

Mr. Kevin Deveaux (President, Deveaux International Governance Consultants Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and honourable members.

Let me start by quickly setting the table as to my background, so you have an understanding of where I'm coming from through my presentation.

I am a lawyer based in Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia. I was an MLA in Nova Scotia for four terms—nine years. For four of those I was the House leader of the official opposition. Twelve years ago, I left that work and started working full time in the area of international parliamentary development and political party assistance.

In that time, I've had a chance to work mostly with the United Nations Development Programme. In recent years I've also worked with the American government, the British government, the European Union and the Swiss government. I've worked with more than 50 parliaments around world and with MPs from more than a hundred countries.

Having said that, let me take a few minutes just to talk about the last report in 2007, which I'm sure you've all had a chance to see. I had the opportunity back then [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] my political career to make a presentation before your previous colleagues on the same committee.

Having read the report in July 2007, I can say that I agreed with almost all the recommendations. In particular, the two that I want to focus on today are recommendations 12 and 15.

Recommendation 12 recommended the Canadian democracy foundation as an overall organization that would provide democracy assistance. Recommendation 15 recommended the establishment of a centre for multi-party democracy.

Let me talk now about some of the key points I'd like to raise. Please understand that my focus is based on my experience working for international organizations in the area of democratic governance. I've done almost no work for a Canadian organization, but given the number of countries I have worked in and the amount of work I've done, I would have expected to see more of a Canadian footprint globally.

As I said in 2007.... I think if you have my written report in front of you, I do have the specific quote that is in the report from that year. Generally speaking, I just want to say that from my experience over the last 15 to 20 years of doing this work in one form or another, I rarely, if ever, see Canadian organizations or Canadian-funded projects through other international organizations in the area that I work.

I said it in 2007 and I still think it's the case. Canada is not a serious player in the areas of democratic governance, particularly around political governance, which is what I focus on.

There might be one exception and that would probably be Ukraine. It's a place where we have probably invested a significant amount of resources—primarily through American organizations, I understand—but overall, the activity in this area is....“limited” would be a nice way of putting it.

The second point I want to make is that since 2007, there is less leadership being presented at a global level—thinking of new ideas and creating innovative approaches. For awhile, in New York, when I was the UNDP's global adviser on parliaments and political parties, there was a process by which UNDP, the World Bank, and DFID from the United Kingdom came together with other implementers and were providing thought leadership on a biannual basis. We were presenting new approaches and new ideas and sharing information. In the last five or six years that's no longer happening. UNDP and the World Bank no longer have global footprints, or even global advisors. The resources have really almost contracted to some extent.

I think there is an opportunity for Canada in both political party assistance and parliamentary development. I think there's a real opportunity for someone to step forward and show leadership. The United Kingdom is trying to do that to some extent. If you haven't seen it, back in 2015 the International Development Committee of the House of Commons in the U.K. came out with its own report on parliamentary strengthening. That report really promoted the idea that the United Kingdom needed to have its own version of the American foundations, like NDI and IRI.

● (0955)

Since that time, they've put a lot of money into the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. If you haven't had a chance to engage them as a committee during this study, I would encourage you to do that. At the moment, though, I would say that they are in the process of expanding their physical presence, though I haven't necessarily seen the impact on the ground of those engagements. There is a space there. There is a vacuum. There is a void. I think there is an opportunity, if Canada were to step forward in the coming years, to be able to provide that leadership at a global level. From a Canadian perspective, I think that it is unique. I see in many of the countries where I work that the fact I'm from Canada does mean I provide a different perspective from what people are hearing from other countries, whether that's the U.S., Canada, Australia, France or the European Union.

My final point is this: Whereas in the last recommendation they talked about a separate political party centre, a multi-party democracy and a separate democracy foundation, I think all of the work needs to be combined into one institution. This would allow—and I speak from my experience in formulating projects and implementing projects—for a Canadian institution, a large institution that would be able to work sectorally with Parliament, political parties, media, civil society, elections and local government. All of that can be done at a sectoral level but it also creates opportunities for cross-sectoral work. I think that would be critical to any success.

