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Chair: Mr. Peter Fonseca

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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair.

[*English*]

The clerk cannot receive other types of motions and cannot entertain points of order or participate in debate. We can now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the governing party. I am ready to receive motions for the position of chair.

Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Clerk. It's wonderful to see you again.

I think in the last session we elected a wonderful chair who guided us and who was balanced. I'd really like to continue with that. I nominate Mr. Peter Fonseca to retake the position of chair for our committee.

The Clerk: Thank you very much, Ms. Khalid. It's been moved by MP Khalid that MP Fonseca be elected chair of this subcommittee. Are there any further motions? Is it the pleasure of the subcommittee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and MP Fonseca duly elected chair of the subcommittee.

MP Fonseca, I will turn it over to you.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.)): Thank you so much, Clerk. I want to thank Ms. Khalid for nominating me.

To all the members—I look to everybody here on the screen—I've had the opportunity to work with many of you in different committee and parliamentary work. It's a real honour to be able to continue to chair this committee. I know we have some previous chairs.

I believe, Mr. Reid, you were chair for quite a long time and we've heard about all the great work that you've done on this committee. Also, Ms. Vandenbeld has been a chair. I'm not sure if I'm missing anybody else who's been a chair, but I know everybody has participated in a very fulsome way on this committee.

When I say it is a special honour, it's because this is a very special committee. I know Mr. Chiu is new to the committee. I believe the rest, including Mr. Reid, are returning committee members. Everybody who has sat on this committee understands how special it is because of the way it works in a very non-partisan, consensus-finding manner. I think that has helped us manoeuvre through some very challenging files and issues, on which we were all able to roll up our sleeves and work so well together.

I believe we will continue to work in that vein. With that harmony, I'm sure we are going to be able to get a lot more good work done here in Parliament and able to dig into files that are important to our communities, to our country and to our standing in the world.

On that, I thank the clerk and the analysts we have with us because they are really the backbone of this committee and they serve us so well. I thank all of you. Also, I thank our interpreters who are helping us right now, and who—for those of us, like me, who are not bilingual—are able to support us with their good work.

I think at this time, Clerk, the subcommittee agrees that we'll proceed with the election of the vice-chairs.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2) and the motion adopted by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

[*Translation*]

I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Chair, I nominate Mr. Chiu for that.

The Clerk: Thank you. It has been moved by Mr. Reid that Mr. Chiu be elected first vice-chair. Are there any other nominations?

Is it the pleasure of the subcommittee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Thank you. I declare Mr. Chiu duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

I will go on to the second vice-chair.

• (1540)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): I would like to put a nomination forward please, Erica.

The Clerk: Absolutely, Ms. McPherson. Please go right ahead.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I would like to put forward the name of MP Brunelle-Duceppe, please, as our vice-chair.

The Clerk: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

It has been moved by Ms. McPherson that Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe be elected as second vice-chair of the subcommittee.

[*English*]

Are there any other motions? Is it the pleasure of the subcommittee to adopt the motion?

[*Translation*]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe duly elected second vice-chair of the subcommittee.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, over to you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before we proceed to the consideration of routine motions, I'll ask you to put your hands up so that I'll be able to see you on the list and go in order of your raising your hands. Before we get to that, some of you, or maybe all of you, have already gone through these virtual settings through committees, but I'm going to go over some of the rules and how they work so that we can be as efficient as possible.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you're ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. If a member wishes to speak in debate, they should use the "raise hand" function. This will signal to the chair your interest to speak. In order to do so, you should click on "participants" at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see next to your name that you can click "raise hand". Everybody should be able to see that.

Can I just see a nodding of heads to show that everybody can see that? That's all good. Terrific.

When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. Also, so you're aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

I'll now open the floor for discussion of routine motions.

I see Mr. Zuberi.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations on your elections to you and to all the vice-chairs. I'm really looking forward to this committee and to resuming our activity from the last session of this Parliament.

I have a series of routine motions that I'd like to present for us to adopt.

I'd like to start by saying that in the last session of this Parliament, we as a committee unanimously adopted a series of routine

motions. I'd like us to readopt them with the exception of one motion, which deals with the questioning of witnesses.

For that, we did adopt a routine motion last time. In the interest of ensuring that we have adequate time given that we're currently on a new platform, which is Zoom, and we know from experience that there are sometimes some minor hiccups that do occur—sound checks, people logging in, bandwidth issues, etc.—we ask that we just slightly adjust that time in order to make things equitable so that everybody can ask a question in this committee and so we can all ask our questions. We also know that, with witnesses, the real meat of the testimony comes out in the questions and answers, and that's where we really get a very rich exchange, a very solid exchange, that helps inform us as a committee.

As for what I'm suggesting with respect to the questioning of witnesses, in the past we allowed for opening statements of 10 minutes. I'm proposing that instead of 10 minutes we have witnesses' opening statements of five minutes and then continue with the remainder of the routine motion as it was intact, as we voted upon it last time.

