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Chair

Mr. Bernard Patry

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•(0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Good morning, everyone.

[Translation]

This is the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Today's agenda item is committee business.

[English]

I just want to pinpoint for the members that the first item is a budget for consultation. We adopted a budget of less than \$35,000 last Tuesday. This is just to tell all the members that the budget will be \$24,859. This is what we're going to request.

[Translation]

That is less than \$35,000.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): That's \$600 a day. Is that the way I understand that?

[Translation]

The Chair: Probably.

[English]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Those are very good rates.

[Translation]

The Chair: The thing is that the House... Yes.

[English]

We are resuming consideration of the motion by Mr. Day. We had the motion. We had an amendment by Mrs. Phinney and we had a subamendment by Mr. McTeague. Does anyone want to speak to the motion first? We're voting on the subamendment first.

Monsieur Day.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): I said at the last meeting that I wasn't doubting or contradicting information related to things Canada has said in the past about Israel's full participation. That is why I agreed first to an amendment and then a subamendment, and then everybody seemed to back off even those.

We have information here. I have been aware and am aware that Israel does participate in a broad range of activities at the UN. However, the fact remains that because of Israel having temporary

status at WEOG—which is the Western Europe and Others Group—it still is not able to participate in the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, which is a very important UN body. It is the body on which we continually see motions being brought forward about Israel's human rights record, and Israel is not able to be present at that body to defend itself. That's a serious disadvantage for Israel, that it's not allowed to participate on that body. It's not allowed to participate on the UN Security Council itself, which is pretty significant. As far as participation in its regional group—the WEOG group—it is limited to New York.

There was never any intention that my motion be pejorative towards our government, which is why I agreed to an amendment or a subamendment to simply reaffirm Israel's right to be on these important bodies. If members still feel, somehow, that this is accusatory towards the government, we can change that to name the specific bodies. I can say specifically “such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights at Geneva and the Security Council itself”, if they feel more comfortable with that.

So there has never been any question that there is some participation at the UN by Israel. But in these important areas, it should be able to have full participation. If we want to change it along the lines that Ms. Phinney suggested, which I agreed to at the last session, that's fine. I don't know why members would feel nervous or defensive about that.

•(0855)

The Chair: Any other comments?

Mr. Bevilacqua.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: I don't sense that any member feels defensive about this at all.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): What do you have to say to Mr. Day, Mr. McTeague?

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): I took the initiative of sending all members the position adopted by the Government of Canada. It seems to me that the debate underway here is not really one of substance. We were asking for something that already exists.

[English]

Mr. Day, I appreciate the concerns you've raised. I appreciate the concern you've raised publicly, that this is somehow an attempt by the committee not to deal properly with Israel's concerns. But I can't for the life of me understand why we would make a motion, without these small amendments, that would not reflect accurately what the Canadian government has indeed done. So to demand something that we already have.... I think you accepted the amendment. I see no difficulty in passing either or both my amendments—that it supports or reaffirms that it supports. Either one is acceptable.

I don't know if the committee has other concerns it wants to raise concerning what that would mean, for instance, to Israel's participation on the Security Council—which may be very difficult to do. We know how difficult it is for Canada to accede to that position. But I nevertheless accept that the motion with these small words added to it does not change indescribably what you're trying to seek, but does in fact give confirmation of the Government of Canada line, which I believe has always been very supportive of Israel's accession.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Madame Lalonde.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I want to come back to what Mr. Day said. It seems to me that if Israel cannot get on the Security Council, it is not because it has been denied that right but because it would not be elected. It is important not to confuse rights with the fact that some 50 states might not vote for Israel; that is really what you are talking about. It is not a rights issue. As for adopting the motion, let us reaffirm that Israel has the same rights, but that does not guarantee that it will be elected to the Security Council.

[English]

The Chair: Fine.

Mr. Day.

[Translation]

Mr. Stockwell Day: In my opinion, Israel definitely cannot run for election because it does not have that right as a temporary member of its regional group.

[English]

The Chair: I think the motion is clear. We have a subamendment. If we all agree, we're going to vote on the subamendment first, because that's the way we do it.

(Subamendment agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

● (0900)

The Chair: That means if there's a subamendment, there are no more amendments.

We're going to vote on the main motion, as amended.

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

The Chair: Merci. It's good.

It is now nine o'clock sharp. We have our study on the international policy statement.

We have the pleasure this morning to have Mr. Hassan Yussuff, secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress. Welcome here this morning. I understand you have some opening remarks.

I just want to tell my colleagues that there will be a vote at 10:30—there will be a 30-minute bell, probably at 10:00 or 10:05—and probably a vote this evening at 8 o'clock.

Mr. Yussuff, the floor is yours.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff (Secretary-Treasurer, Canadian Labour Congress): First of all, good morning. I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to present on behalf of the CLC. We appreciate appearing before you here today.

The CLC, as you know, is an organization with over three million members, men and women in both the public and private sectors across the country. The CLC has a long track record of engagement in international work: strong bilateral relationships with national labour centres in developing countries; an active membership in the international labour movement, in the ICFTU and ORIT; representation on the governing body of the International Labour Organization, the ILO, and the Trade Union Advisory Committee, TUAC, to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; capacity-building development projects in over thirty countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East; and the development of positions on foreign policy issues in Canada, most recently with a brief to the Commission for Africa.

I'll be very short in terms of an introduction. There are a couple of areas we do want to comment on.

We welcome this review of the international policy statement and its stated intent to strengthen Canada's role in the world. There are many references to integration, coherence, and a whole-of-government approach, the need to integrate security development and trade expertise. We wish to speak to this need for integration and coherence in confronting urgent issues of development and global justice. Our comments will focus primarily on development and trade issues of global governance, engaging Canadians in the debate on Canada's role in the world.

Increasing development assistance.... We commend and thank the committee for unanimously adopting a motion on June 9 calling on the government to increase Canada's international aid to the target of 0.7% of GDP and to set a timetable that would make us reach the target by 2015.

We applaud the committee for supporting the call for the government to introduce legislation that establishes poverty reduction as a priority for Canada's official development assistance. We also strongly support other measures, 100% debt cancellation for the poorest countries that respect human rights and new forms of international taxation, such as a Tobin tax.

However, foreign aid and debt cancellation will not in themselves eliminate poverty and produce fair and inclusive globalization. We also need decent jobs. In 2005 there are three important opportunities for Canada to focus on: the G-8 meeting at Gleneagles in July, the Millennium Plus Five UN summit in September—we need a ninth millennium development goal focused on decent work; and the WTO ministerial in Hong Kong in December.

Decent work is both an end in itself and a means of achieving the goal of poverty reduction. To break the cycle of poverty we need fair globalization with a robust distribution mechanism. The decent work agenda focuses on employment, resource transfers to the poor through social protection, and promoting basic rights, including collective bargaining. This has been developed by the ILO, employers, workers, and government organizations.

Canada can contribute to the decent work agenda. Canada's policies and actions can contribute to the decent work agenda.

Trade agreements that promote economic and social development.... The international policy statement recognized that some countries have not benefited from the trade, investment, and market liberalization Canada has been pushing. Pursuing this is a good start, but Canada should support international agreements that combine openness to trade and investment, respect of rights to organize and to collective bargaining in order to ensure a broad distribution of economic benefits, and the right of countries to regulate in the public interest; examples are public service and the environment.

Corporate social responsibility.... The international policy statement says the Canadian government, as a good global citizen, is promoting corporate social responsibility as a sound business practice. However, there is a disappointing lack of specificity. We believe, as did the Broadbent commission, the Canadian Democracy and Corporate Accountability Commission, that the matter is too urgent for us to depend on voluntary codes. It is time for the government to implement mandatory measures. For example, we have domestic legislation to prosecute individuals who engage in sexual exploitation overseas, and the international Westray bill addresses important issues of corporate conduct abroad and should be supported; this is for health and safety. Many Canadian corporations benefit from tax dollars and cannot be allowed to undermine Canada's international reputation.

Labour standards and development assistance.... Canada could do more along the lines of the DFID in the U.K. and even the World Bank to ensure that development program is consistent with the promotion of the ILO core labour standards. The Canadian government should allocate more resources to civil society, including labour, to work on human rights, democracy, and good governance, and to assess the impact of its development assistance on workers' rights.

• (0905)

With respect to multilateralism as a basis for global governance, the international policy statement includes initiatives that Canada takes to support reform of the United Nations and a new multilateralism. The CLC believes that any reform of global governance must be inspired by a vision of fair and inclusive globalization. It should aim to strengthen the UN's political role with respect to other multilateral players such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO; to increase the participation of the developing countries in global economic decision making; and to ensure a greater presence for the ILO in the multilateral system.

One of Canada's key initiatives is to lead the diplomatic efforts to create the group of L-20 leaders from developing countries in the developing world. The CLC believes this may be a preferred

alternative to the G-8 and the U.S.-dominated global agenda, depending on how the L-20 is structured.

The international policy statement also emphasizes Canada's security and economic priorities in North America, and it offers reassurance that a more extensive partnership with the United States and Mexico can be formed without losing the ability to determine our own course. The CLC is concerned that the security and prosperity partnership will move Canada closer to the agenda of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives' North American security and prosperity initiative, an agenda for economic and security integration. The CLC supports a sensible working arrangement to manage our economic linkage with the United States, but insists on preserving and enhancing our sovereignty in those areas where it is most important: civil liberties, defence, foreign policy, energy, environment, and social policy.

We are opposed to: (1) a proposal for a formal North American security perimeter, as it will have implications for Canada's civil liberties, independent polices on immigration, refugees, and defence; (2) a new resources pact, as it will have implications on control over energy and water resources; and (3) changing NAFTA into a customs union, as it will have implications for an independent Canadian trade policy on culture, public services, and social services.

The international policy statement stopped short of the big idea of close integration with the United States, but it does nothing to give us confidence that the government has really rejected the corporate agenda. Canadians are concerned about any agreements with the United States that undermine our capacity to shape our collective future as an independent country. Public vigilance will be needed over the long term to oppose future steps towards a North American economic and social integration.