Again, as I said in 2007 and as I still think is the case, Canada should identify a core group of countries; this time I would say 15 to 20. We should invest deeply in them and become the leading donor in the area of democratic governance in those countries. Then I think we also need to ensure that invest in them for the long term. I think it is important to reflect that engaging in democratic governance—supporting transitions when people and governments are ready to transition to democracy—is something that takes a long time. It's not going to happen overnight. We need to be prepared to invest heavily in select countries and to do it over the long term, in order to ensure that we can have the results and impact that we want from that investment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Eliadis, we'll move straight to you.

Ms. Pearl Eliadis (Human Rights Lawyer, Eliadis Law Office, As an Individual):

Mr. Chairman, honourable members, thank you very much for the opportunity to address this important topic, Canada's role in international support for democratic development.

I'm going to be focusing particularly on the establishment of a new arm's-length Canada foundation, or an institution like that. I also want to echo the comments we just heard. I think one institutional focus for this work rather than a multiplicity of splintered mandates is the way to go.

I also want to start by perhaps giving you a sense of where I'm coming from and my perspective in this work. I am a lawyer, as you heard, but I have an unusual practice. I don't represent individual clients anymore. I work mainly at an institutional level with the UNDP, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. I've also worked with the European delegations of the European Union in a number of countries. I've worked in four sub-Saharan African countries, including Rwanda after the genocide, in setting up two of the three institutional pillars that marked the unity government's mandate in the post-genocide period, as well as in Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, and central Asia, Southeast Asia and China.

My remarks are going to be divided into two main categories. The first is a high-level overview of areas where, in my view, Canada can provide significant added value in the area of democratic development. I also want to talk a little bit about lessons learned for setting up an arm's-length institution like a Canada foundation, if I can use the term that was in the high-level briefing document.

I would like to begin by emphasizing the central importance of human rights in any discourse involving democratic development. I know there was language to that effect in the 2007 report. Interestingly, it was absent in the high-level document that was circulated.

Most people take the position that human rights are buried in, subsumed in or implicit in democratic development. That is not a view necessarily widely shared everywhere. I do think that Canada has a unique perspective, both in terms of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the international instruments and international law principles that Canada seeks to abide by and to contribute to as part of its international commitment and legacy.

The first point I want to make, obvious as it may seem, is that any institutional initiative like this be clearly and explicitly grounded in human rights as well as in democratic development. It should not only be attentive to human rights, but actually have explicit and focused attention on human rights as the central raison d'être of any institutional strategy promoting democratic development. In my view, the two must go hand in hand, and it should not be assumed or implied that democratic development necessarily brings with it an appropriate focus on human rights. I would point out that now more than ever, perhaps, this is extremely important. We're seeing a number of so-called democracies starting to witness the erosion of the rule of law. Freedom House, as some of you may know, just came out with its report stating that we're witnessing a retreat of democracy and democratic values at a global level.

I think we should all be alarmed by that, but at the same time see the opportunity for Canada to renew and indeed establish its commitment.

The idea of what democracy means changes depending on where you are. I know that might sound alarming to some, but the reality is that there are lots of different views about what democracy is. There is no single, established international instrument that determines what democracy is, beyond free and fair elections, of course. On the other hand, there are international standards around what human rights means, and I think the two must go hand in hand.

This brings me to another area where I believe Canada adds value, which is in building stable, transparent institutions.

I was involved, as I mentioned earlier, in the Rwandan government. I helped to set up and strengthen the human rights commission in that country in the post-genocide period, as well as the unity and reconciliation commission, which was modelled to some extent on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Canadians, including myself, were central in those initiatives. It was the same with the Ethiopian ombudsman organization of the Ethiopian commission; the Sudanese commission, which, as you might imagine, is struggling; and a number of other institutions worldwide.

● (1000)

I would echo the remarks that we just heard. Of all the countries I've worked in, Canada was certainly not the go-to country—though I think “irrelevant“ is too strong a word—in any of the rule of law projects I was involved with. Nobody ever said, let's go see Canada, in any of the institution-building projects I was involved with. They said, let's go see Sweden, let's go see the Netherlands. I mention Sweden and the Netherlands because it's easy to brush aside the critique I just made by saying, of course, the United States is bigger, of course, the European Union is bigger. But when you start to deal with countries that have institutions such as Sweden's SIDA, or the RNE—the Royal Netherlands Embassy— and others, it's quite clear that Canada has been dwarfed.

