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The Honourable David Kilgour

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• (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Lib.)): Go ahead, Madam Freeman.

[*English*]

Professor Linda Freeman (Professor, Political Science, Carleton University, As Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to start today by setting a context for Canadian policy.

In preparing my remarks for this session, I was struck by an article by veteran journalist Michael Holman, who recently commented that an immediate course of derision greeted U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's inclusion of Zimbabwe on a U.S. list of outposts of tyranny, followed by the inescapable sound of the closing of African ranks.

For Canadian policy on Zimbabwe, the challenge, the dilemma, the difficulty is to position this country and our policy in a way that it can contribute effectively without producing the same result. Therefore, I'd like to begin this presentation by framing my remarks in the context of Africa and the global south and by saying that the inescapable reality is that within the region of southern Africa, with the exception of Botswana, there is strong public support for the government of President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, and especially his program of land reform. While there are more dissenters in the rest of Africa, again the majority opinion there and in the global south as a whole is pro-Mugabe.

Although leaders of African states contend they exert pressure on Zimbabwean leaders behind closed doors in meetings of SADC and the AU on issues of governance, the evidence of their effectiveness is pretty slim. There are genuine concerns about the broader effects of Zimbabwe's crisis, to be sure, especially the economic decline, but so far they haven't translated into concrete pressure. The most one can see is the adoption this week of a three-year-old report on Zimbabwe's poor human rights record by the executive council of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which now becomes part of the official record of the African Union.

By and large, the record shows that to date, President Robert Mugabe has been extremely effective in winning the propaganda battle and in having the crisis take on a particular meaning. From this point of view, the key issue, indeed the only issue in understanding Zimbabwe's troubles is the refusal of forces within and without Zimbabwe to accept the radical reform that has resulted in the transformation of commercial farmland from white to African

farmers. Therefore, the Zimbabwean government contends, the concern about abuse of human, civil, and political rights is simply a smokescreen to cover efforts to remove the current government in Zimbabwe and to restore old enemies to power.

The Mugabe regime, its supporters argue, needs to be celebrated for completing an important task that has been integral to the liberation struggle. The current crisis is therefore linked to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles that connect the present crisis back to the battles against white majority rule, which ended with independence in 1980, and to the larger struggle of the south against domination from the advanced industrial world. In this view, then, the western world is attempting to organize a regime change in Zimbabwe through the main opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC.

In his role as tribune of the south, Mugabe has gained great currency in a series of speeches at international conferences, from Johannesburg, where at the sustainable development conference in August 2002 he was applauded—in fact those in the press room stood up and cheered—when he told British Prime Minister Tony Blair “keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe”, to New York at the UN last September when Mugabe delivered a scathing speech tearing into the Iraq War allies, in which he said:

We are now being coerced to accept and believe that a new political-cum-religious doctrine has arisen, namely that there is but one political God, George W. Bush, and Tony Blair is his prophet....

These comments are but prologue to highlight the difficulty this context creates for the framers of Canadian policy on Zimbabwe.

If one comes out in the fashion of American Secretaries of State Powell and Rice, the effect is counterproductive. Indeed, heavy-handed pressure from western countries on southern African heads of state before SADC meetings in the early years of this crisis, 2000-2001, produced a backlash and stiffened support for the Mugabe government. Apparently, western diplomats and politicians were phoning SADC heads of state one after another, and it was just overkill.

In terms of policy recommendations, which is why we are here, what should and should not be done?

Looking back at this committee's report and recommendations from two years ago, which were kindly forwarded to me, much has remained the same, but there are differences. I think from my point of view there are at least two major areas to consider.

First of all, there is the question of emergency food aid, and here I think Canada should be ready to provide emergency food aid quickly. It should be primed and ready. The U.S.-funded Famine Early Warning System Network, FEWS-NET, a food security monitoring group, said last week that 5.8 million of the country's 12.5 million people will need food aid to avert starvation before the next harvest in April.

Despite government efforts to censor the data, and their firing of the mayor for reporting these facts, Bulawayo city council reported the deaths of 14 children in January to add to the 162 who died from January to October last year. So the need is clear. I think food production reports are uneven over the country. They're worse in places like Masvingo and the central, southern, and western parts of the country, better in Mashonaland. The FEWS-NET report I think is also quite authoritative.

However, the Zimbabwean government and its Minister of Agriculture, Joseph Made, refused to accept these facts, rejecting external food aid and contending that the new agricultural dispensation produced by the land reform has produced bumper crops. Mugabe himself last year said in a phrase that has stayed with me that food aid should be given elsewhere and that Zimbabwe didn't want to be "choked" with food aid. The official claim is that Zimbabwe has produced enough grain to feed itself, 2.4 million tonnes. It's a figure that's been rejected by most independent authorities and even by a parliamentary committee in Harare. Reports this morning from Zimbabwe suggest the government is desperately trying to purchase 600,000 tonnes of maize but is having difficulty getting lines of credit or access to foreign exchange.

Although the government denies the political use of food and food aid, independent reports continue to show that ordinary Zimbabweans need to be in good standing with the ruling political party ZANU (PF) to be eligible to buy food, not to just get it as food aid, from the Grain Marketing Board, especially in the rural areas. Any indication of support for the main opposition political party, the NDC, automatically removes eligibility to purchase food. The choice for ordinary Zimbabweans is clear: support Zanu (PF) or starve.

Linked to this approach has been the government's periodic insistence that it monopolize the distribution of food. Moreover, the government has put in place a new policy on NGOs in Zimbabwe, which has not yet been gazetted—it hasn't been signed off on by President Mugabe—but may seriously limit the ability of NGOs to participate in the provision of food aid.

It is unclear, therefore, in terms of Canada, when and whether Canadian food assistance will be able to meet the needs of starving Zimbabweans. However, it's not out of the question that very sudden emergency aid will be needed. Canada should be prepared for this eventuality, but I think also to start thinking and coordinating with other donors to address the issue of the Zimbabwean government's determination to control food aid. What will be their response? Will they give food aid if the Zimbabwean government says only through us, or what precisely will be their strategy?

That's the first of two major areas I wish to address. The second is diplomatic efforts, and here I have six main points.

Given the discussion that I've just gone through about broad-based support in Africa and the south for the Mugabe regime, it's clear that certain diplomatic efforts will be counterproductive. I think first and foremost any belief that additional bilateral pressure will bring influence is illusory. There is no sign that the Mugabe government has responded to pressure from close allies like South Africa. Indeed, it's been a bit of a phenomenon watching Thabo Mbeki go up to Harare rather than Mugabe go down to Cape Town or Pretoria, and to see him have a meeting with Mugabe, get into the air after having come to a whole set of agreements, and he is no sooner off the tarmac than Mugabe has repudiated many of these agreements. If Mugabe treats a close ally like South Africa that way, I don't think he's going to respond to pressures, or his regime is going to respond to pressure, from Canada, a country they regard as being part of a western conspiracy to bring down its government.

● (1535)

Opportunities for effective interaction at this level are likely to be slim in the current conjuncture. While the Mugabe government should be left in no doubt about Canada's opposition to many features of the current situation in Zimbabwe and no retreat should be entertained, it is unclear what more can be attained on the bilateral front.

Canada has already co-sponsored a resolution at the UN Commission on Human Rights condemning human rights violations in Zimbabwe, and it has issued a formal démarche regarding the violent intimidation of the opposition. I think our representatives in Harare should continue to maintain a strong presence on the ground, but it's unclear that additional actions on this line will have any effect.

I think the most important aspect of Canadian policy towards the Zimbabwean crisis is that it be sustained. In this connection, support for groups within civil society should be continued where possible. Pressure from below, from churches, trade unions, and other civil society associations, continues to be a sound investment in a democratic culture for the future.

The second of my six points is that the suggestion two years ago that Canada should support a special international tribunal to prosecute those responsible for the most serious human rights abuses is clearly premature and counterproductive. It simply strengthens the resolve of Mugabe and the legion around him never to give up power.