I turn now to global citizenship and public engagement in Canada's foreign policy. A generous public donation in the tsunami relief, the growing number of supporters in the "Make Poverty History" campaign, more and better aid, debt cancellation, fair trade, ending child poverty in Canada—all these are indicators that Canadians care and want to be involved. More unions are creating labour development funds, making regular monthly contributions, or bargaining financial contributions for social development projects in Canada and abroad.

The CLC believes it is important to encourage broad-based public discussion of Canada's international policy and to encourage citizens to participate in addressing global issues. The IPS recognizes the need to strengthen CIDA's cooperation in civil society. It proposes an international panel of voluntary sector leaders with a mandate to examine and improve partnerships for innovation and excellence. It formalizes the establishment of Canada Corps as a key mechanism for providing governance assistance to developing countries.

There are many new initiatives, but they do not present a bold, dynamic vision for global citizenship. The issue is not only about educating the public on Canada's role in the world. It's about providing opportunities to engage Canadians, to strengthen the expertise of unions, to volunteer sending groups and NGOs to build capacities for development, to develop policy alternatives for economic growth and equitable distribution, to promote dialogue among and between communities and sectors, and to build partnerships between north and south based on mutual respect.

We commend the committee for the June 9 motion that calls on government to improve aid effectiveness by strengthening the partnership of civil society, both in Canada and overseas. We welcome the parliamentary committee's panel to travel across the country in the fall to seek the views of Canadians on the international policy statement.

In conclusion, this provides a snapshot of the CLC views about the IPS. A more detailed brief is being formalized and will be made available to all committee members in the next few weeks. It will also be posted on the CLC website.

On behalf of the Canadian Labour Congress, I want to thank the committee for giving us this opportunity to present. I look forward to any questions you may have.

• (0910)

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Yussuff. We would also like to thank Madam Nitoslawska, who is the international program administrator at the Canadian Labour Congress.

In your remarks, you talked about social responsibility. I might mention that we just tabled yesterday a report on corporate social responsibility, which was initiated by the subcommittee on human rights and international trade.

Now we'll start with questions and answers.

Mr. Day.

Mr. Stockwell Day: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Yussuff, for the presentation.

Could you give us some of your insights on questions that we consistently face here? First of all, it's a bit of a mantra of ours, or mine maybe, that poverty doesn't just happen, that there are certain conditions that lead up to poverty. And prosperity doesn't just happen. They aren't accidents of nature. There are conditions that allow people to become prosperous, and obviously most of those countries that experience poverty experience it because they don't have the conditions that allow people to move ahead and be prosperous, and you've actually touched on some of that.

If you don't have good governance, you're going to have less of a chance that people can individually prosper. If you don't have individual freedoms, you don't have the right to own property, you don't have the right to be free about being enterprising. If those conditions aren't in place you can distribute or redistribute all the money you want, you're not going to have prosperity. Individuals are not going to be able to prosper and move ahead.

Given that understanding, and I think you would accept that—maybe we'd look at it in slightly different shades, but you'd probably accept that—at what point should a country like Canada say to a country that we can't just keep dumping money into your country because your leadership is either corrupt or absolutely not willing to introduce the good governance and the policies that allow people to prosper? Because we do know that if you just continue to throw money at a problem but the leadership or the regime is not at all open to the types of policies that lead to prosperity, then all you're doing is enriching the regime itself by millions, as we know. So then when they do the documentation about wealth in a certain country, it shows that level of leadership that has skimmed off the money, sometimes billions of dollars, as becoming horrendously rich, and the rest of the country is still in poverty, so you have this huge gap.

So at what point does a country like Canada say to another nation we're sorry, but other than extreme emergency aid, maybe tsunami-related, for instance, we're just not going to help you, because dumping more money in only makes the problem worse? Do you have a sense of a point at which we should say something like that to a country?

The ILO has a great opportunity, which they properly take, related to promotion of the democratic process, because of course you elect your members in each country, in each area, so it gives non-democratic countries the ability to actually witness, albeit in a microcosm, a democratic process taking place. Because you elect your members there, they get to see democracy in action.

But there is a problem. Certainly in Canada, there's an ongoing debate about the secret ballot when it comes to certification or decertification, and I've always maintained that the secret ballot is sacred, and that if you don't have a secret ballot pressure can be applied, especially on areas like certification or noncertification. So at a time when it's so vital for governments to see an example, an example that you can pretty well set of democracy in action, the secret ballot is crucial to that.

Are you willing to adopt the demand by many of your national and provincial groups that they not have a secret ballot when it comes to certification or noncertification?

And if we still have time, after looking at those two questions—

• (0915)

The Chair: You've taken a lot of time with your remarks and there will be less time for answering.

Mr. Stockwell Day: Is there any expansion you could give us on item number 6, which you mentioned, about sovereignty? Could you give us some more understanding on that?

I've taken about a third of the time. You have about two-thirds of the time left, and I appreciate your advice to us on those points.

Thank you.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: This is an opportunity to exchange views, so I'll respond to Mr. Day's comments.

On the whole question of poverty reduction, I think there's no question that there have been efforts to deal with this issue, and some of it has failed. I think that corruption in government obviously contributes to the problem. It also needs to be recognized that corruption doesn't just happen. Quite often, through procurement contracts and the ability to have special deals in resource manufacturing, extraction, or whatever, western governments are actually exacerbating the problem, of course, by providing the bribery and supporting the systems that actually lead to corruption in these countries.

On the other hand, I think it is fair to recognize that there are a lot of countries in the developmental stage that are very democratic in nature, yet they're very poor. They have followed all the imposed conditions of the IMF, the World Bank, and other governments in terms of bilateral aid, but the fact is they still remain poor. I think that quite often we need to look at the context in which these countries are allowed to trade with us and of course the impact that has on their economies.

Similarly, I think we also have to look more broadly at the debt these countries are carrying. As you know, as we're now talking about the G-8, it has been documented many times that African countries have repaid their debt. As a matter of fact, they've given more resources to the western world in the last period than at any time in history, yet they remain poor. They're dealing with the most catastrophic of issues, whether it's AIDS, tuberculosis, basic education, or a list of things. There is a need for us to recognize that it's not simply a symptom of one thing. We fundamentally have a global responsibility to try to deal with these issues.

I think that many countries have come a long way. Corruption is something that will always be. As long as people can thwart the system, there will be corruption in the world, but I don't think we should see that as the end-all and be-all to global poverty. Poverty exists because most of these small countries don't have the ability to get a leg up. More importantly, there's an historical context to the development of these countries. Despite the fact that the African continent has been around forever, the reality is that the commodity in which they trade has no value in the western world. We simply need to look beyond the corruption. It's an important part and needs to be addressed. As part of global government, we should do that.

By the way, if you look at the western world and corruption in the last little while, we could learn a few things by looking at ourselves. The corporate sector hasn't really demonstrated any capacity to teach anybody anything in that regard.

On the ILO, Mr. Day, I recognize that it is an important tripartite body. It really brings the parties together to negotiate with each other, to find compromises, and to move forward. It's the one part of the global multilateral system that actually works. Of course, the fundamental challenge is on how we get governments to adhere to the ILO conventions that they agreed to in Geneva. It seems there's

quite a selective amnesia when they leave Geneva and go back home as the commitments are brought to those countries. I think Canada could play an important role.

I want to focus on one point. You raised the question of a secret ballot in regard to democracy. People choosing their government is one thing, but I think in regard to unions, most people who make a decision to join a union do so very consciously. I assume that's the point you were trying to emphasize. I quite consciously joined my union when I was a young man because I thought it would make my workplace a better place and would give me a better wage. I made that decision voluntarily. It's important that workers have the ability to do that. Workers vote on collective agreements through secret ballots.

As a matter of fact, we had a convention in Montreal and some 2,400 delegates participated. We elected the leadership, and it all was done by secret ballots. We have no misunderstanding about the importance of democracy within our movement, but we need to separate that and recognize the role of unions in building the broader democracy of society. The workplace is the most fundamental place for people to learn what democracy is about. I think there is a need for the ILO in promoting core labour standards, the right to organize, the right to join unions, and of course the right for people to engage in rejoining labour if they want to.

The last point you raised was on sovereignty. Maybe others on this committee could tell me I'm wrong, but I think Canadians are deeply concerned that our sovereignty has been compromised, given the road that we're following on deeper integration with the U.S. on a number of policies. I know for a fact that our policy on the work we do with refugee issues has changed significantly from what it used to be.

• (0920)

I think we have established as a country that we are somewhat different from the United States, while recognizing that we have to have a good and strong relationship with the United States. About 80% of our trade goes to the United States, and Canadian workers recognize the fundamentals of that relationship. We're not questioning that. But I think there's a need for us to separate that from, on the one hand, how we develop our foreign policy and how, more importantly, we maintain it as an independent nation, and speak with a very independent voice around the world.

I want to tell you, I travel the world quite frequently on behalf of the CLC, and whenever I travel, everywhere I go, no matter which part of the world I go to, people have the highest regard for our nation. I don't think that is simply born out of the fact that we live beside the United States; it's the fact that they recognize there's something fundamentally different about Canada.

First of all, we are not an imperialist country. We didn't send our armies off to fight in phony wars around the world. We've always been on the side of humanitarian and social development. We've always been on the side of peace. We've always been on the side of integration of different cultures in our country. And to a large extent, I think there's a recognition of that.

So I think the way in which our foreign policy evolved in this timeframe after September 11 needs to be really examined in a very serious context. There is a fear that we are moving closer to what the U.S. model is, and essentially losing our independence and our own voice here in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yussuff.

[Translation]

We will now go to Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Welcome, Mr. Yussuff and Ms. Nitowska. You have a very pretty Polish name.

Here is my first question. There was talk recently about debt reduction for 18 poor countries—and then others after that—as the result of a G-8 decision. What do you think about this debt reduction? I asked that question because I received a press release issued by the Committee for the Abolition of the Third World Debt, which is concerned that the announcement is largely cosmetic in nature, whereas what is really needed to fight poverty is debt reduction for poor countries.

I would like your opinion on that. Do you believe that it should be included in our report on Canada's International Policy Statement?