I would also agree with the earlier statement that there are specific countries where what I said that is not true. These are countries, such as Ukraine, and, I would add, Afghanistan, historically at least, and currently Haiti. However, other than with them, Canada continues to punch well below its planned weight.

If I may bring a particular example to the fore, Cameroon is an area where, it seems to me, Canada could have significant value to add. We are not a colonial power. Both the International Crisis Group and Freedom House have identified Cameroon as one of the top 10 areas of risk and concern and international conflict. Canada is nowhere in that regard. Global Affairs continues to take the position that this is a conflict in which bad things happen, not recognizing the serious problems that have been raised. It is important to recognize that this is an area where Canada could, because of its tradition of bilingualism and bijuralism, offer something to a country like Cameroon that very few other countries can. Those are areas where we could add value beyond simply adding to a pot of money at a geopolitical level—although, of course, that should not be discounted.

I also want to talk briefly about the fact that institution-building is important from the top down, but also that it's important to work from the ground up. You need to have both. Canada has unique expertise and something to offer in response to an idea that has been circulating in the international development community, namely, enabling civil society and working in a human rights-based framework to ensure that civil society organizations are supported and enabled. Of course, when I say “civil society”, I mean civil society organizations that are grounded in a human rights framework —so I don't include the Ku Klux Klan, for example, as a civil society organization.

This is a non-partisan exercise. This is the reason why I think a Canadian foundation would be well-placed to do this kind of work.

I think I have a couple of minutes left. I just want to make a couple of remarks about what this entity, institution or foundation, might look like.

It's important for us to learn from our mistakes. The Rights and Democracy debacle and controversy may have happened under the previous government, but the seeds of it were sown, I think, by the government that created it in not allowing it to be meaningfully at arm's length. That means you need to have real independence. You need to make sure that the political exigencies of the day are not such that organizations can be either corrupted or presided over by persons whose background does not suggest their presence in an organization like that. In order to ensure that political and partisan concerns are met, the organization would probably need to be fully endowed from the get-go, as opposed to receiving ongoing streams of funding. The IRPP in Montreal, for example, was fully endowed and has been able to continue to exist on that basis. There is precedent for this.

In closing, I would urge you to ensure that whatever institution you set up is meaningfully at arm's length—financially at arm's length—and that its governance structures are at arm's length from whatever political party happens to be in place at a given time.

● (1005)

Perhaps I'll close with a similar remark to my predecessor. Despite our self-description as champions at the international level, Canada has not been batting even close to average. We have a real opportunity here to change that, and I congratulate the committee for taking this initiative.

The Chair: Thank you very much to you both for your testimony.

We shall now move straight into our questions, beginning with MP Kusie, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm very fortunate to have been at Global Affairs Canada for 15 years, and I now serve as the shadow minister for democratic institutions.

Mr. Deveaux, you talked a lot about a lack of leadership that we've seen since 2007. Certainly while the work on the ground is absolutely important, leadership always starts from the top. We talked a little in the previous panel about relationships and approaches to relationships.

It's very interesting. I even think of the comparison of something such as our leaders' trips to India, where the relationships and the perception of those trips between the Prime Minister and my leader, Andrew Scheer, came across very differently, both abroad and within India, and certainly within Canada.

That moves me to Cuba. I had the good fortune of serving as policy adviser to Mr. Kent when he was minister of state of foreign affairs for the Americas. It was very interesting. At that time, the Conservative policy regarding Cuba was that we only engage with dissidents.

Similar to the spirit that my colleague, member Vandenbeld, has taken with this great initiative, I really was looking at the broader perspective, because I recognized that if Canada weren't there, certainly who would be? Well, it would be Russia filling the void; it would be China filling the void. Even though Brazil had just recently won the World Cup and the Olympics, I could see that it was not nearly as strong a developed democracy as it was getting credit for at the time. Of course, this was 2009.