The third point is that there's no indication the Government of South Africa would be amenable to Canadian pressure for it to do more on the Zimbabwean issue. Since 2000, the government of Thabo Mbeki has supported the Mugabe regime under the guise of a policy of quiet diplomacy—a phrase, and I find many of them, that we used to use when we attempted to justify continued diplomatic relations with the apartheid regime in South Africa. There are few signs yet of a significant willingness to change on the part of South Africa.

Fourth, there remain a handful of countries like Ghana and Nigeria that in a bilateral context might be useful in diplomatic efforts vis-à-vis Zimbabwe, particularly Nigeria, I think. Canada should support their efforts. Attempts by governments in Malawi and Zambia to come to grips with endemic corruption should be encouraged as creating a different environment for the region as a whole.

Fifth, although in 2004 the Zimbabwean government signed on to a protocol of the Southern Africa Development Community, SADC, regarding principles and guidelines governing elections, there's little indication to date that it intends to undertake more than a token compliance, nor is there any sign that SADC intends to require Zimbabwe to do more. This is another of these dances that goes on. Any pressure from a western country like Canada would need to be very skilful indeed not to provoke a backlash.

Finally, above all, the current Government of Zimbabwe should not be able to claim a free and fair election in the upcoming parliamentary elections at the end of March when conditions for such an election have already rigged the outcome. Jim MacKinnon is going to talk more about this. Only friendly observers are going to be allowed to go to Zimbabwe to watch the election process as it unfolds. Therefore, a very practical measure for Canada to undertake is to be prepared to counter the inevitable propaganda that the election process is acceptable, having us fold our tents and all back off with things continuing as usual.

Thank you.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Freeman. I've heard a lot of witnesses, but I don't think I've ever heard a witness give such a lucid testimony with not a single word wasted.

Who's next?

Alex.

Mr. Alex Neve (Secretary General, English Speaking, Amnesty International (Canada)): Yes, that's a hard act to follow. I'm now going to start to babble.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. All of us certainly welcome the opportunity to outline our concerns and share our recommendations with respect to the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe.

I recall appearing before this committee almost three years ago, shortly after the 2002 presidential elections, whose run-up and aftermath were marked by widespread human rights violations. And of course today we meet with elections again being a critical backdrop to our concerns, with parliamentary elections now less than two months away.

In 2002 this committee unequivocally took note of what was characterized as President Robert Mugabe's flagrant abuse of human rights, and a number of recommendations were made for Canadian government policy and action. As Professor Freeman has noted, most of those remain current and very relevant.

The Chair: Just one moment, please. We are joined by the high commissioner.

Please join us at the table, High Commissioner.

Mr. Alex Neve: Importantly, this committee's resolution at the time called on Canada to work with regional allies. The importance of that approach, of working closely and innovatively with regional allies, is a point that I will come back to in my remarks today.

Canadian civil society organizations have a long history of working on Zimbabwe and have long-standing and important relationships with Zimbabwean civil society organizations. The interest and concerns span a wide range of issues: aid and development, human rights, church links, journalists, the legal profession, the labour movement, and more.

The current crisis in Zimbabwe, which became so acute in 2000, is not, of course, the first time there have been serious concerns about human rights protection in the country, but the rapid and serious deterioration in the human rights situation over the past five years did lead Canadian organizations to begin to work together to respond to the crisis. An NGO coalition, the Zimbabwe Reference Group, was formed. It is made up of groups such as Amnesty International, the Canadian Bar Association, Oxfam, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Council of Churches, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, and Defence for Children International. Many of them are here today. It has become a platform for joint research, advocacy, and public outreach by Canadian civil society with respect to Zimbabwe.

In June 2004, that coalition identified the importance of sending a Canadian civil society mission to Zimbabwe with a twofold purpose: first, to hear from Zimbabwean civil society counterparts about the crisis, so as to better understand ways in which we, as Canadian civil society, could support them in their important work; and second, to formulate new, concrete recommendations for Canadian government policy and action. I was fortunate enough to be part of that mission.

Our findings from the mission could likely be summed up in two short conclusions. First, not surprisingly, we found the human rights situation in the country to be bleak and despairing. Second, we were impressed with the continuing determination, creativity, and spirit of civil society organizations in the country, who continue with their work even in the face of harassment, violence, and imprisonment.

Upon return to Canada we prepared a report providing an overview of our findings. The report contains a number of recommendations directed at the Canadian government. It was released last September. I have it with me. I apologize that it never was, unfortunately, translated into French, and we have it available only in English. I have brought copies with me; they are available at the front of the room for anyone who would like a copy.

Let me highlight briefly some of the key human rights concerns that we covered in the report, and some of the most important recommendations we made with respect to Canadian government policy.

First, we were very concerned about the insidious web of unjust and repressive laws in place in Zimbabwe, which have increasingly made it nearly impossible for civil society to express any peaceful dissent or opposition in Zimbabwe. This includes two draconian pieces of legislation passed in 2002. The first is the Public Order and Security Act—its acronym is POSA—which requires anyone organizing a public gathering to give the police four days' advance notice, and which has been interpreted and applied in such a fashion as to simply allow the police to ban such public meetings outright. The second is the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which has established a media and information commission empowered to register news outlets and accredit journalists. It has been the source of an intense crackdown against Zimbabwe's free press, most notably the shutdown of the only independent daily newspaper, *The Daily News*, in 2003.

Those two laws have now been joined by the Non-Governmental Organizations Act, enacted by Parliament on December 9 last year, December 9 ironically being the eve of International Human Rights Day. This legislation gives the government sweeping powers to interfere with the operations of any NGO in Zimbabwe through a government-appointed NGO council. It also, critically, prohibits Zimbabwean NGOs from receiving any foreign funding to engage in human rights work. While this law has not yet been signed into force, it is already having a chilling effect in the country. It will be a disaster for victims of human rights violations and for human rights defenders in the country. These three pieces of legislation cannot stand. All three must be repealed.

Second, we were obviously dismayed at the ongoing human rights violations in the country, targeting individuals and groups who expressed any opposition to, or who are perceived to be in opposition to, the current government.

• (1545)

Abuses include arbitrary imprisonment, torture, rape, killings, threats, and the banning of peaceful meetings and assemblies. Victims include the political opposition, notably members and supporters of the MDC; women's groups, such as followers of the courageous and energetic Women of Zimbabwe Arise; lawyers who defend opposition figures, such as the inspiring Beatrice Mtetwa; and church leaders, such as the outspoken Catholic archbishop, Pius Ncube; and more: trade unionists, journalists, those opposed to the government's approach to land reform, food security monitors, human rights groups, and organizations working on constitutional reform.

There is no sector of society in the country that is immune or safe. It was clear to us that more has to be done to provide protection to victims of human rights abuse by increasing the funding and support that organizations receive, intensifying human rights monitoring by embassies, and by bolstering the ability of lawyers to go to court on behalf of victims of human rights abuse.

Third, the continuing food crisis in the country was deeply worrying. It has been elusive to get reliable figures as to Zimbabwe's food needs. The government is not transparent about either its supply or needs. This only fuels widely held concerns that there will be political manipulation of food supplies in the lead-in to the upcoming election. Food has clearly been used as a political weapon

in the past, with maize supplies distributed on a discriminatory basis and often denied to supporters of the political opposition.

Part of the problem here has been that land reform in Zimbabwe has been pursued in a manner marred by violence, corruption, and blatant disregard for the rule of law. Land reform can, and must, be advanced so as to more fully realize human rights, including the right to food. That has not been the case to date. Instead the approach to land reform has led to human rights violations and increased food insecurity.

Fourth, we were alarmed to learn about the extent of the displacement crisis that has resulted from Zimbabwe's current tragedy. It is possible that as many as 3 million Zimbabweans have fled the country over the past five years, two-thirds of whom have likely escaped to South Africa. Some 400,000 Zimbabweans currently reside in Botswana, a staggering figure that is equivalent to more than 25% of that country's population.