With respect to corporate social responsibility, we have adopted a report on that, but your comment is welcome, since what the statement says is quite vague.

Mr. Yussuff, you talked about the impact of development assistance on workers. I would like you to explain to us what you mean.

Finally, unions and cooperatives are not very much in fashion at the present time. I would like to take advantage of your presence here to ask you to talk about the importance of cooperatives and unions in developing countries, particularly in helping to bring more fairness to globalization, as you would like to see.

[English]

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: I'll let Anna answer the first question and I'll deal with the corporate social responsibility question.

Ms. Anna Nitowska (International Programme Administrator, Canadian Labour Congress): Thank you.

On the issue of debt, we indeed welcome the ongoing public discussion of the debt issue, which as my colleague Brother Hassan has mentioned, is so crucial for development. Indeed, on the debt issue, there has been in the past a campaign, as you know, the Jubilee 2000 campaign, which put the debt issue on the international agenda, and we're very pleased that the G-8 and the finance ministers are addressing this issue. Certainly it was also an issue that came up in the Commission for Africa discussions and there was a recognition in the report, which we welcomed, that debt relief and debt cancellation was an important issue.

As you mentioned, Madame Lalonde, indeed we think that it's not enough. We think that progress is being made, but not enough progress. Along with our colleagues and friends in the non-governmental community, we believe that the HIPC initiative, under which debt relief is being tackled, does not resolve the problem in the long term. We are talking about both a short-term, immediate

problem, but as well a longer term problem. And indeed we were also critical of the suggestions of the Canadian government in terms of debt relief, although we also recognize that some progress, again, has been made on forgiving debt to certain countries. We believe that the IFF suggestion of the British government needs to be supported. We believe that we need to look at debt cancellation, but also it refers back to the other question. What do we do with the debt cancellation? We think it's vitally important and we hope the committee will recognize that it is important to put the resources for debt cancellation into social development, into creating conditions for genuine sustainable development so that any relief that is gained from debt should go into employment creation, should go into strengthening public services, should go into infrastructure, and not perhaps into other issues that will not indeed sustain development for communities and for working people.

• (0925)

The Chair: Mr. Yussuff.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: On your point about corporate social responsibility, as you know, the OECD guidelines have been developed with very extensive consultation with both the corporate sector and civil society and the union movement. I think it's worthy of some serious examination on how we as a country promote that in terms of Canadian corporations' behaviour abroad.

As you know, not all Canadian corporations act in a very bad way. Internationally, some of them do quite well in recognizing national laws and do a lot to promote so-called Canadian values when they operate. There are others, of course, that want their social responsibility, and I think there needs to be some adherence and coherence as to how we do that in an integrated way. I think quite often when Canadian corporations behave badly abroad it's not a reflection on them, it's a reflection of us as a people, as a country, and as a nation. And I think it's critical that this be integrated in a more serious way, because there is a sense that we can move this now and elevate corporate social responsibility simply as something that's nice on paper. Most of what has been proposed in the guidelines is achievable, because it would be things that we would expect Canadian corporations to do here at home, so why should we not expect them to do them abroad? Safety, environmental concerns, development concerns are basic and realistic.

I don't always study the recommendations of the committee, but I think this is an area where we have been trying to do a lot of work. Recently there was a panel on the NAALC that looked at this issue, and again, they made some recommendations, but I think this is an area we have to do far more work in to try to ensure we move forward.

I'm sorry, I missed your last question.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I asked you about the role of unions and cooperatives in development.

[English]

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: We just had our convention last week, and we were talking about the work we're doing internationally. We have a very small fund, not a large fund, for working on dealing with AIDS, as an example. It's very basic. Once somebody contracts the disease, there are terrible challenges they have to deal with, drugs and what have you. Our work on AIDS is simply focused on how we do prevention. Essentially, it's about education in the workplace; it teaches people how they can prevent AIDS in the first place, what they need to do and engage in.

On gender equality, we have a project, for instance, in Yemen, just talking with Yemeni trade unionist women about, most importantly, how they can achieve equality in that country.

In some countries it's simply about building a framework for the promotion of human rights within the workplace but also within that country. In other cases it's about a basic infrastructure for democracy. Look at the history of the trade union movement and its work around the globe to try to build a mechanism for global governance about how society can function. I think it's been absolutely far-reaching for the resources we've put in, our own resources in this work on a day-to-day basis.

I think there's a need for Canada to see it as an integral part of our foreign policy initiative, because the promotion of Canada's foreign policy is not simply done by government; it's done by all of us as Canadians, as citizens who travel, but there are also institutions that are engaged in these questions on a day-to-day basis. This is an area where we would again encourage the committee to look at the work that's been going on and, more importantly, try to enhance that work within the review—of course, given proper consideration for the role of the Canadian government—and to encourage CIDA to be actively involved in this aspect of the work.

● (0930)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: What about cooperatives?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Anna.

[Translation]

Ms. Anna Nitoslawska: I would like to add a point.

When the committee and the Government of Canada look at the issue of the Millennium Development Goals, it would be helpful to also explore what unions are doing in this context. In the area of eradicating poverty, when unions are able to sit down at the table with employers and negotiate pay increases and better working conditions, that helps reduce poverty.

In the education sector, unions are founding members of the global campaign for education. That is another contribution that unions are making around the world, in the north and in the south, to raising education levels everywhere to reduce poverty.

My colleague has just talked about initiatives in the area of HIV-AIDS, etc. It would be possible to examine how unions are playing a role to help achieve each of the eight Millennium Development Goals.

When we are talking about workers' rights, it means for workers in both the north and south. Just as human rights are universal rights, workers' rights involve obligations on the part of governments and the ILO members. The Government of Canada, as a member of the ILO, also has obligations that need to be reflected in its development cooperation programs.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): But it has not signed a lot of conventions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Mr. Bevilacqua.

[English]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I want to express my gratitude for your presentation. Over the years we've benefited a great deal from Labour Congress presentations in a number of venues, whether it's been the finance committee or the human resources development committee.

Major blocs of countries that generate a lot of economic activity are emerging globally. The emergence of countries like China and India is obviously going to create a challenge for the Canadian economy, which I think is self-evident.

The other issue is the fact that we are an aging society, and within the North American economic space there is an emerging country called Mexico that is very young compared to us. As you know, they're also modernizing their economy and making investments in research and development. You've seen their productivity rate go up, and I'm thinking perhaps of the auto sector.

As all these changes are occurring around the globe in economic terms, what do you see for the future of Canada? Do we concentrate on developing greater ties, and de facto a tightly knit North American economic community? I'm not talking about institutionalizing it; I'm talking about making sure that we as North Americans develop ways to increase our productivity and invest in greater innovation so we can be up for the challenges that are just around the corner. As a matter of fact, I would say they're here already.

The Canadian Labour Congress is opposed to further steps toward North American economic integration, for all the reasons you've cited, most of them related to the issue of sovereignty. So if we're not willing to go down the road of perhaps mutual recognition of certain things between us and the United States and Mexico, and we're not willing to perhaps pool the resources—and it's worked quite well, for example, in the Auto Pact, and you would probably support that—what are the alternatives, given all that is happening around the globe?

● (0935)

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: First, let's recognize that the relationship we have with the United States is one that has worked very well. It has served our interests and theirs mutually. But it seems to me that if you already have 80% of your trade going to the United States, you'd say, "Why would we want to increase it to 100%? Would we not want to simply link with other countries that are emerging and developing?"

You mention a couple, India and China, but let me mention one that is closer to home. Brazil is right near us. It's not that far away. It's in Latin America. It's the largest democratic emerging country in this region. In terms of looking at the future, whether we like or not, we're going to either have a closer relationship with Brazil because we desire to do so, or fundamentally have other countries take that space.

I think politically we need to recognize that there is change. I agree with you that our country is changing and it's aging quite rapidly. I think we haven't even comprehended what is really happening in terms of the demographics and the shift in our country. Canada of course needs to start recognizing that, but I think we need to broaden our trade.

I think our trade with the United States is quite healthy, and it's going to continue to grow, but we also need to find other countries with whom we can simply build a strong relationship. Brazil is right within the Americas, and we have an opportunity to do that.

There's no question that the Auto Pact has served our country well, but it has also served the U.S. very well in terms of production. But since we went to the NAFTA agreement, it included the same countries, but the level of investment has not been the same. The government initiative has maybe turned the tide slightly, but we need to be conscious also that we're going to face more and more competition in this sector.

If you look at the Canadian auto sector, it's probably the most productive. We make some of the best products in the world. The quality is second to none. But we need to do more, and that in itself is not going to do it. We have a huge number of imports coming in with very little restriction, and we need to figure out, well, if it's simply an open market, there will probably be no Canadian auto industry.

At the same time, I think there's a need for us to recognize that as part of our development we need to re-examine what Canada's strategy is for maintaining the industrial economy that we have had and that developed this country for quite some time. We're losing, and losing at a very fast pace.

We'll never be able to compete in China, in my opinion, unless we want to get to their wages and working conditions. I don't think Canadians will ever accept that. The question is, at the same time, how do we have a healthy relationship with China, recognizing that China also needs to start changing its thinking around how it treats labour?

I think Canada needs to see its role in these emerging countries and figure out how we start building that relationship with these countries and at the same time enhance our two-way trade with these countries so we can continue to create the kind of wealth that this country has been capable of, and, more importantly, providing employment for future Canadians.

One area that I think also needs to be considered in terms of looking at the foreign policy review is of course the role that immigration will play in the future of this country. It has played an important role in our history and will continue to play an even greater role. Most of our skills need will come from immigration. I think this is a significant shift, because we're not developing the

skills that we require to meet the needs of our economy, and we need to figure out how we can do that in an intelligent way while at the same time integrating the new groups of Canadians who are coming to our country and increasingly in much larger numbers than they are today.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Bevilacqua.

[*English*]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I notice that the Canadian Labour Congress, in my early days here, was even against the whole issue of balancing the books. Deficits were not a very big issue in your agenda. But then I remember Ken Georgetti's speech a few years ago, when he actually came out and said there are certain economic fundamentals that need to be in place in order to have an economy that can prosper.