That said, when our Prime Minister, for example, laments the death of a dictator and his close relationships with that family, does that affect the work you do on the ground?

Mr. Deveaux.

● (1010)

Mr. Kevin Deveaux: The short answer is that my work is done for other organizations, multilateral organizations, mostly the UNDP, UN Women, and World Bank, so I'm able to distance myself from any of the political machinations happening in Ottawa.

To me, what you're hitting on, though, is something like Cuba. I haven't had the chance to work there, but I've worked in Turkmenistan and in Uzbekistan, two countries that are also fairly closed off, it's fair to say, and unreformed in some ways, particularly Turkmenistan. The best way that Canada can show leadership there is not always to be the one in the front, because there are always going to be challenges and perceptions of any country, coming forward, whether it be Russia, U.S., Canada, or Brazil. However, there are ways that you can do that through multilateral organizations.

Again, if Canada were consistently engaged in the UN at the agency level, and not necessarily worrying about whether it will get a seat on the Security Council, which I don't think has much bearing and much impact, but if we actually invested in agencies such as UNDP and UN Women and through them, where they have that neutral position, to be able to put the pen in the door, to be able to begin to open up and show and share knowledge, that eventually would build something as reforms come about and could be a way of doing it. It would allow us to build relationships indirectly through other institutions, while at the same time being able to actually begin to support the reforms we envision.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I'm certain that the committee could spend another study entirely on United Nations reform, but it's certainly a very critical and relevant organization within our world, without question.

Moving forward from my previous question, it has been said in the media by certain academics and leaders that Canada has few friends left in the world since its new leadership. Unfortunately, our current leader has been referred to as things such as “little potato”, which he believed was endearing when in fact it was actually perhaps more insulting.

Mr. Deveaux, you talked about 2007 and the historical values that set the idea for this project, a very worthwhile project indeed—and again I commend my Liberal colleagues for bringing forward this Conservative Harper-era initiative. How would you compare the approaches towards democracy internationally between the previous Conservative government and the current Liberal government, and what lessons can we learn from 2007, here today, to help us in this current environment?

Mr. Kevin Deveaux: Look, my point in my presentation was the same as it was in 2007, and I believe it was a different party in power then. My point is that Canada is non-existent to a great extent in the area in which I work—political governance. I don't think that has changed since I started doing this work in 2001, when it was another party in power.

I don't think it's a partisan issue. I think it's a matter of...as a country. To be brutally frank about our country, we have a tendency to say, “Oh, someone else will do that. No one really wants to hear from us.” I think there is almost a lack of confidence. When I go out there and I'm talking to people, I can assure you that people want to hear the Canadian perspective. They really do. We need to be a little bolder and little more confident, particularly now more than ever, given some of the other countries that have been doing this work.

● (1015)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move to MP Vandenbeld, please.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much. I'll be directing my questions to Mr. Deveaux.

Kevin, it's good to see you again. I recall the years that we spent working with the global programme for parliamentary strengthening with the UNDP and, actually, your words about that and the fact that there is a void right now internationally in this area.

I know that at that time, GPPS was really building the best practices in a field that had not previously really had norms and practices. Right now, Canada is uniquely positioned, I think, to be able to do this kind of work. You referred to it as an opportunity for thought leadership.

I would just like to put to you that while Canadian organizations or Canadian funding may not be as present as before, Canadians are. I think that we see that around this table, and we see that in the experiences that you, I and others have had. Most of the work that I did prior to being elected was for multilateral organizations, American organizations. Only once did I work for the Parliamentary centre. Most of the work of Canadians, however, is outside of Canadian organizations. In fact, in one case, I was hired by NDI, an American organization, using Canadian funds. They hired a Canadian to go in and do the project.

Could you maybe talk a little bit about that, because the expertise is there? We have the international credibility. As Pearl mentioned, we haven't been a colonial power. We understand the two different legal systems. We understand Westminster democracy. This is why organizations like NDI and IRI are hiring Canadians, yet we are not within the sort of framework where we can actually really pursue this from the perspective of Canadian values. I'm wondering if you might be able to elaborate a little bit on that.