The situation has reached a point of desperation. In South Africa, authorities resist all efforts to allow Zimbabweans to access the country's refugee determination system. Zimbabweans are subjected to violence, extortion, mass roundups, and deportations. They are targets of racism and discrimination from the police, government officials, and the general public. In this context, they face physical attacks and also find it very difficult to gain employment, attend school, or obtain health care. The latter point is of particular concern given that Zimbabweans living in South Africa, like Zimbabweans still in Zimbabwe, are living with a high rate of HIV/AIDS infection. An unknown number of Zimbabweans die weekly in South Africa from AIDS.

The South African government's and the international community's response to this refugee crisis has been shamefully inadequate.

Let me quickly highlight our key recommendations for Canadian policy and action.

Canada, like other western governments, has understandably tread cautiously with respect to Zimbabwe, fearful not to speak out in ways that could allow President Mugabe to take political advantage and dismiss the criticism as being neo-colonial. In the country we heard repeatedly that Canada has strong moral stature and credibility, in Zimbabwe and within southern Africa, and could play a far more active role in addressing the Zimbabwean crisis than has been the case to date. That does not mean adopting a strategy that would be primarily confrontational, aggressive, and involve highly visible public criticism of the Zimbabwean government. It became clear that the critical role for Canada would be to work concertedly with other African governments, particularly, but not only, those in southern Africa, to help facilitate a stronger African response to the situation in Zimbabwe. African governments—obviously South Africa, but not only South Africa—are the governments that are decisive in resolving this crisis.

We have called, therefore, for Canada to develop a new comprehensive Africa-wide, Africa-based, and Africa-focused strategy for Zimbabwe, one that would work within and take advantage of the influence Canada has within key multilateral venues, including SADC, the NEPAD Secretariat, the African Union and the Commonwealth.

•(1550)

We further called on the Prime Minister to appoint a high-profile, politically powerful champion of such a strategy. We initially called for a special envoy, an individual whose profile, background, and reputation would stand up to any possible criticism of their being biased. This individual would likely do most of his or her work outside Zimbabwe, involving skilled shuttle diplomacy between African capitals and working within multilateral fora.

We did have initial feedback from Canadian officials expressing concern about a special envoy but indicating some possible willingness to consider, or at least think about, a special representative. However, five months since making the recommendation, there have been no steps taken in that direction.

We have also urged Canada to put in place a program of support for Zimbabwean refugees in southern Africa, including by initiating resettlement directly from Zimbabwe, which could be done by officially designating Zimbabwe as a source country under Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. This should also be accompanied by boosting resettlement of at-risk and vulnerable refugees from countries in the region, such as South Africa and Botswana.

We have been disappointed at the lack of response to our recommendations. We believe they point to a solid way forward for Canada, a strategy that recognizes that the best chance for a solution to Zimbabwe's crisis will come from within Africa and a strategy that identifies an important role that Canada can play in that regard.

Time is obviously of the essence. If a special envoy or representative had been appointed in the fall, he or she could already have been working to address the critical human rights, democratic legitimacy, rule of law, and governance issues associated with the upcoming election, but even now it is not too late—and of course the work will continue beyond the election.

It is our hope that this committee will endorse the recommendation for a new and comprehensive Africa-wide Zimbabwe strategy, championed by a special representative, and that it will also call for a refugee protection program that ensures Canada is doing more to address the massive Zimbabwean displacement crisis that has been one of the many sad and untold outcomes of the country's humanitarian catastrophe.

Thank you.

•(1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much. You were excellent, too, by the way.

Our next witness is Jim MacKinnon.

Mr. Jim MacKinnon (Program Officer, South Africa, Oxfam Canada): That's hard to follow. I do not follow very well after Linda and Alex. I'll bring out my golf balls.

I'm going to follow a little bit on recent events. I think they've been covered quite well by both Alex and Linda up to this point. I'm going to start with some highlights of what's going on in the country now.

As you know, the election has been called for March 31. This is a special moment in Zimbabwe, but it must be highlighted that this is a parliamentary election, not the presidential election. Mugabe is in power until 2008.

The MDC has decided to participate in the election, though under an official protest. COSATU, which will probably be highlighted by Steve later, recently arrived in the country and was immediately kicked out. COSATU is the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

The African Union, which Linda highlighted, adopted a critical report on Zimbabwe's human rights record. Desmond Tutu recently was very critical about Zimbabwe, and the Zimbabwean government called him a sellout.

This week, the Zimbabwean government announced a 1,400% increase in pay for the military, and it will become clear later on why—a 1,400% increase to the military in salaries.

I could focus on a wide range of issues today, including the critical food situation, but with the election seven weeks away, it seems urgent to highlight this election. The election must be seen within the context of the three laws very clearly highlighted and outlined by Alex: POSA, AIPPA, and the NGO bill.

In August 2004, in Mauritius, the SADC, the Southern Africa Development Community, election guidelines were adopted, and Zimbabwe was a signatory. Under the principles for conducting a democratic election, the following are a few highlights of these guidelines.

One of the first ones is full participation of citizens in the political process and freedom of association. With POSA, AIPPA, and the NGO bill firmly in place, participation and freedom of expression are nearly impossible. Therefore, the Zimbabwean government is non-compliant with the guidelines.

Next, on political tolerance, in the past three weeks alone, three opposition MPs have been arrested for holding meetings—again, being arrested under POSA. Therefore, the government is non-compliant under the guidelines.

On equal access to state media for all political parties, despite recent promises to Thabo Mbeki and other leaders in SADC, the state has blatantly refused any access by the opposition to both print and television. All access to media has been denied. Therefore, it is non-compliant.

On equal opportunity to exercise the right to vote and be voted for, millions of voters living in the diaspora—South Africa and Botswana in particular, but England as well, and Canada—are being denied the right to vote. Up to three million people are being denied the right to vote. Therefore, there is non-compliance with SADC's guidelines.

On the independence of a judiciary and the impartiality of the electoral institutions, since 2000, over 85% of sitting MPs have suffered human rights abuses, while 0% of these cases have been brought to justice. Therefore, there is non-compliance with the guidelines.

As to the existence of an updated and accessible voters roll, the voters roll is in shambles in Zimbabwe, but few have access to it. It is reported that 800,000 deceased people are registered as eligible voters, out of five million people on the voters roll. In addition, 900,000 are registered under the wrong address and therefore denied the right to vote. The numbers in that voters roll that are actually living in South Africa, or Botswana, or England is not clear.

• (1600)

Therefore, the Zimbabwean government is non-compliant with the guidelines it signed.

Last is a mechanism to assist planning and deployment of observation missions. South Africa has stated that it will not send its own delegation, but only a couple of members, to the SADC group. So by all accounts, there could be a couple, 20 or 30, or who knows how many, observers who are going to watch and monitor the election in 120 constituencies. Therefore, the government is non-compliant with the guidelines.

These are just a few highlights, but you get the picture.

In addition, under the new electoral act, the government now has the right to use military personnel to be election officers. This is under the new electoral act; this did not happen in previous elections. In addition, 50,000 youth, or Green Bombers, have recently been trained to be deployed for the elections. These are not promising indicators.

Canada needs to make clear statements now that the environment is not conducive to free and fair elections. It seems somewhat pointless to wait until the polling day, since an election, as we know, is not only about one day.

So where do we go from here? I think we have to be clear that ZANU's goal is the complete destruction of the opposition. This includes not only the MDC but also civil society and many of the partners that Canadian civil society works with. Then they want to consolidate power and get recognition, first from African countries, within southern Africa first, then Africa-wide, and then look to the international community. I think if they get African recognition, which I believe they probably will, the international community will probably pack their bags—maybe slowly—after the elections and leave, because they feel they have few choices left for influence in the country.

I think now is the time to undertake a comprehensive analysis, as Alex very clearly outlined, on the situation and then provide options and recommendations, to civil society, international NGOs, and to embassies.

In closing, it needs to be highlighted that civil society and the MDC have remained peaceful despite relentless attacks from the government. All indications from all independent groups since the year 2000 are that over 95% of human rights abuses have been perpetrated by the state.