I wonder whether you also recognize, for example, that in order for us to compete with other countries, the issue of corporate taxation needs to be looked at. By that, I mean lowering it.

• (0940)

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: I thought this was the foreign affairs committee, not the finance committee.

The Chair: He is a former finance committee chairman.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: It's true that it's the foreign affairs committee, but the reality is that you have to be also very practical, and competition and global competition is very much part of our reality.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: If you look at Canadian corporate tax rates compared to other parts of the world, I think our corporate tax rate is not out of line with anything we're doing. If you look at the European countries, which have a much higher social commitment to their citizens, their tax rates are much higher and they're still very productive. They're still generating a lot of wealth.

So again, this is not the be-all and end-all. Yes, we're an evolving organization. We have eliminated the debt, but there are other challenges we're seeing. We're still seeing far too many kids being poor in our country, still too many people living in the streets, and our productivity gap keeps growing. So there are a lot of other things we need to look at, and the fundamentals are not always going to be tied up in a tax rate, because the tax rates in themselves haven't done much to increase that productivity gap we're talking about.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bevilacqua.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: I have just one final question. To get back into the foreign affairs committee, what do you see as your role? As you read the statement, did you identify a specific role for the Canadian Labour Congress? How do you see it, as you read that paper? What is your role, do you think, as an organization?

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: This is one of many reviews on foreign policy in which the congress has participated. I do hope, though, that there's a recognition that Canada needs to play a leading role in the 21st century. There's an expectation—not just here, but abroad—for Canada to play a leading role. I think it's a voice of reason and a voice of sober thought, quite often, in its engagement, and I think there's an expectation for us to be much more bold. We're a very small nation in terms of our density and our wealth, but we can play a much more important role, and I think we need to define that.

I've never seen a point... Look at a small country like Norway; it can be an interlocutor to bring warring parties together to try to find solutions to how they can bridge to peace in their countries and move forward. Yet our role is completely diminished. The major initiative Lloyd Axworthy was involved in, the land-mine initiative, certainly put us on the global stage, but every so often we seem to take a pass and allow others to take the political space. We could go ahead and say that we are going to establish ourselves as an interlocutor country, that we're going to play a substantive role in global governance, that we are going to use the international institution to promote our own self-interest, that—more importantly—we are going to promote a view that is unique to Canadians. Instead, I think we're losing the opportunity to do that.

How is it that a country smaller than Canada, Norway, can occupy such high space in the world in doing such important work in other countries, and we're sitting on the sidelines watching this stuff?

My frustration is that I think there's a real option for our country in the 21st century. I think we should seize this, in terms of this review, and be bold. We don't necessarily have to have the wealth; as long as we're able to bring people to engage on these big questions, I think we can actually enhance this country's role around the globe.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yussuff.

We'll go to Ms. McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to Hassan Yussuff and Anna Nitoslawska for appearing today on behalf of—and I don't think you can say this often enough, and we need to recognize it—2.2 million organized workers. I want to also congratulate you at the outset for the incredible amount of often unrecognized work you do through your international engagements on behalf of not just your own members, but of unorganized workers and working people around the world.

I think we always welcome the opportunity to have some dialogue with you, but I also want to congratulate you on your restraint and forbearance in not rising to the bait and getting into a big discussion about who conducts whose internal business in what way as it relates to secret ballots. You might ask us why we don't vote in secret when it comes to our business; I think it has to do with accountability.

I have three quick questions, because I mostly want to give you the opportunity to be speaking. The first is that originally Tom d'Aquino and the deep integrationists were going to appear before the committee today, and it occurred to me that it would be a great opportunity to have a debate between yourselves and them. That didn't happen, but had Tom d'Aquino and his gang appeared here today, I'd like to know what you would want them to be hearing and

taking into account, very specifically and directly, on behalf of working people in this country.

Second, I know that from time to time there are complaints against some labour practices in Canada before the ILO. I wonder if you could speak about that a little bit, in terms of whether we should be concerning ourselves with any complaints that are currently before the ILO from Canadian trade unionists, and what the status of any of those might be.

Third, I think your comments about increased immigration are welcome. I think sometimes the position of the CLC is misunderstood or wilfully misrepresented in that regard. I want to know, and I'm going to ask if you could clarify for the committee, what the current situation is—not about immigration workers coming in through immigration, but the very serious issue of increasing numbers of foreign workers being brought to work in the Vancouver Special Olympics site, in the Alberta tar sands, and so on. I'll give you an opportunity to talk to the committee about what the real issues are there.

• (0945)

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: Very quickly, maybe I'll deal with the last one. We just recently passed a statement on the foreign workers issue.

First and foremost, we have always recognized as a congress that immigration is an integral part of who we are as a country and who we are as a people. We fundamentally believe we should always be a welcoming society.

The question of foreign workers I think is fundamental to this historical view of Canada, because foreign workers who come in and are being brought in... Really, I think we should bring people here to become citizens and pay their taxes and should integrate them into our country, and the foreign workers' program essentially does none of that. It treats workers as though they are chattels. They are only here on a temporary basis: if we have a problem, let's bring them in to fix the problem; then we send them back to where they come from.

It also speaks to the lack of a coherent policy to deal with the skill shortage in our country. Governments and employers are now using it as a way to solve a problem that I think they have exacerbated or actually contributed to.

So our position is very simple. There are instances where we may need foreign workers, but the way it is being administered and promoted right now doesn't do anything for our country, and more importantly might create a backlash against immigrants, and xenophobia, which is not necessary. Most Canadians, I think, are generous, they're welcoming as a people, and this program essentially is creating divisions among workers, the sense that these workers are coming here and quite often undermining their ability to work in the sector. Often it has nothing to do with the fact there is a skills shortage. What government ought to do is create an apprenticeship program to solve that problem.

On your second point, about the ILO, Canada has been condemned a number of times by the ILO. To a large extent, most recently, it has been provincial government legislation that intrudes on the rights of people to bargain, the right to strike, and the right to organize. These are fundamental violations, in respect to the ILO.

Of course, governments get quite excited every time this happens, but it has to do with the fact that we are not living up to our commitment in the ILO. There's no complaint right now that I'm aware of that's presently being dealt with, but the most recent one was dealt with in the last session and had to do with a B.C. government initiative. Again, the ILO ruled against the government's initiative, when it made legislation to essentially rework a collective agreement without negotiating with the union.

This has been a persistent problem for our country. I think it's quite unfortunate, because to a large extent there's fairly good legislation—not uniformly across the country—recognizing the fundamental purpose of the ILO. But in a number of areas, especially in the public sector, there's been a consistent pattern of governments being found to be in violation of it.

On the fact that Mr. d'Aquino is not here, actually, I'm quite disturbed by that; I hope it's not my presence. I would certainly welcome any opportunity to—

An hon. member: No, no, he told me it wasn't your presence.

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: Oh, good; I'm glad.

There is, I think, a sense that what the CEOs have been pushing is, I would argue, a strategy Canadians have already rejected. We fundamentally believe we need to have a good relationship with the United States; there are a number of areas in which we need to work with them and we need to find a common approach to how we deal with issues. But simply to start integrating our laws and common security borders and immigration policies and defence policies.... I think Canadians find this absolutely fundamental to who we are as a people; it goes against what the thinking has been on our sovereignty. The reality is, the deeper you get in, the more difficult it is to get out.

I think we have a very good relationship with the United States. I travel in the U.S., I have a lot of good friends in the U.S.—good trade unionists, good people. We have ongoing.... We have our differences, but it's not because they're Americans. I think there is a fundamental difference in how, as a government, we approach the world and how we deal with a lot of issues.

In regard to the deeper integration, if we follow this path, fundamentally it will have an ever more corrosive impact on our independent foreign policy around the globe. There is a sense right now, where I travel, such that most people simply think we have the same rules as those that apply in the U.S. If the Americans say you don't have to have a visa, and we say you have to have a visa.... In terms of immigration and refugee policy, we're pretty close to that reality.

I think there is a sense among Canadians that this decision is wrong, and more importantly it also goes to the fundamental issue around our natural resources. A majority of our gas exports now go

to the United States. This, as you know, is a natural resource that we're depleting and can't replenish.

• (0950)

The more deeply we become integrated with the U.S., the less ability we have to control resources for our own needs in the future, because we can't get out of the arrangement we're currently under in NAFTA. I think there's a sense that it's the wrong direction. I think it has been widely recognized as the wrong direction. Public opinion polls have spoken to that. Most Canadians have said this, in their own way. I think there is a sense that Canada should regain its independence, and in areas where we can cooperate, we should.

One area I would conclude on is the whole question of our security measures. To a large extent, while we may not have the Patriot Act here, we have a good close cousin to it. There's a deep sense in this country, as we're seeing in the Maher Arar inquiry, that there's something fundamental in which people have been criminalized for not necessarily doing anything wrong.

I went before the committee when Bill C-36 was proposed. Exactly what I said was going to happen did happen. Bill C-36 has a fundamental corrosive effect on Muslims and Arab Canadians. It makes them criminals; and more importantly, it makes people suspicious of their activities. We have a Criminal Code to prosecute people who engage in terrorist or illegal actions in our country and to hold them accountable. That should be the mechanism, not secret trials and a denial of justice. I think this is fundamental to what people see a country should be, and more importantly, what Canadians expect us to do in defence of our sovereignty.

I think the integration strategy that the CEOs are pushing is simply wrong. I think it wouldn't see the light of day if people like yourselves, as parliamentarians, could find the opportunity to keep saying that it is wrong. This is an opportunity to engage Canadians on what we should have as an independent policy for our country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stockwell Day: I have a point of order.

The Chair: What's your point of order?

Mr. Stockwell Day: I only want clarification. Did Ms. McDonough use the terminology "Mr. d'Aquino and his gang"?

The Chair: That's not a point of order. Thank you.

Mr. Stockwell Day: It is because witnesses are not to be treated in a pejorative sense, Mr. Speaker.

The Chair: You discuss it. It could be a gang. That's true.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: He's not as thin-skinned as you are, Stockwell. He's quite used to me calling them the d'Aquino gang.