Mr. Kevin Deveaux: Thank you, Ms. Vandenbeld. It is good to see you again, even if it is halfway around the world.

I thank you for bringing that up because it is true, and I think I raised this in my 2007 presentation as well. Even though the Canadian organizations are not out there and Canadian funding at times is scarce—more than at times, but most of the time—there are many Canadians doing this work.

I'll give you a very personal example. Next week, I'll be in Malaysia. Malaysia's first change of government in 60 years was last year. They came to the Americans and asked if the latter could help them—NDI, IRI, and then there is another organization called DAI, which is working under USAID. As for me, I'm going there to work with the Americans because it's a Commonwealth country and their system is not one that the Americans have much expertise in, but they look to Canadians.

Elizabeth Weir, for those who may know her, is a former MLA and leader of the NDP in New Brunswick. She is doing work with NDI there. The Americans often turn to Canadians.

I always recall that NDI, in my time working for them, was probably made up of about one-third Canadian employees, so there are plenty of Canadians doing this work, absolutely. It's a matter of harnessing those resources under the Canadian flag. I really do believe that most of us would be honoured to be able to do that.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: You refer to this line of work as political governance. That's very specific to particular institutions, parliaments, political parties and members of Parliament. Why is it important to do that kind of work specifically?

Mr. Kevin Deveaux: I think this picks up on what my colleague was saying about civil society. I look at it as demand and supply side. You have, in the case of working with civil society, what's very important—building their capacity, having them advocate, having them collect and aggregate the voices of citizens and advocate towards government. On the other side, you have the supply. All of you around the table know very well what that is. You need to be engaging civil society. Committees need to be functioning. Committees need to be holding public hearings. We take them for granted in Canada, but the fact is that in many countries they don't exist.

Again, I'll use the example of Malaysia, where I'll be going next week. They've had a parliament now for more than 60 years, and yet they have almost no functioning standing committees. It's only with this change of government that they're talking about changing that. There was no place in which the public could provide input.

By building the capacity of Parliament, by building the capacity of political parties, you're creating a supply that's demanding that advocacy and demanding citizen input. When you do that, you end up having a better dialogue and you end up having political dialogue. You will be less likely to have conflict, and those voices who aren't normally heard have a better chance of being heard.

● (1020)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: One thing that you recommended we actually heard from some of the other witnesses—that is, the need to be on the ground long term, not just to fly in with a consultant and then leave again. That constant, long-term, sustained presence really requires a larger overarching kind of agency or funding mechanism to do that. I think you recommended 10 to 15 countries.

Why is it so important that you stay on the ground and present, not just project to project but actually with a long-term presence?

Mr. Kevin Deveaux: I think there are two reasons, which I think I talked a bit about in my written submission. Obviously, if you're going to invest in a country and democratic reform, it will take time. It will take more than one electoral cycle. You'll need to be building champions within Parliament, within parties, within civil society. You'll need to be building independent institutions like electoral commissions. If you're doing all of that, it can't be done in two or four years. I think we all realize how long it takes to build democracy. In the case of Canada, it's been, what, 180 years almost?

The other part is that if you have an umbrella organization at the global level, and they're doing thought leadership, research and identifying new ideas, you want to be working at the local level and the national level to be testing and piloting that. You want that link so that if you have identified potentially new and innovative ways of working and creating and developing and supporting, you have the ability to test that in certain countries. If you're only there in the short term, you won't be able to measure the impact of that.

So if you are going to have a vertical organization, from global to regional to national, I think you'll want to be able to ensure that it's in place and that you have the architecture that allows you to test and try new ideas.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we will move to MP Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank both of you for your presentations this morning.

First, I'd like to speak to Ms. Eliadis, who is in Montreal, in my area.

First, I want to emphasize that I agree entirely with you that the issue of human rights must be at the core of democratic development, development policy, foreign policy and even trade policy, although that is another issue, of course.

You said that often, people do not turn to Canada, but tend rather to go to Sweden, the Netherlands or other countries like those. Is it a matter of expertise, or is the issue Canada's funding for this type of work?

