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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

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• (1715)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.)): Marc.

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): This is a motion I presented a couple of days ago, and I'll read it:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee report the following immediately to the House:

- a) that the House recognize that there is strong evidence that the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has committed and is committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide against religious, ethnic, and other groups in Iraq and Syria, including Yazidis, Shia and Sunni Muslims, Christians, and members of the LGBTQ2 community;
- b) that the Government of Canada continue its efforts to have these atrocities properly investigated and, where appropriate, referred to the International Criminal Court to formally determine the existence of genocide and to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice; and
- c) that the Government of Canada and the international community continue their efforts to combat ISIL, as well as help protect these vulnerable populations.

The Chair: You've heard the motion. Debate.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): We have an amendment to table.

The Chair: Do we have a copy of this amendment?

Hon. Peter Kent: Well, it's a verbal amendment in response to....

The Chair: How are we going to do that? Is it a fairly lengthy amendment?

Hon. Peter Kent: The changes are very slight. I could read the entire proposed amendment, but the changes we would make would delete "that there is strong evidence", and the motion would begin, "That given the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, the United States House of Representatives, the European Union, and the United Nations have also recognized the actions of ISIS as genocide, that this House recognize" that the so-called, etc.

The Chair: Okay, that's the amendment to the original motion. Is there any debate?

Garnett.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Chair, if I could just speak to this, first of all, specifically, in the context of this committee, we had the opportunity, an opportunity that members of this House, of course, in the chamber, did not have. I think we have the responsibility to relay what we received from them.

We heard from activists within the Yazidi community. It was some of the most moving testimony I have ever heard, talking about the existential threat that their people face. They were very clear in the

language that they used. They were very clear not only in using the word "genocide" but in emphasizing the importance of the word "genocide". For us to say that there is strong evidence...I think one member of this committee used the term that the actions are clearly "genocidal", but stopped short of calling them genocide.

Maybe some people who aren't from the region or intimately connected with what's happening in the region might see these differences between "genocide" and "genocidal", or there isn't strong evidence versus there is, as not being that consequential. However, it was clear from what we heard from the representatives who were here specifically from that community to speak on behalf of that community that these words are important to them. It's pretty clear why. It's because genocide is that kind of focusing word that cuts through, that is very clear, and that crystalizes our obligations. Anything we do that detracts or derogates from that, whether it's adding "al" or qualifying it with a "there might be" robs that concept of the punch that we would really expect it to pack.

I think of my own background. My grandmother was a Holocaust survivor. If anyone were to derogate from the clear emphasis that what happened to members of her family was a genocide, all of us would quite justly find that offensive and wrong. The response from the Yazidi community, as we heard represented here at this committee, was very similar.

There's discussion here of evidence, yes, but at some point evidence demands a verdict. I read at the time, and it's important to read for members again, what the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as:

...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such :

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

In this definition, the definition is clear that it's not required that all of these conditions be met to define something as a genocide, but only one of these conditions is required to qualify it as such. Yet we know from following the news, from testimony we've heard here, and from debates we've had in the chamber that ISIS is doing all five of these things.

It seems that it's only here that this is even disputed. ISIS, pardon me, Daesh—I prefer the term Daesh—has been clear about what they're doing. They don't seek to hide it.

I'm paraphrasing, but John Kerry said something to the effect that they are not just genocidal in their actions, they are committing genocide in their actions, but they're also by ideology, by confession, genocidal.

They talk about this. They don't hide it. They talk about it. They advertise it. They post images, of course, and videos all over the Internet. There is no denying it.

• (1720)

It's strange to me that we're again here presented with a proposal that does not seek to confront the reality of what is happening. It instead tries to introduce these other kinds of words that maybe are meant to sort of imply a similar kind of thing, but in reality they don't use the crystallizing clarity that is associated with using the actual word "genocide".

That's clearly a problem. It's clearly a problem for the witnesses we heard. It's clearly a problem for the community.

It's not clear to me why we as a Parliament and we as a committee would not go the distance that others have gone. The point has been made before that if you look at other parliaments around the world, such as the European Parliament, the American Congress, the American administration, and the British Parliament, in all cases, unanimously, or nearly unanimously.... I lived in the U.K. for a while. Their Parliament is very diverse, with a range of different kinds of parties, yet they all had no problem getting behind the qualification of this as genocide.