However, we recognize your discretion as chair and the discretion of vice-chairs when they are in your place to shepherd the conversation and, if you deem it appropriate, to allow for a longer time for the opening statements.

Just to sum up, I propose that we readopt the routine motions from the previous session, which we all agreed to last time, with one exception: that instead of having an opening statement of 10 minutes for witnesses, it would be reduced to five minutes, and that we allow for the discretion of the chair to determine if it should go on longer or not.

Thank you.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

I see that Mr. Reid has his hand up.

Ms. McPherson, did you use the "raise hand" button?

Ms. Heather McPherson: No, but I'm going to right now.

The Chair: Okay, great.

Mr. Reid, go ahead with discussion on this, and then we'll hear from Ms. McPherson.

Mr. Scott Reid: The first thing I would do is to ask Mr. Zuberi if he has actual wording. I'm not sure if the discretion part he's describing is actually part of the motion or is merely encouragement as to how we ought to behave, a general friendly direction to our chair.

Could I just go back and have him answer that question, Mr. Chair? Then I'd like to come back, depending on what he says, and offer some commentary.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Zuberi.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: The wording would be exactly the same as it was last time, except we would strike out “10 minutes” and replace it with “five minutes”, and then add one sentence to say “that the above be at the discretion of the chair”.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

The Chair: I'm just going to weigh in.

My understanding is that if we see that a witness is coming to a conclusion but that they may go a minute or so over, we would have the flexibility to be able to provide that time.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Exactly.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. Now I can comment on that.

I appreciate the fact that the wording was put in, Mr. Zuberi. That makes a big difference. If it were not there, I think the danger would be that we could be too mechanistic. I know from my own experience of chairing this committee for seven or eight years that there are two kinds of witnesses.

You may have already discovered this, Mr. Chair. There are United Nations officials or other types of people who are polished professionals, members of the public service. They will practise and get everything down, and time themselves in front of a mirror or with a stopwatch. Then you get people who are here talking about their experience when they were imprisoned or when they were tortured, and that kind of thing. The rule I always had was that you don't interrupt something like that, and that was back when they had 10 minutes. You had to give people the time. It was often an extraordinarily traumatic experience they had gone through.

This is my way of saying—and I hope you and others will agree with me, Mr. Chair—that when we have that kind of witness, we exercise very considerable generosity in extending it by more than just one minute. It's a big deal for those folks.

The Chair: I think I'm seeing all heads nodding in the same direction. Yes. Agreed.

Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I was going through some of the routine motions. On the one that we're talking about right now, in terms of witnesses, I do appreciate Mr. Zuberi's intervention. I think that having the five minutes is good. I, of course, agree with MP Reid that there should be that discretion to be empathetic and to recognize the challenges some of our witnesses will have with that five minutes. However, I would like to also amend it to add “that wherever possible witnesses provide the committee with their opening statements 72 hours in advance”. That does provide us with some support, although not necessarily for those who are speaking about their own personal experience. As those of us who were on the committee last session know, some of the statements could not have been limited to a written statement, and we would not have wanted that. But when possible, I think it would be good to have that 72 hours in advance to be able to hear and think through our questions a little bit better.

Following that, in terms of the allocated time for each question, at the moment my understanding is, just to be clear, that we have seven minutes for the first questioner of each party, and thereafter five minutes allocated to each subsequent questioner, alternating

between government and opposition parties. Just to ensure the Bloc and NDP actually do get a second chance to ask questions, I'm wondering whether or not it would be possible to change “alternating between Government and Opposition parties” to a list like “Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party”. That's what I would like to propose.

• (1550)

The Chair: Okay.

Is that what you were putting on the table, Mr. Zuberi, in allocating time to the parties?

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: For the allocation of time, that's a friendly amendment. And also with respect to the 72 hours, that's friendly. So if you propose it as friendly, I'll accept it as such.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I propose it as friendly.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: It is.

The Chair: Okay. Wonderful.

I just want to say that there are some witnesses who may not be able to put forward their submission, their testimony, 72 hours beforehand. We understand that for last-minute, or whatever other, circumstances there are, they may not be able to do that. We would still bring them on as witnesses but not have their testimony in writing before us.

Is that okay? Yes. Okay.

Before I go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, let me just say that I have a twin on the screen here. It's an identical twin: Iqra Khalid-Fonseca or Peter Fonseca-Khalid, squished. They've given us both the same name there.

Iqra, if you want to take my name, I'd be honoured.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I don't know how to change it.

The Chair: Perhaps someone could fix that.

Ms. Heather McPherson: That's a really awkward proposal there, Peter.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I don't know if the IT people are on it, and I don't know if everybody can see it, but I do see my name under Iqra's screen there.

As they try to fix that, we will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and then Mr. Chiu.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Ms. McPherson was quicker on the trigger than I was in bringing up the speaking time allocated to each party.