Ms. Pearl Eliadis: Thank you very much for the question.

There are two answers to that question.

First, the fact is that expertise issues are intimately linked to financial issues.

This is what I want to say. When I am around the table in Tadjikistan or East Timor, people say that they have to pass the hat to see who will subsidize a project. In the countries where I have personal experience, everyone knew that Canada did not have the funds and that often, unfortunately, it did not have expertise at the official level, if you will, to go forward.

That said, what my colleague said is entirely correct. Canadian men and women are very involved and very present internationally. We have to be able to reach these people and rally them within the framework of a global institution.

In short, it seems very important to me that the funding be there, but also that Canada be present, and have an independent voice to express its values. It's important to contribute to the global financial effort, but often we lose our voice.

I would also like to say that I support the point which was just made.

● (1025)

[*English*]

I will switch to English for this second part because my thinking on this has been in English. A key point of funding has to be around core funding. This idea of project funding that became popular in the early 2000s, which characterizes government funding and sadly has bled into funding of major Canadian foundations, has condemned civil society workers and non-governmental workers to subsistence salaries. It means that we cannot be sustainable because we're always thinking about the next project and we're always building our way of behaving and doing around the next project. I would strongly urge this committee, especially if it is thinking about a foundation, to set aside the idea of project funding and really focus on human rights, to really focus on political governance, to really focus on what it is trying to achieve as a concept and as a holistic idea rather than this really retrograde idea of project funding.

You cannot projectize human rights. You cannot projectize political governance. These are broad projects that have to be engaged in holistically and, in my view, multilaterally.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you, and I totally agree.

Mr. Deveaux, you mentioned the role Canada could play in strengthening political institutions.

When we talk about strengthening political institutions, the participation of women in parliaments is a theme that often comes up. It's a file in which Canada is far from perfect. Only 20% of the members of one of our three major parties are women, which is vastly inferior to the world representation average.

So, how do we resolve this problem? I don't think that generally speaking, there are many countries we can preach to with regard to that issue. How do we overcome that difficulty?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Deveaux: I'm going to provide a very specific example that I share very often when I am working in the field of women's political empowerment, which I know may seem odd, but in the international field if you can bring the perspective of different countries it's valued no matter your gender. I often raise the NDP example of how the party—and I know it fairly well from my experience—slows down the nomination processes, how it tries to encourage and mentor women to come forward as candidates, and how that has had some success. I think there are examples in Canada that we can share that can have some value beyond our borders. Is it the only example? No, there are plenty of examples out there of other countries. I can talk about the Rwanda process and how they have succeeded in reaching over 60%. We can talk about the Swedish model, or the Scandinavian model, but I wouldn't necessarily dismiss Canada as not having any experience in this. I think there are examples from our country that can be brought forward, and people do want to hear about those, particularly in those countries that have a first-past-the-post electoral system like ours. They don't have a proportional representation system in which women are put on the list as party candidates. They have women who are trying to win seats in single-member constituencies, and I think that Canada does have some lessons on how we've done that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Sidhu, please, you have the floor.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you both for your testimony this morning.

Mr. Chair, I have a small correction to make on making friends around the world. I think the present government has made more friends by signing the CPTPP, representing 500 million people in 11 countries, and signing the new NAFTA agreement, the USMCA, representing another 500 million people. I think the present government is doing a great job making more friends around the world.

Getting back to the real issue here, the previous witness commented that fewer than 20% of the people around the world exercise a democratic right. Mr. Deveaux, you commented that Canada is not a serious player, despite the fact the present government is promoting gender equality and empowering women around the world. We have Elections Canada, a body for fair elections. With that 20%...where do they see Canada? Where do we fit in the puzzle? Are we seen as a leader in the democratic world, or not?

I'll share my time with Mr. Sikand after this.

● (1030)

Mr. Kevin Deveaux: Canada is seen as a country with long-standing democratic principles, ones by which we have managed a diverse country, a multilingual country. You have so many challenges, of course, to address. However, I think, as my colleague said, being a country that was not a colonial power does allow us at times to have a more honest conversation with those in other countries than maybe some of the others that are leaders in this field. There is opportunity for Canada to step forward and provide a perspective that is different—and it is different. I think we just need to be, as I said earlier, a little bolder about how we go about doing that, whether in political governance, human rights or many other areas.