The Chair: I have two questions for Mr. Yussuff.

Mr. Stockwell Day: I'm only asking for clarification.

The Chair: Mr. Day, I would like to use the minutes left to ask two questions of our guest.

Mr. Yussuff, in your remarks you talked about the L-20. You said that the CLC believes this may be the preferred alternative to the G-8 and the U.S.-dominated global agenda, depending on how the L-20 is structured. How do you see it structured?

I have another question, on development funds. You talked about the millenium goal for HIV/AIDS. You talked a little bit about the Tobin tax. The European countries are now looking at the possibility. They're going to make a pitch to the G-8, in the next two weeks, about putting a tax of a dollar on every airfare ticket. That could bring a \$3 billion a year in the world.

What's your opinion regarding both these questions? Please briefly answer within two minutes.

• (0955)

Mr. Hassan Yussuff: Very briefly, on the L-20, I think that the Prime Minister's initiative is a good one. We have to find a global context to bring these emerging developing countries into the broader debate, especially on poverty reduction, global security, and more importantly, how we deal with the question of development and trade.

The fact is the G-8 doesn't allow them to do that. They always feel that they're on the periphery. There's a sense that the G-8 agenda is quite often dominated by the biggest player, which is essentially the U.S. There's a need for Canada to keep leading this initiative. I think it is welcome.

Of course, the structure of how countries are given their voice around that table is critical. Ultimately, what will be the role of the L-20, and how can they address the big questions that they want to talk about? That mechanism doesn't really exist right now. I would simply welcome the committee to again look at this and to strongly recommend that it's an initiative that has some merit.

On the Tobin tax, we have long advocated that the Tobin tax made sense. Of course, at one time, we even brought Professor Tobin to speak to us in preparation for one of the G-8 meetings. He made his argument.

Listen, I'm one of those people who thinks I make a good salary. If somebody said that \$2 from my paycheque will go to help reduce global poverty, I'm prepared to do so, but I don't think most people would. If it's a tax on an air ticket, I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. I think it will have a minuscule impact on the airline industry.

I know that others will tell the committee that this will be heresy, and whatever, but I'm not here to argue that. I think you have to find a mechanism to generate more wealth and dedicate it toward poverty reduction around the globe. I would welcome it in any way we can do it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you for being here this morning, Mr. Yussuff and Ms. Nitoslawska.

[English]

We'll now go to Amnesty International Canada, with Mr. Alex Neve, secretary general.

Welcome, again.

[Translation]

You are a regular.

[English]

I want to tell my colleagues that there will probably be a bell at about five minutes past ten, and we'll need to leave about 25 to 30 minutes after. That's why we're going to start right now. We need to go and vote at 10:35.

Mr. Neve.

Mr. Alex Neve (Secretary General, English Speaking Section, Amnesty International Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, committee members.

If ever I had motivation to try to be to the point, this will be it, working against the bell. There's so much to say, though, and I will certainly try to limit my own remarks so that we have at least some opportunity for exchange as well.

Let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to be here this morning. Amnesty International has a long-standing interest in the development of Canada's foreign policy and has participated and followed and made submissions to various processes, reviews, white papers, green papers, dialogues, and round tables over many years, and of course has been quite involved in making representations regarding the current international policy statement.

Let me begin a distressing and I suppose inevitable observation. This is, that worldwide millions upon millions of men, women, and children live a life that is marked on a daily basis by serious systematic violations of their fundamental human rights: the right to life; to be free from discrimination; to be protected from torture; the right to education; the right to basic health care; and so many more basic human rights.

Amnesty International has just issued its most recent annual report, a look back at the year 2004, documenting widespread abuses in countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, 145 countries in all. From that observation stems our principal recommendation for Canadian foreign policy. That is, that human rights should be an overarching goal, at the very centre of Canadian foreign policy, not one issue among many, and not buried in the detail. Human rights should be one of the pillars of Canada's foreign policy. We have urged that repeatedly in various submissions to various reviews over the years. We have suggested that the overriding principle guiding foreign policy should be to pursue initiatives that will advance human rights to the maximum extent possible. The predominant goal, whether in negotiating a new trade deal, entering a multilateral security pact, funding a development project, or sitting down for routine bilateral talks, must always be to act bilaterally and multilaterally in ways that do not directly or indirectly undermine or violate human rights, but instead make a positive and lasting contribution to the global and universal enjoyment of human rights.

Human rights should be a pillar to Canada's foreign policy because that is the foundation of everything about how we construct our lives, build our futures, and live alongside our neighbours, both near and far, how we treat others, and how we expect and deserve to be treated by others.

The UN has long recognized it as such, and therefore human rights are at the centre of the UN charter, which, it's worth noting, was signed 60 years ago this very Sunday. The Secretary General of the United Nations' recent ambitious and comprehensive report on UN reform, which I'll come back to, reaffirms the centrality of human rights in the world order and proposes a new approach to international governance that is based on the essential triangle of development, security, and human rights, each deeply and integrally connected to the other. Surely, Canada's international policies should reflect this view.

The last rendition of Canada's foreign policy did not give that sense of prominence and priority to human rights. At that time, our foreign policy was built around three pillars: prosperity, security, and Canadian values and cultures. There's nothing obvious there about human rights, and it was only once you looked further and read about what was meant by the projection of Canadian values that human rights emerged described as a value that Canadians cherish and hold deeply and which we must pursue internationally. But human rights are not just about Canadian values. They are fundamental principles of global reach, universal application, and international importance. Canada's international voice must therefore resoundingly echo the sentiment of universality and say confidently to the world that this is not about our own national values and culture, but rather about Canada embracing the most important international values that there are.

None of this is to suggest, by any means, that Canada has been inattentive to human rights. There is much to be proud of, and much that Canada has contributed to the effort to create a world of human rights protection. The human security agenda that Canada has championed has resulted in groundbreaking initiatives like the International Criminal Court, the ban on land mines, and efforts to protect child soldiers. Canada has led important international developments regarding the protection of women's rights. Canada has actively championed the strengthening of the UN Commission on Human Rights and many other things.

• (1000)

All of that is, of course, important. There are also numerous areas, though, of shortcomings, instances when human rights appear to be forgotten or relegated to a back seat. Most notably, perhaps, is the concern that when trade and investment is being pursued—be it bilaterally with a particular government, such as China, or multilaterally, as new trade deals are being negotiated—Canada's commitment to human rights suddenly goes soft.

The bottom line is that Canada's record of human rights achievements cannot be accidental and cannot be inconsistent. It cannot come down to which person or departmental division has carriage of a particular file. It cannot be strong and clear in our diplomacy with one country, and uncertain and tentative with another. It has to be guaranteed and assured. It has to reflect Canada's voice point-blank.

The world needs that sort of unwavering leader on the human rights front. Canada is an obvious nation to play that international role. I'd say to you that this leadership brings with it at least three imperatives. First, we must have a scrupulous, stellar human rights record ourselves. Second, we need to be strong and consistent in

what we advocate and demand of other countries and within multilateral settings. Third, we need to be bold and creative in pressing for reform and improvements. I guess the critical question I should be addressing with you this morning is whether I believe the international policy statement sets Canada up to play this role.

Human rights is there, but—I'm sure you're not surprised to hear me say “but”—human rights does not have the degree of prominence and centrality that I have argued it should have. It certainly does not approach being recognized as a pillar of Canada's foreign policy. In fact, one has to dig a fair bit to get a sense of the nature and scope of the human rights dimension of the statement.

Sometimes it is there in specific human rights terms. There are passages or subsections on human rights, for example, in the overview document, the document dealing with diplomacy, and the document dealing with international assistance. Notably, though, the term “human rights” does not appear anywhere in the table of contents of the paper dealing with diplomacy. That paper highlights four priority areas: the North American relationship, security, multilateralism, and bilateral relationships. Human rights does not make the cut, nor is it specifically highlighted in the summary descriptions of what is entailed in those four priorities, all of which, of course, do face considerable and important human rights challenges.

Human rights are, of course, inherent, though not explicitly stated as such, in other concepts that are advanced and promoted in the statement, such as human security, the focus on failed states, or the promotion of the “responsibility to protect” model. But what is missing here is a sense of it being a defining core theme for Canada, rather than a collection of various areas of work, projects, and initiatives.

I'd say, as well, that there is still some ambivalence about precisely what it is that we are prepared to say to the world about human rights. Gone is the relegation of human rights to being nothing more than an aspect of Canadian culture and values, but there is still tentativeness about the universal place of human rights on the world stage and Canada's role in championing that universal vision. As such, the overview statement highlights the fact that specific governance structures charged with upholding human rights will “vary by political and cultural context” and that Canada's new challenge is to “specify what these values actually mean and require in countries with different circumstances from our own”. The statement stresses that

...the importance of national autonomy cannot be overstated. Canadians hold their own values dear, but are not keen to see them imposed on others. That is not the Canadian way.

We have to be culturally sensitive, of course, and there are human rights at stake in that need to be culturally sensitive—freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of association. But we should never refrain from being absolutely firm in our view and our insistence that universal human rights principles are just that, universal, and must be upheld and protected on a universal basis. The international policy statement does not make that sufficiently clear.

•(1005)

While we have that disappointment about what is not in this statement, there are certainly aspects, when it comes to human rights, that Amnesty International very much endorses. Let me highlight just two examples.

The first is that throughout the statement we see a strong commitment to UN human rights reform. The UN human rights system...what can we say? It's a sad and sorry international state of affairs whose time has very much come. And there are exciting, unparalleled proposals for change now very much on the international agenda through the work of last year's high-level panel, followed by the UN Secretary-General's bold paper earlier this year, all of which will culminate in the UN leaders summit in September.

The statement gets behind the Secretary-General's efforts to elevate human rights within the UN machinery, to defuse some of the politics around UN human rights debates, and to increase its currently woefully inadequate level of funding.

As an aside, I would very much encourage this committee, and parliamentarians more widely, to actively engage with and provide political support to that reform initiative. The summit in September is by no means a sure thing, and some of the most contentious discussions will likely be about the proposals for human rights reform.