Africa needs this fine example of people who are trying to bring about peaceful change. We need to continue to support these brave people who are working for democratic change. In the past, Canada has demonstrated leadership on southern Africa—and at times on

Zimbabwe. We need to continue this commitment that we have earned international recognition for.

Finally, I would like to highlight the important role of Canadian parliamentarians who are currently taking part in an MP twinning campaign. We ultimately hope that their involvement in this campaign will foster a greater understanding of the serious human rights crisis in Zimbabwe and perhaps a desire to push Canadian officials to do more than tolerate the status quo.

Thank you very much.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

I won't make any more comments about the quality of the witnesses.

Mr. Benedict is here for the Canadian Labour Congress.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Benedict (Director, International Department, Canadian Labour Congress): Good afternoon. With your permission, I'll begin in French.

As Alex mentioned earlier, we are part of Zimbabwe Reference Group. Unfortunately we were not able to join their delegation. However, in September, my colleague Marie-Hélène Bonin and I spent some time with our fellow union workers in Zimbabwe.

Naturally, we discussed the economic situation in this country and the impact of Mugabe's policies on the formal sector of the economy — which is shrinking with each passing day, on the informal sector — a sector that is growing daily — and on farm workers.

We also met with a number of union activists. I clearly recall one young woman of 23 or 25 years of age with a shorn head. Since she was in and out of prison much like people enter or exit their homes, she explained that given conditions in Zimbabwe's prison, it was much easier for her to keep her head shaved. She recounted with amusement that women are packed so tightly into cells that when one wants to roll over in the middle of the night, everyone must follow suit, like dominoes, because it's impossible to do so alone. This brings to light a certain reality that people often view as merely theoretic problems.

[*English*]

In your kits you have a copy of our report from our trip to Zimbabwe. You also have a report of trade union violations, which the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions has put together. It covers the period up to last September. One of the major strategies the government uses is this constant postponement of the hearings. Trade union leaders go to a hearing and they have to take a day to prepare and a day to travel, and travel is difficult. They get there and the hearing is postponed and reset. This means that these charges then sit over the heads of trade union leaders for months and months and years. It's a way of making sure they are not able to carry out their functions.

As a result, Zimbabwe has been in front of the International Labour Organization now for a number of years, and the behaviour they seem to exercise at home they carry into the international arenas, and they behave in absolutely abominable ways. Last June the Minister of Labour proceeded to insult in particular the Canadian delegation for being critical of the lack of respect that Zimbabwe was showing toward its trade unions and the ability to carry out its affairs. Since then the situation has continued to worsen.

As Jim mentioned, on October 26, a trade union delegation from South Africa, from the Congress of South African Trade Unions, was kicked out for interfering in Zimbabwean affairs. The reality is they came to meet with their counterpart to talk about the situation as it affected Zimbabwean working women and men. On the first of February a second delegation was kicked out, and then the general secretary and the president of COSATU, and today, trade union educators from the Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Council were thrown out of Zimbabwe for failing to provide a security clearance from the Ministry of Labour. The Ministry of Labour in Zimbabwe doesn't have such a thing as a security clearance, but it doesn't matter. These trade union educators from southern Africa got thrown out all the same.

Despite all of this repression and the use of bills like POSA and the NGO bill, which are held over when they should have absolutely no impact on the trade unions because they are recognized bodies in Zimbabwe, both labour and the churches in particular continue to function, probably because they are part of internationally organized networks, which might be one of the reasons.

It has not been reflected in the documents the Canadian government has been producing. Last week, for the consultations on human rights that the foreign affairs department held, the one page on Zimbabwe completely failed to recognize any of that.

Now we're heading into elections. The last elections in 2002 had representatives from trade unions from South Africa and from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions - African Regional Organization. It's a bit of a wasted effort in 2005. Given that everybody else is being thrown out, there's a pretty weak hope that we are going to be able to have any kind of trade union monitors in this upcoming election. Essentially, it's a no-win situation for Zimbabwean working people.

It's clear that Canada can't be openly at the forefront of an international position on Zimbabwe, that our African colleagues are going to have to take the leadership on that, and they are.

• (1610)

The Canadian position, on the other hand, is extremely timid, essentially saying they are concerned that within the context of the Commonwealth, somehow taking a strong position would be seen in the wrong way. By the same token, it's not doing much to push its partners in Africa—South Africa, SADC, the African Union. It had collected some capital, some standing, with the initiative started in Kananaskis, the NEPAD, and things like that. It is wasting those by not taking a more forceful approach vis-à-vis those.

It seems to me that in addition to the recommendations that Alex and Jim have outlined as part of the work we've been doing, it may be time for Canada to consider hosting a conference, in Canada or

elsewhere, to actually begin to inform our positions on this and look at how to develop a more assertive and aggressive policy vis-à-vis Zimbabwe after this last set of elections has been stolen.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Would your colleague care to add something further. No.

[English]

Who wishes to ask questions? I assume everybody?

Will you try to give time to your colleagues, too, Mr. Goldring?

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Yes, thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Freeman and gentlemen, for your presentation this afternoon.

I wish we'd had the information here earlier, before the meeting, so I could have done a little reading on it too. I beg forgiveness if I'm not really up on all the situations, but I do want to comment on a couple of issues you mentioned, because I can see the benefits in other parts of the world.

Take the Caribbean, for example. There was just recently a member of Parliament appointed responsible for Haiti. Another member of Parliament was appointed responsible for Grenada. I think those types of actions serve very well.

When you're talking about electoral reform and monitoring of the elections, although it may not be directly comparable, having had Ukraine just come through the process, I think it follows through there too. I really do think that in a situation like Ukraine, it would be a very good idea once again to have a member of Parliament be specifically responsible for monitoring, helping, and following through as Ukraine starts moving toward going into the European Union.

I would tend to agree that in the case of this country too, that would be beneficial to do.

I have a question here. You said MPs are twinning. Would that be MPs twinning with MPs there? Is that what you mean, that type of relationship?

When you're talking about Canada having a good relationship with most of the African countries, and there's a high amount of respect involved there too, the question I suppose is, does Zimbabwe have this equal amount of respect, and should Canada become more engaged internationally in specializing in election monitoring? I think Canada could probably play a very pivotal role there around the world. But is this something that would be widely received by the country itself, by the leaders themselves? How exactly would we be able to offer this in a fashion that would be accepted? Are you suggesting that it would have to be leveraged by other African neighbours to possibly put some influence on this type of monitoring?

In other words, how could Canada...? It's one thing to have it and it's one thing to have it available. Certainly, I agree you'd need more than 20 or 25 monitors in a country that size. But suppose Canada did have teams of hundreds of people prepared to go. Exactly how would they do it?

•(1615)

The Chair: Which of you wishes to answer that?

Mr. Peter Goldring: I think, Alex, you were talking about the electoral part of it.

Mr. Alex Neve: I think a number of us did. I will say a couple of things, and I'm sure I have other colleagues who would like to add their comments.

First, on your question about twinning, it is a twinning initiative between Canadian members of Parliament and Zimbabwean members of Parliament. This goes back to the time of the presidential election. There was a program launched at that time that involved about 15 Canadian parliamentarians, both members of Parliament and senators, who entered into twinned relationships with at-risk MPs in Zimbabwe.

Each of those relationships ended up looking a bit different. Some people were in regular phone contact with each other, some exchanged emails, and some even had opportunities to meet in person because some of the Zimbabwean MPs involved actually travelled to Canada at various times. It was a very important source of solidarity and I think protection for some of those MPs. We've heard from many of them that they'd like to see it continue and be sustained.

In this lead-up to elections once again, it's obviously a critical time to look at that again. There are a number of MPs—some here in the room—who are part of that initiative and others who aren't yet and would like to be could easily be in touch with Jim or me and we can certainly facilitate that happening.