Thank you.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: I'll pass it on to Mr. Sikand.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): My colleague, Jati, just brought up trade and how we're really pushing for that. Pearl, I guess this question is directed to you. Earlier, we heard about value-laden statements, morality and the right things to do. We also heard about security. Could you speak to how access to resources, employment and maybe capitalism is tied to human rights and democracy?

Ms. Pearl Eliadis: Sure. Perhaps the best way of making that connection is through a tangible example. In the late 2000s, before the last civil war in Sri Lanka, I was invited by the European Union, specifically because I'm Canadian, to go into the country and do an assessment of the extent to which the Sri Lankan government was complying with civil and political rights.

It was a pretty fraught time, and the mission was actually not a straight human rights mission. It was tied to something called the GSP+, a codicil in the European Union documentation that allows the European Union to remove most-favoured-nation trading status from a country if it appears that that country is not complying with human rights. That's a direct example of how the human rights practices of a given country are being directly connected to its capacity to take advantage of trade and tariffs favourable to it, based on its human rights records.

There are well established ways of tying a country's performance in human rights to trade, recognizing, as has been said before, that this is a slow and gradual process. It's a marathon. It's not a sprint, but you need to have markers in place to make sure that you are using both carrots and sticks, if I can use that analogy, and that you can connect the way you're trading with a country to the values you actually espouse. It seems to me that this is not only an ethical way to proceed, but also a way to bring to the fore the human rights values your country claims to aspire to and to make a real and tangible connection to human rights outcomes.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Thank you for that answer.

I have very little time.

Kevin, I was recently trapped on Koh Samui during the storm and was also in Bangkok.

In Thailand, for example, their monarchy is revered but they also have a democracy. Could you please speak to how those can go hand in hand and how one system can support democracy?

● (1035)

Mr. Kevin Deveaux: I'm a little hesitant to talk about the democracy in Thailand. I'm not so sure. They're having elections on March 24, so let's hope they are successful.

I think there are always challenges. I don't think it always has to be a monarch. Some people say to me that Canada has a queen and wonder how that works. They're baffled it if they come from a republic. Obviously, we are talking about constitutional monarchies, and if we're talking about democracy that is how we need to proceed. I don't think the two are mutually exclusive. I think that in most countries in the world whether there is a queen or a king or a president, there is always a need to balance the head of state versus how the government operates.

The Chair: Thank you very much to both of our witnesses for taking the time to join us and provide your insights this morning.

With that, members, we do have some committee business.

I'm going to suspend briefly while we go in camera.

Thank you very much.

We'll suspend.

● (1035)

(Pause)

● (1040)

The Chair: I'd like to open up the floor to any members who would like to add their condolences on the passing of MP Dewar.

I also want to recognize again the heartfelt words of our colleague from the NDP, and the thoughts of all members of this committee, being passed along to the family of MP Dewar on his passing.

We'll begin with MP Wrzesnewskyj, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for this opportunity.

Many people are aware of the tremendous work that our former colleague Paul Dewar did here in Ottawa.

He also did a tremendous amount of work on some of the most difficult international files. Soon after he was elected, he joined our committee for the prevention of genocide and crimes against humanity, chaired by Senator Dallaire. He took over the chair of that committee after a couple of years and continued the tremendous work of Senator Dallaire, shining a light in some of the darkest corners of the world, a light that shone directly into the face of the darkest and most horrific of evils, genocide and crimes against humanity. I think it's important that we remember that work.

I'd also like to quickly read from Paul's final posting yesterday, in which he wrote to many of us here.

> Dear Friends,
>
> The time has come...to say goodbye.
>
> Let's nurture and grow with peace, love and unity. Let's join hands and hearts....

Paul, shine on my friend. May your example and work continue to shine on.

Thank you.

● (1045)

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Wrzesnewskyj.

I think on that note, and reflecting on the inspirational legacy left to us by MP Dewar, we shall adjourn this meeting.

Thank you.