I think we've discussed this before. This is a transpartisan committee; we always endeavour to reach a consensus. Basically, we want everyone to have an equal opportunity to speak. Ms. McPherson already raised the issue. We want everyone on the subcommittee to have a fair chance to speak, and that's never been a problem in the past.

[English]

The Chair: I think we all agree with that. What we're trying to find...is to build in that opportunity and flexibility with this new allocation, to be able to make that happen.

Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Now we'll move to Mr. Chiu and then Ms. Khalid.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Congratulations, sir.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, and congratulations to you too.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I meant to congratulate you, as well, Mr. Chair. My apologies, I forgot to mention that.

[English]

Mr. Kenny Chiu: I think in principle we do agree with the amendments that have been proposed. The only concern I have is that, with the 72-hour requirement, we apply the same discretion that we have shown with the time limit on opening statements. A lot of our witnesses may not be professional, as MP Reid has said. They may not be able to provide a written statement within the 72-hour window.

Secondly, we support the arrangement so that the NDP and the Bloc will have the ability to speak as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chiu. I think we are all in agreement with that.

Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

Over the past five years that I've been sitting on this subcommittee, what I have appreciated the most about it is that we are a consensus-based committee. Like all chairs in the past, Mr. Chair, you have been very fair with your allocation of time. As a subcommittee, we have a really short chunk of time. I've seen that whenever we run out of time, we divide whatever time is left quite equally amongst all parties, making sure everybody gets the opportunity to speak. I understand and appreciate the concern of everybody who is raising it here, but I'm hoping we'll continue with our tradition of consensus. I'm hoping we'll continue to work together quite collaboratively. I think the language that Mr. Zuberi has proposed with respect to "at the discretion of the chair" at the bottom of the motion should take all of that into account.

Mr. Chair, I'm happy that we're hoping to move forward on a consensus basis, and I know you'll do the right thing with respect to time allocation.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

Does anybody else want to speak to the routine motions? No? I don't see anybody.

As we've seen over the last number of minutes, we are already working with a consensus-based approach. We've taken a great first step and we will continue to do that.

I'm seeing consensus on the adoption of the routine motions. Yes?

(Motions agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: It looks like there's *Kumbaya* harmony here.

Clerk, from here I don't know where we move. I'm just looking to you on whether we have other discussions about any other future business or whether there's something prior to this that needs to be brought in.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I did want to double-check with the members of the subcommittee really quickly to make sure that I had everything recorded properly.

If I could, I will reread the "Questioning of Witnesses" motion I have so that I'm sure everyone understands the same thing. It would read:

That, at the discretion of the Chair, witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated seven minutes for the first questioner of each party; and that thereafter five minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner alternating between Government and Opposition parties;

—I think that part stays the same—

and that wherever possible, witnesses provide their statements 72 hours in advance.

Is that everybody's understanding?

Mr. Chair, I believe Ms. McPherson has something to say.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I believe that our chair's Zoom feed may be frozen.

The Clerk: Yes, I believe that's correct. In that case, while we get that sorted out, Mr. Chiu, since you are the first vice-chair, would you be able to suspend the meeting until we get him back, please?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kenny Chiu): Okay. The meeting is suspended until we have the chair back.

The Clerk: Thank you so much.

• (1555)

(Pause)

• (1600)

The Chair: We are resuming.

Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I wanted to clarify only one thing in what the clerk put forward. It was my understanding that it was seven minutes for each party and then five minutes for each party, not five minutes alternating between the government and opposition parties.

The Chair: Mr. Zuberi.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Yes, that was a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Okay. We have clarification.

The Clerk: Okay. It would read:

and that thereafter five minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner in the following order: Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party, and that wherever possible, witnesses provide their statement to the subcommittee 72 hours in advance.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Exactly.

The Clerk: Thank you.

The Chair: Is that all you needed, Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Wonderful.

Now we have Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, now that we've dispensed with those matters, I was hoping to deal look a little bit ahead as to what we might be doing. Is it appropriate to do so at this time or is my timing off?

The Chair: We can. We do have some time.

Mr. Reid, what we can do, though.... As you know and have brought up, some of the witnesses who have come forward have talked about very serious issues, and at times privacy is of concern and paramount. I believe the clerk has set up a way for us to go in

camera to discuss those. If you feel that we would want to be in camera for something that you might be bringing forward, then I think it would be best that we do that.

Mr. Scott Reid: You know what? I don't think it's necessary, but out of an abundance of caution, it can't hurt to do that, so why don't we go in camera?

The Chair: Okay. As for how it's going to work, Clerk, could you walk us through it?

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This meeting will end. You will all be kicked out of this Zoom meeting. I'm going to send around a new link and a new password. I will also send these to your indicated staff who will be supporting you through the in camera portion of meetings.

Once this meeting ends, please give us about five minutes. Then you can try to log on to the new meeting.

The Chair: It will be a good trial for us, too, to go through this process.

I guess we're all going to log off. Then we're going to get a link to our P9s and log back in. We'll see you shortly.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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