The second area, which we very much welcome, is the renewed leadership that is called for on the human security file. That is very welcome. There has been some sense of Canada resting on past laurels for initiatives such as land mines, child soldiers, and the International Criminal Court, all of which have helped to strengthen human rights protection in very fundamental ways. But there is no room or time for complacency. Even past initiatives still need strong and determined Canadian leadership. The International Criminal Court, for example, appears in the statement almost with the sense of it being a closed file. But there is still so much to be done to strengthen that institution as it begins to take its first steps out onto the stage of international justice. So many more countries, close to a hundred, including significant players like the United States, need to be encouraged to take part.

Canada also needs to lead new campaigns, as it did in the past with efforts like the International Criminal Court. The global trade in small arms is a perfect example. It is an utter and totally devastating scourge when it comes to protecting essential human rights. Many governments have begun to coalesce around a proposal for a new international arms trade treaty that would seek to regulate this unbridled global trade in death and terror.

The United Kingdom is notably a strong champion of that. Coincidentally, this proposal figures prominently on the agenda of the G-8 foreign affairs ministers meeting being held this very day in London in advance of the G-8 summit next month. Sadly, our own Minister of Foreign Affairs is not at that meeting. The statement recognizes that there is a pressing need to be more attentive to issues related to the arms trade, but sets no vision as to how that should be accomplished, and takes no position on this critical need to begin developing a treaty in this area.

Let me quickly wrap up just by saying three things. There's so much I could say about some of the specifics of the statement, which you obviously don't have time to hear, but I want to leave you with three broad thoughts or recommendations.

First, to repeat where I began, it is far past time for there to be a strong visionary statement that unequivocally and unapologetically establishes a commitment to protecting and promoting universal human rights principles as a bedrock, core component of everything Canada seeks to achieve and accomplish through its international presence, international activities, international financial contributions, and international voice. Tied to that should be a firm commitment that Canada will do everything possible to move beyond rhetoric and ensure that those universal standards are effectively and consistently enforced.

Second, it is indeed disappointing to see how little attention is paid to the issue of corporate social responsibility in the background paper dealing with international trade. International trade cannot just be an unbridled rush for more contracts, more trade deals, and more money. This is an area where there is a huge potential—and we know it—for business, when done badly, to directly and indirectly cause human rights violations, but also for business, when done well, to be part of the solution and to play a role in helping to protect and uphold human rights.

But that takes effort, it takes intention, and increasingly, it is obvious that it will take a role for government in legally requiring certain minimum levels of conduct on the part of Canadian companies when they go abroad. All it gets this time out is a short text box towards the end of the paper on commerce, and without any new vision as to what Canada intends to do to ensure that responsible human rights practices become the hallmark of Canadian corporate activities the world over.

•(1010)

Finally, our international policy must firmly demonstrate Canada's intention to bring that global commitment to human rights home and recognize that our own domestic approach to dealing with international human rights obligations is not just a matter of national concern, it is a key aspect to our contribution to strengthen and improve the international human rights system.

We cannot in the slightest afford any disconnect between what we espouse on the world stage or demand of other governments with respect to human rights on the one hand and what we do when it comes to protecting those very rights ourselves within our borders. For example, there are a number of crucial international human rights treaties dealing with the death penalty, violence against women, human rights protection in the Americas, the rights of migrant workers, and a new global system for inspecting jails with an eye to preventing torture—to name a few—that Canada has not yet ratified.

Beyond signing on, however, Canada needs to be a paragon for the rest of the world as to what it means to implement international human rights obligations. Our own process for doing so is confused and unclear, and is not open to the public.

I will end there so that we do have some time for questions. I again thank you for the opportunity to share with you Amnesty International's reflections on how to strengthen the very critical human rights dimension that should be at the centre of Canada's foreign policy.

The Chair: Merci, Monsieur Neve.

We'll start with Mr. Day, for five-minute rounds.

Mr. Stockwell Day: I have a question, followed by a question by Ms. Guergis. We'll give you this giant amount of time to respond.

I agree. We also lamented the fact that there was not, as you put it, a strong visionary statement related to human rights in the international policy statement.

Can you help us with some practicalities in Canada's relationship with China? Obviously, China has some horrendous human rights violations, yet when we raise them, we always get feedback, either formally or informally, from Canadian institutions saying, "Don't offend China; otherwise, there will be a reaction and we could lose business."

So have you any specific suggestions on how Canada could more effectively address human rights violations in both China and Cuba? How can we be more specific?

• (1015)

The Chair: Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thanks.

My question is very similar. How is the government's move away from the Canadian NGOs affecting Amnesty International Canada?

I see that you have a pretty extensive list of your concerns about the human rights violations in China on your website. I'm wondering if it's frustrating for you, when you're competing for aid dollars, to see that our government does hand over tens of millions of dollars to the Chinese government.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Could I ask one as well?

The Chair: Oh, yes. You may not get answers if you don't have enough time.

Go ahead, Mr. Sorenson.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Are there any countries where Amnesty International is not accepted? I looked on the website a bit, and 735 different stories came up with Amnesty International in them. You're dealing with a lot of countries. But are there certain countries where they just don't want Amnesty International present?

The Chair: Good. That's one, at least.

Go ahead.

Mr. Alex Neve: I'll start with the last one, actually.

Yes, there are, and the two countries that have just been put on the table are two examples—China and Cuba. They are both countries that refuse access to Amnesty International, so we cannot actually travel to those countries to carry out human rights research on the ground. That doesn't mean by any means that we don't do extensive work on both of those countries.

An hon. member: And Burma?

Mr. Alex Neve: We have just recently, in the last two years, been granted access to Burma, and we have had two missions there in the last two years. It comes and goes with some countries. Libya would be a recent example, where last year, for the first time in 17 years, we were granted access. In Sudan, we were similarly last year for the first time in 15 years granted access. We wrote a series of fairly scathing reports afterwards with respect to Darfur, but not only Darfur, and ever since have not been allowed to come back.

So it comes and it goes. None of that ever means we temper what we say about a particular country. We won't go soft on a country in order to get the visa. It means we need to find other ways to do the research, and there are lots of other ways to get good, impartial human rights information, even when you can't be there on the ground.

China is obviously a huge challenge. It's a challenge for us in terms of our own dealings with our government and its approach to China, and it's a similar concern and challenge that human rights activists the world over face with their governments, be it a human rights activist in Australia or in Denmark or in the United States, because there has been this increasing tendency to tip-toe around China when it comes to human rights issues.

We are very disappointed with the directions Canada's foreign policy on China has taken since 1997, which is when we made a concerted, deliberate decision to stop, for instance, pressing China's human rights record within UN human rights settings and take everything behind closed doors, into a private dialogue process between Canada and China.

We're not opposed to dialogue, but if we're going to pursue dialogue it needs to be done responsibly. So we've called, for instance, for that dialogue process to be regularly evaluated, for there to be benchmarks that give us a means of measuring process; but it also needs to be combined with other forms of more public action to maintain the pressure on China. China spends incredible diplomatic resources to avoid being criticized in UN settings. They care about international condemnation, and we are simply not using that leverage the way we can.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Paquette.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chairman, I have a point of order. Is there still going to be a vote? The bells usually...

The Chair: I do not hear the bells and do not see the light flashing. There probably is one. We tried to find out and we were told that there was a vote; the light is not flashing, however. We will ask again.

Mr. Paquette, please go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your presentation. Like you, when the international policy statement was made public, we were a bit disappointed. Even the fact that it is split up into a number of documents leaves the impression that the various parts of the policy are not integrated and based on major principles. You have mentioned one: the promotion of human rights. The government's decision to create a separate Foreign Affairs Department and International Trade Department is of great concern to us. As you know, Parliament voted against the bill but, at the administrative level, the government is going ahead with setting up two departments. That is reflected, for example, in the estimates.

You talked about China. Do you not have the impression that the Canadian government has had two approaches for a number of years now: one for trade and the other for major international meetings? Perhaps you could tell us—this is a sort of follow-up to what has been said—how we can be sure that our trade policy can be instrumental in the promotion of human rights.

You also mentioned corporate social responsibility. The Subcommittee on International Trade, Trade Disputes and Investment prepared a report on emerging markets that it presented to the committee. In that report, we call on the government to develop a much clearer policy on corporate social responsibility for Canadian companies operating here and abroad. We used the OECD rules as a basis for our work. In your opinion, should we go further? Are the OECD rules adequate? What could the Canadian government do to ensure that Canadian companies behave in a socially responsible way both in other countries and here at home? I will let you answer all these questions.

• (1020)

[English]

Mr. Alex Neve: In the interests of time, maybe I'll take both of those questions—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Don't rush through your answers. We've waited for a long time for you to be here, so take your time.

Mr. Alex Neve: The two questions take us to a similar overarching question: how do we ensure that Canada's approach to trade and investment remains fair and inclusive? The government is involved in many things. It negotiates trade deals, carries out trade missions, and conducts bilateral trade discussions with countries. We must also take into account the Canadian face that's taken abroad when corporations—and there are increasing numbers of them, particularly in the resource sector—start operating in countries where there are serious human rights violations, or where a civil war is raging.

This international policy statement is a missed opportunity to make a clear, highly principled advance on that front and to address the disconnect that exists. We have papers on commerce, diplomacy, and international assistance. We also have an overview paper meant to bring it all together. But this piece is sadly, woefully unattended to in that integration. We have to grapple with this as a nation. This isn't something for the next foreign policy review ten years from now. We need to see significant advances today.

There is lots of energy out there; there are lots of things happening. The OECD guidelines are something we approve of and

endorse. But we don't think they go far enough, especially when it comes to human rights issues. They're weak on the human rights front. That's why we have endorsed another UN level—and this time it's from the UN, not just the OECD effort under way within the Commission on Human Rights—to establish specific human rights principles to govern the conduct of transnational companies abroad.

That's become a contentious debate, and our own government has by no means yet given its support for this initiative. It's given its support to the general idea that we need more clarity and discussion around the topic. But it has refrained from endorsing the idea that we need clear principles to be elaborated on the international stage. That's problematic when it comes to the international scene around this issue. Other governments, civil society, and victims of human rights violations around the world look to Canada to bring a strong voice for human rights into discussions of this sort.