I would also like to pick up on your opening comments about the fact that there is obviously a track record of Canada appointing special representatives and special envoys for other countries. You mentioned Haiti and Grenada. There has also been Sierra Leone in the past. Right now there's a special envoy for the Sudan peace process. Sometimes it's MPs, sometimes senators. Clearly, there is something to build upon, and we think Zimbabwe is an obvious example of another country that would benefit from this kind of attention.

With respect to electoral monitoring, I think the challenge we have right now is whether we had 20 or 200 or 500 Canadian monitors ready to go into the country, they wouldn't be allowed in. I think right now the option that is primarily open to Canada points toward looking at SADC's electoral processes and electoral guidelines and that sort of thing, to Canada working within SADC to make sure that this body is empowered to vigorously and effectively implement and enforce the protocol it has established. This is probably where Canada is best positioned to play a role.

The Chair: Professor Freeman, did you wish to say something?

Prof. Linda Freeman: Yes. I think it's a bit of an illusion that we're going to have any influence within a SADC monitoring team, because fundamentally SADC has set down principles, which the Zimbabwean government is not complying with, and it's not going to do anything about it. That team almost has its report ready in advance to say that it's all going to be free and fair.

We're not going into a situation where simply because of some of the good opinions people may have about Canada in certain respects,

we're necessarily going to be listened to. It's a situation in which African opinion doesn't agree with us, by and large. I think it's a much more subtle, difficult, and complex situation than normal, and it's going to require a special sensitivity to the openings that come, because they are coming a bit. There's been a huge reaction to the refugee problem, which Alex talked about, to the economic collapse of Zimbabwe, to the impact that Zimbabwe has on NEPAD, and other things.

It's not that it's a closed shop. But at the moment, we're considered to be part of the enemy, part of the western world that's trying to get rid of a regime they support.

•(1620)

The Chair: Jim, can you be very brief, and Steven, please, because he's way out of time.... Everyone wanted to speak to this.

Mr. Jim MacKinnon: I'll try to be brief.

Just on the MP twinning, yes, there is this existing project. Your chair, David Kilgour, is very much involved. One of the main purposes is that people in Zimbabwe, MPs, feel like there's someone outside watching, the fraternity among MPs throughout the world, I think.

Around the issue of observers, I think there are creative ways of supporting African observer groups. If you go back to 2002, a subgroup of the SADC Parliamentary Forum actually went into Zimbabwe and declared the elections not free and not fair in 2002. And I think there are things that were funded mostly by USAID and I think the EU.

There are creative ways of looking at this. What we're trying to say is that, yes, you're not going to take Canadians and transport them, as we did with the Ukraine, but I think there are creative options within southern Africa outside of just the official SADC. There are initiatives happening on the ground.

I'll stop with that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Clavet.

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to begin with a general comment. No one is happy to see political violence and abuse escalate. On the contrary, people are dismayed when this happens. The Canadian Labour Congress made a number of suggestions in a very fine report. While certain situations can be denounced, it's important to look to the future. Mention was made of gradually bringing in labour legislation that would be considerate of the welfare of workers.

Is it not merely wishful thinking on our part to believe that sound labour relations will gradually take hold when deep down, the climate is so poor and the situation so chaotic? Are we moving in the right direction by asking for such legislation? The idea as such may be a noble one, but is it realistic to demand labour legislation? The reality of the labour movement in Zimbabwe goes far beyond anything we can imagine.

Mr. Steven Benedict: We use the word “gradually” because the international community, and in particular, the International Labour Organization, is trying to get the Government of Zimbabwe not only to review woefully inadequate legislation, but also to put in place a system conducive to new labour legislation, a system that meets basic standards.

One way of broaching this subject with this hard-line government is by employing various strategies, including ILO involvement. As I was saying, the government doesn't appear to be responding, but that doesn't mean we should give up either.

Mr. Roger Clavet: My additional question is directed to all of the witnesses. I'm curious as to whether the suggestion that Canada organize a conference on Zimbabwe might be an interesting, realistic option to consider.

[*English*]

Would having Canada host a conference on Zimbabwe be a good start?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Benedict: As part of the NEPAD initiative, CIDA had organized a conference here in Canada bringing together a host of civil society stakeholders to discuss potential courses of action. The conference proved to be moderately successful.

The suggestion that a similar conference be organized specifically to look at the policies that Canada should pursue is intriguing. Such an initiative would be one way of imparting information to representatives of SADEC in South Africa, for example. It would also resolve in part the problem of perceived Canadian interference in African affairs. The aim would be to impart some information on Canada's position and to begin developing somewhat broader strategies than the ones we've seen thus far.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you both.

Mr. Broadbent.

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'd just like to add to what's been said about the twinning. I recently joined the twinning project of MPs, which is another attempt going around to get more members to join in.

There are three areas I want to quickly ask about. One is the South African government's abominable attitude, as I would describe it. Would any one of you who has more expertise in the politics of the region than I have like to comment frankly on how we are to understand this?

The Chair: Mr. MacKinnon knows that transcripts of our proceedings go up on the website, I hope.

Mr. Jim MacKinnon: Yes.

Every time I'm in the country, Zimbabweans scratch their heads. They don't know why.

The short answer is that I think Thabo Mbeki has in a sense painted himself into a bit of a corner right now. There was a spy

scandal that happened recently, and a number of key people within ZANU (PF) were caught. They first said they were spying for the Americans, but it turned out they were spying for the South Africans. It sounds like, from all reports, they've been quite severely tortured. They're still being held, including people as high up as a guy named Philip Chiyangwa, who is a very key MP within ZANU (PF) and a very high roller.

It's soured relations between the two, but still South Africa will not come out and say anything against Zimbabwe. Mugabe has continually snubbed him. He has made agreements, as Linda has said, and then as soon as he gets onto the plane to go home, he turns and says, we're not going to agree to that.

I wish I had an answer to that. That's the million dollar question. I don't know.

The Chair: Professor Freeman?

Prof. Linda Freeman: I've written an extensive paper on this. If you give me your e-mail address, I'll forward it to you.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: If I can remember my e-mail address, I'll do that. It's a recent phenomenon for me.

Prof. Linda Freeman: Okay.

I think there's a very complex set of reasons.

The Chair: Can you share it with us all, please, when you get it?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: No, I won't share it with everyone.

Prof. Linda Freeman: There is a complex set of reasons. I think it has to do with ambitions, particularly Mbeki's, in terms of South Africa's position in Africa. I think it has to do with domestic considerations and also regional ones. There's a whole range of...

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I assumed it was that, but I wanted to know the particulars.

Prof. Linda Freeman: It's a very long story. Because there's been such support in Africa for Mugabe, because he's managed to make his construction of this crisis stick—as being one of finishing an anti-colonial struggle—Mbeki, if he wants to have a role as the major African leader, has to be in tune with African opinion, both abroad and in Africa—especially strong in the region, but also at home, among his own people.

The other thing to remember is that South Africa has a land problem that is, if anything, worse than Zimbabwe's in terms of inequality. There has been strong support in popular opinion. When Mugabe came to Mbeki's inauguration last summer, the South African elites stood and cheered him. He's been received with cheers second only to Mandela in South Africa. But it goes much further than that.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Thank you.

I would like to get a copy of the paper. Steve, if you don't mind, because of my time limitations for questions, I'd like to go to another issue. It's directly related to this.

All four of you, if I've understood you correctly, have said—at least two of you said it, while the others seemed to tie into it—that leadership on this issue must come from Africa. You're all nodding.

What if it doesn't come from Africa? Are we to stand back? When there's a problem in the Ukraine, we Canadians can say that we had to remain quiet or quiescent, and turn it over to the European Union. We're not a colonial power. I can see why some white countries, historically, in parts of Europe, can be accused accurately of being former colonial powers, but we can't be.

I remember a few years ago, as the vice-president of the Socialist International, supporting a mission led by Olaf Palme—and I didn't hesitate to do so—that consisted of whites going in and talking about African affairs on a human rights basis. Why are we hesitating? If African countries aren't standing up, why don't we—including the NGO communities—stand up? Why do we say it has to be led by Africans, if they aren't leading?