Daesh doesn't deny that it is involved in genocide, so it's strange that the Canadian Parliament and members of this committee, who are proposing this motion, do not seem prepared to, in fact, go the distance that many, if not all, of our partner countries have gone.

The best we have here in response was the minister, in question period the other day, saying that the Swedish Parliament rejected a similar motion. That's too bad, but identifying one country when you had—

• (1725)

The Chair: Order, Garnet. We would like to hear from other members. Could you please wrap it up. I think we've given you a significant amount of time.

We're not going into a huge debate. We'll be putting the motion here in the next couple of minutes.

I'd like to hear the opinions from other members, if they have any.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: May I just ask for clarification, then, about the process?

Will I have an opportunity to further participate in this debate in response to what other members say? My sense is that the rules of the committee don't provide for time limits. I'm happy to cede the floor, but I would like to be able to respond subsequently.

The Chair: No, the chair will decide as to when the motion is put. That's how it works in committee.

I'm going to put the motion in a few minutes, so I'd like to give other members an opportunity to speak.

Hon. Peter Kent: The amendment first and then the motion.

The Chair: The amendment first. You're right.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: May I just clarify, though?

I'm a new member, but I was a staff member before and involved in committees. My understanding of the rules of committees is that as long as there are members who are wishing to speak to a motion, the motion cannot be put. That's the process committees follow.

The Chair: No, that's not the process. The process is that people are given ample time to make their case and then we move to a vote on the motion.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I will briefly wrap up then.

I'm concerned about a motion that is not willing to use the clarity that it should use to actually use a word that obviously everybody is thinking, but that for some reason, some people don't want to say. We should do what our allies have done and what the witnesses from this committee have actually asked us to do.

We should have the moral courage to give them the moral clarity they want.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any further comments?

Mr. Miller.

Mr. Marc Miller: I have a brief one. I've heard a number of Garnett's speeches both in Parliament and committee, and I want to thank him for his advocacy. I know he does his homework. We do hold different positions sometimes. I don't believe it's much different on this one. I do appreciate the effort.

I believe the words of this motion stand by themselves and I'm prepared to vote on them.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

We'll vote on the amendment.

Could I have the amendment read out?

Allison, could you read it?

Ms. Allison Goody (Committee Researcher): That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee report the following immediately to the House: a) that given the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, the United States House of Representatives, the European Union, and the United Nations have also recognized the actions of ISIS as genocide, that the House recognize that there is strong evidence that the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has committed and is committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide against religious, ethnic, and other groups in Iraq and Syria, including Yazidis, Shia and Sunni Muslims, Christians, and members of the LGBTQ2 community; b) that the Government of Canada continue its efforts to have these atrocities properly investigated and, where appropriate, referred to the International Criminal Court to formally determine the existence of genocide and to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice; and c) that the Government of Canada and the international community continue their efforts to combat ISIL as well as help protect these vulnerable populations.

(Amendment negated)

•(1730)

The Chair: The amendment is lost. We'll move to the motion.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: May I speak to the main motion, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, you've spoken to the amendment, so we're going to go right to the motion. I see there is a whole pile of people here waiting to go, so we'll move right to the motion.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, I haven't had a chance to speak at all to the main motion. You allowed me to speak to the amendment but that's a separate issue from the main motion, so I would argue, Mr. Chair, that it's important for us to have some substantive conversation about the main motion, as well, which is distinct from the amendment. The main motion deals with the issue itself in a broader way rather than simply the distinction between the language we were looking for and the language that the government was looking for.

The Chair: No, I would disagree with that, because the amendment was specific at the beginning, and the rest of the motion was exactly the same. It's clear what we're voting on.

I'll move to the motion.

Hélène, did you vote for or against the motion?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): For.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: All right, the motion passes, and I'll report it to the House.

Colleagues, I don't think we're going to see each other until the fall, so have a very good summer. I'm sure hoping I don't see you on Tuesday, as much as I like you all. Good luck, have a good summer, and we'll get back to work in the fall.

The meeting is adjourned.

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