Over the next two to three years, this is going to continue to play out in the UN system. It would be a perfect opportunity for us to begin to bring together these separate streams of policy development in Canada and make it clear that the two can't be approached on different tracks.

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. McTeague.

• (1025)

Hon. Dan McTeague: We're glad to have your presentation. I think we complement the good work you're doing. I know some of the work we're doing together is bearing fruit, albeit not as quickly as some would like.

I noted your comments about leadership and the importance of being consistent in pressing for solutions. There is a belief that there is a strong body of people out there working to improve human rights.

It's suggested that we have to separate reality from romanticism. Precisely what is it? You've listed three areas where you felt the Canadian government could act, despite not putting the issue of human rights squarely into the international policy statement. Is there something we could be doing in Geneva that we are not currently doing?

I was at some of the round tables in which discussions on aboriginal rights and other issues were in their embryonic state. They were still advocated by Canada as part of its advocacy for human rights. Are there areas where you believe Canada has a particular expertise, short of moralizing to other countries, which we often tend to do? It's a feel-good approach, but actually accomplishes very little. Where might Canada best persuade other nations through international forums? Is there a particular area you feel we are adept at?

Mr. Alex Neve: I think there are actually a number, and they do reflect the fact that over many decades we have established, and rightly so, a very credible and respected international voice on human rights issues. There are all the things that have been done on concerns related to human security, like the International Criminal Court, land mines, and child soldiers.

I would therefore add to that an issue I highlighted in my remarks, and that is the critical need to get a handle on the global trade in small arms. I don't want to suggest that Canada's not interested in this and has been exhibiting disinterest, but there are a growing number of countries that have coalesced around the idea of a treaty being needed here.

Canada's voice is still notably absent—and it is being noted by governments around the world—on that front so far. It's a shame that Minister Pettigrew isn't in London today to be part of the G-8 foreign ministers' discussion on that very topic. But this is going to move beyond today's meeting, and Canada needs to not only become part of that group. We were able to be such a strong facilitating nation on some of those earlier initiatives—child soldiers, land mines, the International Criminal Court—all of which ended up where we need the small arms issue to end up, and that is at the international-level treaty. All of that experience should be drawn upon again, and Canada should lead the charge.

I think a very critical issue in front of the UN human rights community right now, and where Canada is playing quite a good role, is this issue of reform. These coming months leading up to the summit in New York in September, where there are going to be critical decisions made about the future of the UN human rights system, I think represent a time when we should be pulling out all stops possible. I'm seeing a lot of very commendable work happening at the departmental level. But I would like to see ministers and parliamentarians, a strong Canadian voice in these coming weeks and months, championing that idea of UN human rights reform at every single possible turn in every single possible exchange. That would be, I guess, a current one that I would very much highlight.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Before I move on and allow Mr. Bevilacqua his time, on the subject of small arms, there are a number of nations that have very strong track records on human rights. I think, for instance, of Switzerland, I think of Sweden.... There are nations for which the issue of small arms becomes a very slippery slope. How do you propose to deal with this? I recall that there was an article a couple of weeks ago in which Canada was not held in a very great light, but it also pointed out several other nations. Is it your suggestion, your contention, that those same nations should now come together on this issue?

•(1030)

Mr. Alex Neve: Oh, absolutely. We do need international consensus on this, which won't come easily. Our neighbour south of the border is very much on record as not being keen to see much greater international regulation of the arms trade either.

The fact that we won't have immediate, solid, international unanimity on a new initiative or a new treaty doesn't mean we should be shying away from moving it forward.

I think part of the answer to countries such as Switzerland, where—much like the United States—there are strong right-to-bear-arms traditions, is that this isn't about abolishing guns. This is about putting in place an international system to regulate the trade in weapons such that we go much further than we ever have—and there's been no effort to regulate it to date—in ensuring that those weapons don't end up in the hands of likely human rights violators. Whether or not that's of concern to Switzerland I guess I would leave to experts on Switzerland's human rights record.

We're primarily thinking, quite honestly, about Africa, where small arms are at the heart of the ugly civil wars that have plagued Africa for decades and decades. Eighty percent of those weapons originate with arms dealers and manufacturers in G-8 countries. It is a shame. It is a stain on the notion of a human rights commitment on the part of those countries. That's why it's critical that the G-8, through U.K. leadership right now, is starting to look at that, because they are key players in this. Canada shouldn't just be an observer. We should, at the very least, link arms with the United Kingdom and start to push that initiative forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Ms. McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to Mr. Neve for his usual fair and balanced presentation—also a tough one. I think it is appreciated when you're very forthcoming about the fact that Canada has distinguished itself in a number of important areas, which I think makes it all the more incumbent upon us to keep providing leadership. I'd like to go to two specifics where there can be no doubt that leadership is needed, and I want to just pursue this a little bit.

Many of us were in attendance, and certainly Amnesty International was a force and a presence, at the recent second international conference on the abolition of the death penalty. At the conference, just under a year ago, the foreign affairs minister indicated that Canada was...I guess he said looking at or considering the question of what Canada might do about signing on to the second protocol. I'm wondering if you have any information to share with us about any further progress in that direction.

My second question concerns the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. I think we all were extremely proud when Louise Arbour, former Supreme Court judge, was appointed as head of the UN Human Rights Commission. One of the things she has been very open and outspoken about is Canada's failure to sign on to the optional protocol, which would actually move us from having said the words to the realm of actually believing in and committing to enforceability of our supposed sign-on to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

I think this falls into the category of what you talked to us about as needing to be sure that our own record is exemplary or impeccable if we're going to provide leadership in the world. I'm wondering if you could comment on where we are with that from Amnesty International's point of view.

I know that an observer, actually an intervenor, at a conference last February around this described Canada's position as shameful—a situation of our moving from being seen to be a leader to being very much a laggard. I think it's one of the things this committee is grappling with—how we can get Canada out of that category of laggard and back into the forefront of being a leader.

Where would you see that particular covenant fitting in, and what could we do about it?

Mr. Alex Neve: Those are two very good examples of what I was stressing when I said how critical it is for us to be attentive to our own record, our own contribution to the international system.

We continue to be frustrated that we're not seeing anything beyond the easy words that Canada is considering, Canada is examining, Canada is reviewing whether it's going to sign on to the second optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. That is essentially the death penalty protocol.

We are the only significant abolitionist country in the world that has not signed on to it. What we are told, time and time again, is that there are certain elements within certain departments who don't want us to sign on, because they're afraid that if we do, it will limit our ability to deport or extradite individuals to countries where they would face the death penalty.

•(1035)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Wouldn't that be a good reason for doing it?

Mr. Alex Neve: That's certainly our response. We've responded by pointing out that the Supreme Court of Canada has already looked at that question. A number of years ago, in a case known as *Burns and Rafay*, the court said that only in the most extraordinary of circumstances, which they didn't define, should Canada ever be allowed to send someone back to face the death penalty without first seeking and obtaining assurances that the death penalty won't be used.

That has become common practice now, for instance, in how we deal with the United States. It was already a long-standing practice in how European countries and Mexico dealt with the United States. What I can tell you is that in our experience with all those other countries, the United States has never failed to provide those assurances. When faced with a government saying yes, we will give back this wanted fugitive, but you need to promise us you will not execute this person, they provide the assurances. Essentially, the bottom line is they want to ensure that justice gets done.

It's time to move beyond those somewhat semantic arguments. I think it's time to recognize that the Supreme Court has already said something very strong to the Canadian government about this issue, and it's time to move beyond considering, reviewing, thinking about, and examining, to just doing it—ratifying that protocol.

On the economic, social, and cultural rights front, we're not yet at the stage of ratification. The international system is still developing that optional protocol, which would be a critical means of strengthening the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights on the world stage.

Most importantly, it would enable individuals who feel their fundamental economic, social, and cultural rights—be it the right to health care or education—have been violated to make a complaint to an international-level body and have that international-level body issue a ruling. That opportunity exists for almost the entire other range of rights in the UN system. Torture, the rights of women, civil and political rights—there is, on all of those fronts, an option to have the international-level bodies adjudicate a case. There is nothing on the economic, social, and cultural rights front.

Whoever you heard speak in February, expressing concern about Canada's shameful position on this issue, was right. Canada is, I would have to go as far as to say, opposed outright to the idea of this being developed. The position Canada continues to advance on the international stage is that economic rights, by their very nature, aren't subject to measurement or adjudication; they're policy aspirations or they're government budget decisions. They're not about rights in the same way that other rights are, in the sense that an individual should be able to say this is my right; it has not been afforded to me; here is my complaint; I demand redress.

That's precisely what we need with these rights, and until we start to see some of those developments put in place at the international stage and within our own courts and tribunals, economic, social, and cultural rights will continue to remain there as vague promises that no one really does anything about.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Thank you for clarifying, because I didn't mean to cause confusion about the issue of the optional protocol. In my eagerness for it to happen, I jumped ahead a step.

The Chair: Ms. McDonough, you've already extended much more than five minutes.

I will now go to Mr. Bevilacqua.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Neve, I was having a discussion with a few constituents about the whole issue related to human rights. They asked me a very interesting question, and perhaps you can help me answer it for them. They asked what the process is, at the end of the day, of changing a nation that engages in human rights violation. That's the question.

Mr. Alex Neve: Well, it would be nice if there were a simple answer to that. It's a complex answer. It of course would depend on the nation. It would depend on the types of human rights violations, but the process is one that needs to be pursued both from within and without.

“Within” means—and this is where we need to be very attentive to what we're doing with our international aid dollars—providing assistance and support to local communities, groups, and institutions committed to advancing and protecting human rights to make sure that the human rights voice, which has over the last 30 years begun to flourish around the world in ways that are unprecedented and very exciting.... In any armed conflict you go to, in any country mired in deep repression and long-standing human rights violations, you will find pockets of brave, courageous, innovative individuals and small groups, maybe working at the neighbourhood level, the community level, the city level, or the national level to document human rights violations, to speak out about abuses, to educate and empower their neighbours and schoolmates about human rights issues, and to speak out on the national stage, demanding that violations come to an end.