• (1630)

Mr. Jim MacKinnon: I don't disagree. I actually think that one of the things.... If we're painted as a white nation, we're not a white nation any more. We're not—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Or a colonial nation.

Mr. Jim MacKinnon: —and we should be able to use that platform to say that we're not.

I agree. Maybe that's part of the Africa-wide strategy we're asking for—at a certain time, when we don't get any results, we don't just censor ourselves any more. It has to come into a more comprehensive strategy. We look at it, say we've had enough, and look to our next step, because just silencing ourselves is not good enough, either.

The Chair: I think everyone wants to have a go at this. Steven Benedict is next.

Mr. Steven Benedict: The answer is that African nations—and, certainly, in terms of the international trade union movement, African trade unions—are taking very sharp and clear positions of leadership on the issue. It is not just South Africa; Nigeria, Ghana, and a whole number of countries are taking very strong positions on it.

You mentioned earlier the question of the South African government. In the coalition, two partners out of the three, the South African Communist Party and COSATU, have very clear positions on Zimbabwe. The situation, in short, has changed significantly within the coalition over the last two years. There has been significant movement within the coalition.

It's important to make sure that, rather than acting as an isolated group, we are feeding into the process that is happening in Africa. I think that's the distinction.

The Chair: Professor Freeman, and then Alex Neve.

Prof. Linda Freeman: Just to follow up on the previous remarks, you have to work with the action where it is. It's going to be trade unions, churches, the less-than-state role—which is a little

uncomfortable, sometimes, for the Canadian state. That's where the hope is, and it's a long-term hope. I don't think this situation is going to be turned around in a hurry.

The Chair: The last word....

Mr. Alex Neve: I just want to highlight to not interpret our recommendation as suggesting that we think Canada's voice should start to become mute or silent. Absolutely we think there continues to be an important role for Canada to say what needs to be said and to do it clearly and in outspoken ways. But in terms of adding on to the strategy, looking for new approaches, we think the value-added isn't so much upping that rhetoric or intensifying the kinds of public statements that are being made; the value-added that Canada could bring now, drawing on our multicultural identity, drawing on that sort of moral stature we have in southern Africa and political capital we have in Africa more widely, is to begin to assist and facilitate and cajole and urge that wider African response at both the state and non-state levels to continue to deepen.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bains.

Mr. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you.

Based on the comments, especially now in light of what Mr. Broadbent has been able to bring to the forefront...initially I was under the impression, Alex, after hearing your comments, that we needed an African response to this crisis, but after hearing Mr. MacKinnon clearly illustrate that the environment is definitely not conducive in any shape or form, we can bring all the observers we want, but when you look at the numbers, the staggering numbers in terms of five million voters and how many are claimed to be dead or whatever, my question or concern now is that I believe even though we're perceived as a threat or we're perceived to be the enemy, so to speak, as the professor has outlined—I'm talking about Canada—what can we do above and beyond rhetoric? I acknowledge that if we step up our rhetoric, it could cause alarm and it would backfire on us, but do you have any other concrete policy recommendations above and beyond what has been stated in the past?

This question is open to everyone.

The Chair: Alex.

Mr. Alex Neve: I would just come back to our recommendation that where Canada should be focusing in terms of additional steps or value-added is this idea of really starting to work in a very coordinated, comprehensive, cohesive way throughout Africa, that there's a coordinated African-focused strategy that Canada is pursuing.

• (1635)

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Do you think it's a viable one in light of the situation where they perceive us to be the enemy—that is, the western world—where they have this anti-colonial perspective? There's very little accountability within and among the other nations as well in terms of how they operate.

Mr. Alex Neve: I don't think we were saying that Canada is seen as the enemy throughout Africa. I think that was a particular concern about how President Mugabe either perceives Canada or, more importantly, has been able to portray Canada.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: So what nations could we work with? What countries do you recommend would be good allies in this cause?

Prof. Linda Freeman: I'd say Ghana, and Nigeria especially. I think this is a situation where there are not going to be any pat answers. You're going to have to work on your feet and see how things unfold.

There have been some democratic movements in Malawi, of all places, in the last few weeks, and in Zambia as well, in their anti-corruption efforts. So you sort of see where it's coming up, but you're against a continent that has been, in a sense, slapped around, bossed around, has a very heavy colonial history that is still very fresh in many people's minds, and whether we like it or not, we're included in the broad umbrella of western countries on certain issues. So it's going to take sensitivity and great care.

The Chair: Mr. MacKinnon.

Mr. Jim MacKinnon: Yes, and on top of that, I did focus on the elections now in 2005. They're basically seven weeks away. But as I said earlier, Mugabe is in power until 2008, so we have short-term needs and we have a longer term in which we can work on a strategy.

I think we can also go back to some of the lessons we learned around South Africa and some of the stuff that happened within the anti-apartheid struggle, both with Canada playing and with a whole bunch of other partners.

To identify specific countries, you have Botswana within southern Africa. We have a new president in Mozambique. I think we can probably work there. As Linda said, there's Zambia and Malawi. If you look at southern Africa, they're all Commonwealth countries. So there are a lot of people, and they come and go and it becomes better. But Botswana is in a really difficult position, with over 25% of its population now being refugees from Zimbabwe. So they can be helped and can be helped very concretely.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Do you think we should prejudge the elections, or do we wait for the election outcomes?

Based on your comments, I'm under the impression—

Mr. Jim MacKinnon: I think the Government of Canada has to look at a strategy and be prepared. It can't be looking on the day that happens. March 31, in all likelihood, could be very peaceful, because everything else has been fixed before. So you have to be very, very careful, and you cannot be surprised. It's very difficult to announce before, but you have to know very clearly that this is not going to be a free and fair election. What is the response going to be? Long before the election they announce that they won.

The Chair: Ms. Torsney.

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): In terms of the African response, it's a bit like "I can say my brother is a jerk, but if you say my brother is a jerk, I'm going to get very upset with you; we'll solve our own family problem". I think we saw that at one of the recent Inter-Parliamentary Union meetings where we were working on an issue related to the Sudan. The Africans said, "Sorry, we'll take care of it; don't you dare". Canada had a little more opportunity as a non-

colonial power. But there clearly was the perception that they'll take care of their problem.

I do believe there is great opportunity to support the rest of the neighbours. Certainly in Ghana and Nigeria, Canada has worked very well.

Professor Freeman, you mentioned that South Africa has a problem with the land issue. But Namibia and some of the other countries have issues they're having to deal with, so they're in a difficult spot. Perhaps through supporting civil society and some of the other organizations we can assist and make sure that people are in a position to move quietly. I think there are some great examples, whether it's from Georgia or Ukraine, of peaceful ways to ensure that civil society is able to do things in a peaceful manner. Obviously, conflict is also expensive.

A number of parliamentary associations, beyond the twinning arrangement, will be meeting in the next few months, such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has done investigations into the political process and has written letters to the governments about MPs who are not treated properly. They do have the opportunity to put these issues on the agenda and to network within organizations of parliamentarians. Most of us around this table have some capacity to do that. I hope you would also support us in continuing that effort.

I really appreciated your presentations. I look forward to working with you and to hearing from the officials about how they are doing. We certainly will ask the question about the special representative.

● (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Broadbent would like a further round.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: We will hear, as Paddy said, from the officials later today.

I have a question for Steve about recent Canadian government statements on the situation in the country that made no reference to trade unions. Freedom of association for trade unions, as you well know, is a human right, not just a so-called workers' right. Has Canada brought up Zimbabwe at the ILO? In your experience, when the Government of Canada puts out statements on human rights situations with reference to any other developing country, do they make any reference to workers' rights?

Mr. Steven Benedict: Can I just say that I didn't pay him to ask me that? If I have 15 minutes, I'm really going to have a good time.

There is a constant struggle within a number of departments of the Canadian government to get officials to recognize that trade unions in various parts of the world, whether it be New Zealand, many parts of Africa, or elsewhere, are not only about strikes and throwing rocks through windows. They are part of civil society. They are part of a construct of human and trade union rights in most societies around the world. This should be part of the sensitivity the Canadian government reflects when it looks at it. I've only been at the Canadian Labour Congress for nine years, so for nine years I've been begging for more recognition of that. Whether it be in Foreign Affairs or CIDA, there's the constant struggle to achieve recognition of what workers' organizations can bring to society and the functioning of government.

The Chair: Jim.

Mr. Jim MacKinnon: It's not all African countries. They have different reasons they don't support it. But there is this trend toward African solidarity. The AU did adopt this very critical report on the human rights situation in Zimbabwe, and I think that should be applauded.

Second is NEPAD. There is the peer review mechanism, and in a sense it holds them more accountable. The African countries wrote this. It wasn't imposed on them by the west.

The last point is there's a very good report called "Playing with Fire", which is about these 85% of MPs in Zimbabwe. It's written by a Zimbabwean group, and all the data were collected by a Zimbabwean group. I think it would be very good to submit this to the IPU, the CPA, and all the other groups.

The Chair: You get the very last word for the delegation.

Mr. Alex Neve: For the last word, I'd like to bring the voice of Canadians into the room.

I just want to highlight that in our work in Zimbabwe, we have very much been engaging Canadians across the country from coast to coast on these issues. Most recently Canadians signed an electronic petition Amnesty International had launched urging the Canadian government to look seriously at these ideas of a comprehensive Africa strategy championed by a special representative. The petition has gone to the Prime Minister. I brought a copy of it, though, just for the committee's interest. It has been signed by 1,500 Canadians in just a short time span.

I just highlight that to you to reflect the fact that there is wide concern and interest about Zimbabwe in the country.

The Chair: Can we accept that as an exhibit?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: It's unanimous.

Thank you all. You were all terrific, and we are very grateful to you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you many times over for coming here today.

[*English*]

You are welcome to stay to hear the other viewpoints we're going to have.

Before we get on to the next witnesses, Mr. Bains has a motion. Maybe we could get that out of the way quickly. If you like, you can speak to the motion. Everyone has received advance notice of it, I believe.

• (1645)

Mr. Navdeep Bains: I'll present the motion. I'm not sure there'll be much opposition to it, but nevertheless, I would appreciate your feedback on it.

I move that the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Development hold a committee hearing on the Cuban government's denial of human rights, in particular that a representative from the Christian Labour Association be invited to appear before it.

There's some background to it as well.

The Chair: Does anybody have an objection to that, or can we take that as approved?

[*Translation*]

Can I have the unanimous consent of colleagues?

[*English*]

That will be part of the broader study we're doing.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Procedurally, did you just say we were accepting this?

The Chair: That's if nobody objects. He has also given notice, so really it doesn't—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I have a bit of a concern. I just had it confirmed by a representative of the CLC that the head of this organization is a former vice-president of a bank and that in terms of a trade union association, there's some serious question about whether we should be seeing it as a trade union body. That for me is a question at this point. I haven't personally made any final decision, but I would just like a little more time before we proceed with this.

The Chair: The notice did go out to everybody's office, I believe, and the motion—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Well, if it's in order, then we'll vote and we'll go for it.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Calderwood is the director of the eastern and southern Africa division of Foreign Affairs. Georges Flanagan Whalen is the Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and G-8 Africa action plan, peace and security issues desk officer.

That's quite a title. Can you get all that on your card?

Mr. Georges Whalen (Mozambique, Zimbabwe and G-8 Africa Action Plan Peace and Security Issues Desk Officer, Eastern and Southern Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs): It's a couple of extra lines.

The Chair: Mr. Landon and Michel Lemelin are from CIDA.

What's the order you wish to make your presentations in?

Mr. Perry Calderwood (Director, Eastern and Southern Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs): I'll be starting.

The Chair: You have exactly half an hour. How long do you all expect to speak?

Mr. Michel Lemelin (Director General, Eastern and Southern Africa Division, Africa and Middle East Branch, Canadian International Development Agency): About five minutes each.

The Chair: Mr. Calderwood.

[Translation]

Mr. Perry Calderwood: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the invitation to speak to the committee. It is unfortunate that, three years after this committee first met to discuss Zimbabwe, the situation still continues to deteriorate, with only slender hopes for real improvements.

With the parliamentary elections scheduled for next March 31, we had hoped that we would be able to inform the committee that the situation in Zimbabwe had improved, and that there were real prospects for free and fair elections. However, although there has been a reduction in politically-motivated violence, the reality is that the human rights situation remains very poor.

We are deeply troubled by the continued selective application of repressive legislation to muzzle public debate, and the continuing state-sponsored or state-condoned violence, harassment and intimidation of opposition parties and their supporters, civil society and the independent media. The recently passed but not yet enacted bill that will limit the activities of non-governmental organizations is a particular concern.

•(1650)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Calderwood, could you get to your points, please?

Mr. Perry Calderwood: I will be three or four more minutes.

[Translation]

We are also witness to the regional impact of this crisis, with a large migration flow out of Zimbabwe and efforts by the government to limit engagement by civil society in the region. We saw this most dramatically last week, when the government of Zimbabwe denied entry to representatives of South African's largest trade union.

[English]

We had hoped to welcome the visit of Morgan Tsvangirai to Ottawa this week, which would have given us an opportunity to exchange views on the political situation in Zimbabwe. That visit has been delayed as a result of elections being called, the parliamentary elections for March 31. Mr. Tsvangirai has decided to remain in Zimbabwe to campaign for those elections.

Canada commends all Zimbabweans, whether in the opposition or in government, in civil society or in business and private dealings, who repudiate violence and intimidation as a means to direct public life in that country. We are also increasingly concerned by food scarcity in Zimbabwe, particularly in the run-up to the elections, and the possibility that food will be manipulated for political ends. My CIDA colleague will discuss this in greater detail. I believe the Zimbabwean government's own policies in this regard have considerable human rights implications.

Canada has had a strong and consistent response to the difficulties in Zimbabwe stretching back to 2000. These measures include the 2001 suspension of Zimbabwe's eligibility for future transactions with the Export Development Corporation, a 2001 ban on new CIDA initiatives with the Government of Zimbabwe, the 2001 reconfirmation of the existing policy of barring all military sales to Zimbabwe, and the suspension of Zimbabwean participation in Canadian peacekeeping training courses.

In March 2002 former Prime Minister Chrétien announced a set of actions that Canada would take to reflect our opinion of the flawed election of 2002. He announced the withdrawal of all funding to the Zimbabwean government and that members of the present government would not be welcome in Canada.

These decisions have been informed by our continuing policy stance on Zimbabwe, which is based on three pillars: speaking out actively against human rights violations; working with partners to support regional efforts; and continuing to support civil society organizations in Zimbabwe. We believe these tracks are the most effective ways to support a return to respect for human rights and good governance in Zimbabwe.

Canada has spoken out on numerous occasions against human rights violations in Zimbabwe, including our most recent interventions in December with the ambassador here in Ottawa and in Harare.

We have also had our ambassador in Harare highlight Canada's serious concerns regarding the NGO legislation on several occasions with several ministries since July 2004, when a draft was first leaked to the media. In multilateral fora, we work to bring greater visibility to the core issues of concern. For the last three years we have co-sponsored an EU-led resolution on the human rights situation at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The resolution was regrettably subject to successful no-action votes on each occasion.

In 2004 we also co-sponsored a resolution in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, which similarly failed to pass the hurdle of a no-action motion. We are currently actively consulting with like-minded states both in Europe and in the developing world regarding a potential resolution on Zimbabwe at the upcoming session of the Commission on Human Rights.

We recognize the importance of dialogue and compromise in finding an eventual resolution to the crisis. This is why through our embassy in Harare we continue to engage with parties on all sides to find ways to support an environment of greater respect for human rights and rule of law. But we're also backing our words with concrete action through Canadian assistance programs on the ground that seek not only to address the humanitarian situation, as you will soon hear from my colleague, but also the need for political dialogue; promotion of human rights; and strengthening of a transparent, impartial, and accessible legal system.