Incredible work, but they're also in many countries among the most besieged members of society. That work, which of course should be celebrated as one of the most important aspects of any society in many countries, is just about the most dangerous thing you can do. You'll be targeted by death squads or guerrilla groups, thrown in jail, killed, or chased out of the country. So certainly anything we can do to continue to strengthen the development of a domestic human rights community, even in countries with horrific human rights records, has to be an absolute priority.

External pressure, though, is critical. It's not all going to come from within. That external pressure, for one thing, often is what strengthens the hand and gives a sort of resolve and energy and inspiration to local human rights communities. That external pressure doesn't mean that we want to see Canada every second day issuing an angry press release about human rights issues in a particular country. Yes, that should be one of the aspects of how we pursue a sort of external human rights advocacy, but lots of it will be quieter. It will be through the bilateral exchanges that will happen; it will be through strong things that are said when ministers are meeting.

But it's not all bilateral; it's also multilateral. So working within bodies like the UN Commission on Human Rights, for all its many flaws at the current time, is still the only sort of global-level intergovernmental human rights forum we have. That's also a critical place to be exerting pressure.

So there is no short answer to what was a very short question other than to highlight that we need to, as I say, pursue things both inside the country and outside the country. We need to always pursue a variety of strategies, some of which will be quite public and some of which will be much subtler and quieter. Some of it is throwing money at a situation and making sure that the right kinds of initiatives are getting the support they need, but others are more about diplomacy and that kind of advocacy.

•(1040)

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: How long have you been involved in this movement or coalition for human rights?

Mr. Alex Neve: I would say human rights activism probably began for me about twenty years ago. I've been in my current job as secretary general of Amnesty International Canada for five years.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: With regard to the past twenty years, if you had to describe them to me vis-à-vis progress made or failure,

whatever the case may be, whatever you view it as, what would you say?

Mr. Alex Neve: There have been lots of both, and the fact that there are lots of both is what, at least for me personally, makes me believe it's worth continuing with this work.

In those twenty years we've had Rwanda, Darfur, and East Timor, and they couldn't be a starker, more dramatic reminder to me of why it's so critical to continue with this work.

We've had huge achievements, the end of apartheid, the end of military dictatorships in Latin America for the most part—that's not to suggest that there aren't still serious human rights concerns in Latin America—and we've had huge breakthroughs in cracking one of the toughest nuts on the human rights front, which is impunity. We've had things like the International Criminal Court and the Yugoslav and Rwanda tribunals come into being, and we actually have governments now showing a real commitment to making sure that human rights violators will face justice for their horrific misdeeds. That's another amazing breakthrough.

So there have been both. I don't know how I would balance it. On any given day or any given week, I would probably feel the balance shift a little bit. It's always back and forth.

•(1045)

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: I have just one final question, because I think you promised me that—right?

The Chair: Go ahead. I promised you.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: What are your thoughts on the use of force?

Mr. Alex Neve: Do you mean the use of force writ large, or the use of force to end human rights violations—

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: That's right.

Mr. Alex Neve: —humanitarian intervention?

Organizationally, Amnesty International doesn't either oppose or endorse that. We can understand and see the reasons many think it's a critical thing to promote in certain instances. We also have grave concern about the fact that humanitarian interventions almost always, no matter how well intentioned themselves, also contribute to human rights violations. So we think it's something that needs to be undertaken only with the greatest of caution and concern.

We're also a bit concerned that the increasing focus on that as the great solution to the world's human rights crises risks diverting our attention from where the real work and effort has to lie—that is, preventing crises before they begin in the first place.

I guess it's a bit like at the domestic level, where there's often a temptation in the face of crime, for instance, to say, "Let's just get more police officers. Let's build more prisons." More police officers, more prisons...which sometimes deflects from what we really need to be focusing on. That is, what are the social ills that lie behind this crime wave or these patterns of criminality, and let's address that.

We don't want the world to get too entranced with the notion that sending in the marines will always be the answer to human rights violations and forget that it's the longer-term, harder, and sometimes almost invisible work around preventing human rights violations where we really need to focus.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: But is it sometimes the answer?

The Chair: Mr. Bevilacqua, that's fine.

We'll go now to questions from Mr. Sorenson and then Madame Lalonde.

Mr. Sorenson.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Thank you for your honesty. When you say we've had a lot of successes and we've also had some failures, I guess if you didn't have failures or if there weren't areas where perhaps you haven't had the impact that you would have liked, you would have worked yourself out of a job. So I think that's part of life.

What is the budget of Amnesty International, and how are you funded?

Mr. Alex Neve: We are funded totally through private donations. Amnesty International doesn't take government money from any government anywhere in the world, even a government with as benign, or theoretically benign, a human rights record as Canada's. That is because we want to maintain our complete independence and impartiality.

Here in Canada our budget is about \$9 million a year, much of which funds international-level work, but much of which is also spent directly in Canada on campaigning, education, outreach, and those sorts of programs. It's almost entirely small individual donations. We don't get multi-million-dollar donations from corporate Canada, I can assure you. It's people signing up to give \$20-a-month donations, \$30-a-month donations, or \$200-a-year donations. It truly is ordinary Canadians who have said, "Human rights matter to me, and here's how I'm going to support that."

We have around 70,000 members of Amnesty International in Canada, and it's through their donations that we're able to do that work.

[*Translation*]

A voice: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Alex Neve: Yes, there are two Amnesties.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Neve.

The protection of Canadian citizens against torture is a difficult issue—as all of them are, in fact. We have seen dramatic cases over the past few years, and we have all tried to defend the victims of those events. Zahra Kazemi suffered a horrible death. I will not take the time to describe the situation, but we have had the Arar, Kazemi, Bouzari and Sampson cases.

Canada faces a twofold problem. First, it can do little to defend citizens with dual nationality in countries that practice torture. Second, those people have no means in Canada of obtaining compensation. This has been confirmed by Canadian courts and pointed out in the United Nations report.

What is your position on this? Should this issue be included in the statement? Canadians have taken a keen interest in these cases.

• (1050)

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Neve: You're quite right. This obviously has become a very pressing and high-profile issue over the last several years—the cases you referred to—but there are actually many cases beyond this that haven't received the kind of public attention and notoriety that handful has.

There are huge challenges around this—no one would deny that—and double nationality is one piece of that.

I think, yes, the international policy statement should have been much more thoughtful and deliberate about paying attention to this issue. There are references to the need to strengthen, better resource, and expand consular services. We think that—

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Are you thinking of the signing of the Vienna protocol, maybe?

Mr. Alex Neve: Yes.

But on the consular services front, we would certainly endorse the idea that there does need to be a strengthening and that this should be a priority of real concern for the government, because this kind of situation is only going to continue.

And it's not all only in that difficult, thorny area of security and human rights, which is where some of these cases have emerged of individuals subject to counter-terrorism investigations here in Canada suddenly and in increasing numbers finding themselves in Syrian jail cells. What's at stake here? What's the pattern? What's Canada's role?

The Maher Arar inquiry is getting at some of that, but it's going to be limited in the degree to which it gets at the wider question of what's the pattern and policy at play here, and that's critical. We can't lose sight of that.

But consular services needs to be much better equipped. It's been striking to me, both in the Maher Arar inquiry but also in the involvement I've had in a number of those other cases, that there's a notable training gap that needs to be filled, and filled quite urgently, for consular officers so they can go about their work carrying out prison visits, for instance, in less than perfect circumstances where, because of double nationality, no one is allowing Canada to have a private visit, for instance, with the person.

How do you do that visit in a way where you make the most reliable assessment you possibly can as to whether torture is a concern? That skill set simply isn't there. Some pick it up a little bit here and there on the job. It has to be a real commitment within the consular services to make that happen.

There are all sorts of law reform initiatives we should be pursuing. Yes, signing on to the optional protocol to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations so that we actually can take disputes around consular access to the International Court of Justice is critical, but there's the law reform need that you pointed to as well, to make sure that those individuals who do come back to Canada who have been tortured abroad can actually use our court system to pursue justice. Absurdly, our courts, our government, our laws say to those individuals, "We're sorry. We understand you've been through something horrific, but state immunity has to prevail here." And that government is going to be protected in our court system from having to answer for what it's done.

We've been pressing for law reform on this front for many years. There have been individuals who have been trying to get the courts themselves, through charter challenges and other means, to overturn this absurdity in Canadian law. We have to get to a point where it's made clear that no government is immune from lawsuits in our courts for things of the highest international concern: torture, crimes against humanity, war crimes. There's no place for that kind of immunity in Canadian law.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Before closing, I have one question for you, Mr. Neve.

With regard to United Nations Secretary-General's proposed United Nations human rights council that will replace the current UN

Commission on Human Rights, does Amnesty International have any detailed view as to how such a council should be structured or how it should be operated in practice?

Mr. Alex Neve: We absolutely do, and I don't have the time to give you all those details.

The Chair: No, but maybe you could provide that to the committee.

Mr. Alex Neve: We have a paper.

The Chair: I'd like to have this.

Mr. Alex Neve: It's about 15 pages. It's not too long, not too short.

We strongly endorse the proposal and we're very excited that the Canadian government also is behind it. And as I was saying earlier, I would urge all members of this committee, but parliamentarians more widely, to do everything you can over the weeks and months leading up to that September summit to make sure there's a strong Canadian voice out there in all the cocktail parties of the world, making sure we do everything to advance this initiative.

The Chair: I'd like to have that paper, please.

• (1055)

Mr. Alex Neve: I will forward it to you today.

The Chair: Merci, Monsieur Neve. It's always a pleasure to have you here.

Pardon, Madame. Ms. McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Do we have scheduled witnesses now for Tuesday, given that we're coming back here?

The Chair: Right now we have Monsieur d'Aquino and his group to appear on Tuesday morning, but we'll see if the House is still sitting.

An hon. member: I want to go home.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: If it is, we are going to meet?

The Chair: Yes. If the House is sitting, we are going to meet.

An hon. member: Aw.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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