The Chair: Mr. Calderwood, your five minutes, I gather, is just about up. Could we hear from your colleague?

Mr. Perry Calderwood: I had two more points, but I'll defer to Michel. Thank you.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Sorry, does he have five minutes?

The Chair: I gather he's used five minutes.

You have two more points to make? Okay, go ahead.

•(1655)

Mr. Perry Calderwood: I'll just complete the last two points.

Within the mandate of Foreign Affairs Canada we have supported civil society and the media, most recently through the planned visit of a journalist from Zimbabwe in two weeks' time to learn more about Canada's electoral process and finer points of election coverage that can be applied to more challenging environments. Canada will continue to project our policy by engaging with civil society in Zimbabwe and continuing to press the government of Zimbabwe to respect its own constitutional and international guarantees of civil and political freedoms and rule of law.

Thank you.

Mr. Michel Lemelin: Thank you for inviting me to come before this committee to update you on our development programming in Zimbabwe, an important pillar of our relationship with this country.

My name is Michel Lemelin. I'm the director general for eastern and southern Africa at CIDA.

[*Translation*]

I have the pleasure to have with us our CIDA representative on site, Mr. Sam Landon. We asked him to join us today, given his knowledge of the subject, to help with the question and answer session.

As you know, the Government of Canada, in response to the deteriorating rule of law, decided in May 2001 that CIDA would not undertake new initiatives with departments of the Government of Zimbabwe. In March 2002, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien issued a statement following the flawed presidential election, announcing that Canada had withdrawn all funding directly to the Government of Zimbabwe.

While these measures resulted in the closing or suspension of a number of projects, we have been able to maintain a significant bilateral program of direct benefit to the people of Zimbabwe through civil society organizations, without channelling Canadian assistance through the Government of Zimbabwe.

Following the announcement by the Government of Canada that it would be suspending funding to the Government of Zimbabwe, a decision was taken at the ministerial level to retain the key sectors of governance, HIV/AIDS, gender equality, environment and food security as the programming priorities for that country. As well, it was decided that all funding would be directed through civil society organizations, and that the annual level of funding for the bilateral program would be around \$5.5 million.

In March 2003, in front of this subcommittee, we presented how maintaining development programming was still possible and necessary in Zimbabwe. Since then, the Government of Zimbabwe has been in a confrontational stance with civil society, opposition groups and the media.

A number of high profile cases, including the treason trial of the opposition leader, undermined and tested the independence of the judiciary. Several pieces of legislation have been introduced that effectively limit civil society and the media's freedom of assembly and speech.

Most recently, a controversial bill was passed by the parliament of Zimbabwe that if applied would prevent local NGOs engaged in human rights and governance work from receiving foreign funding. It is expected to receive the President's final approval shortly.

Economically, Zimbabwe has experienced a period of hyperinflation, currency devaluation, rising unemployment, and a serious decline of the key sectors of agriculture and tourism.

The country also continues to experience a growing crisis in the sectors of health and education. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a serious threat — HIV prevalence in Zimbabwe is among the worst in the world — at 25 per cent it is behind only Botswana and Swaziland.

[*English*]

The availability and affordability of maize meal, the staple food for a Zimbabwean, has become a problem. Food security, especially in rural areas, is now a grave concern, with the government having decided not to enter into an agreement with the World Food Programme for a general feeding program.

Last spring the Government of Zimbabwe stated that it does not need, and will not request, international food assistance this year. The government maintains that the country harvested enough food to meet the needs. However, an independent assessment indicated a significant grain deficit, suggesting that the government will need to import and distribute adequate amounts of food. WFP continues, however, to provide targeted food donations to vulnerable groups such as orphans and the HIV/AIDS affected.

It is in this context that CIDA provided this year only \$1 million to the World Food Programme for their regional operation in southern Africa. Zimbabwe will be included in this operation.

It should be noted that since 2002, CIDA has provided over \$17 million in food aid and other humanitarian assistance to help the population. Basically, this is to say that a serious decrease in our contribution was seen.

Zimbabwe's human development index ranking has dropped dramatically. From 2000 to 2002 it fell 20 places. It has now fallen into the low development grouping.

Despite the difficult context, there continues to be space for the operation of numerous Zimbabwean NGOs engaged in promoting good governance, providing service to those affected by HIV/AIDS, and trying to improve food security.

The CIDA bilateral program has established strong links with Zimbabwean civil society organizations mainly through the financial and management support provided to over 70 Zimbabwean and international non-governmental or community-based organizations. This support has helped to materialize their initiative in the fields of governance, HIV/AIDS, and food security.

In addition, the Canadian partnership branch supports 20 partnerships between Canadian organizations and Zimbabwean partners. The multilateral branch is also currently supporting efforts to promote health, nutrition, and food security.

Zimbabwe also benefits from original projects administered by CIDA's southern Africa and the pan-Africa program for issues such as HIV/AIDS and agro-forestry. Some examples of CIDA-funded programs include: support to 11 rural hospitals to enhance their ability to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, reaching 13,000 women a year; promoting democratic values and processes by assisting organizations to undertake research, advocacy, and dialogue among key stakeholders on important legislative issues such as elections and NGO registration; fostering political dialogue and debate at the local level in order to reduce politically motivated violence; and developing business models to empower rural women through innovative income-generating activities.

In 2003-04 CIDA contributed a total of \$14.4 million in Zimbabwe. In a difficult environment, the CIDA Zimbabwe program monitors closely the implementation of its delivery strategy. All indications are that the program's current orientation remains relevant. Flexibility and responsiveness are the chief characteristics of CIDA's initiative in Zimbabwe.

In the current circumstances, the most appropriate and effective way to continue to support the people of Zimbabwe is through transparent, non-partisan, and accountable Zimbabwean civil society partners, international NGOs, and UN agencies in coordination with other donors.

•(1700)

More than ever, the people of Zimbabwe need our continued support.

Thank you.

The Chair: Does anybody else wish to comment?

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your presentation. I have a question on one of the comments here, toward the end, where it was said that there was \$5 million on one page, but on the next page I think it was corrected to \$14.4 million that is presently being contributed by CIDA on an annual basis to Zimbabwe.

What was the amount that was contributed before? In other words, how much was being contributed to the country before the Parliament of Canada cut off the direct funds to the government itself?

Mr. Michel Lemelin: The bilateral program was about \$10 million a year, and it was reduced to \$5 million, by half.

•(1705)

Mr. Peter Goldring: Oh, so it wasn't all—

Mr. Michel Lemelin: Other channels that are responsive, such as food aid, humanitarian assistance, and others, continue to work.

Mr. Peter Goldring: So not all funds to the government were cut off.

Mr. Michel Lemelin: All funds to the government were cut off.

Mr. Peter Goldring: So it's only funding toward NGOs or other operators delivering assistance in the country itself.

Mr. Michel Lemelin: Exactly.

Mr. Peter Goldring: When we're looking at some of the areas that are being funded now—and certainly the rights and democracy and the governance is still being funded—and looking at the rule of law, are these not rather exasperating things to be funding, given the situation that you have a country that really doesn't want—

Mr. Michel Lemelin: Exasperating for whom?

Mr. Peter Goldring: For the Canadian government, for the funding associations.

How do you gauge by your yardstick whether you're actually making any headway in that area, given the situation? In other words, are you making headway with that funding, or is that another area that really might be futile, to be funding those areas of rights, democracy, and governance, given the situation in the country?

Mr. Michel Lemelin: Sam has a daily view of that.

Mr. Sam Landon (Head of Aid, Canadian High Commission, Harare, Zimbabwe, Canadian International Development Agency): Thank you. That's an important question that we have to keep asking ourselves. In the current environment it is a challenge to be able to continue supporting groups that are engaged in governance, human rights, and working on promoting the rule of law and seeing very little result at the national level and at the level of the rhetoric that is being put forward by the Zimbabwean government. However, what you don't hear so much about is the support we give to organizations that are engaged in bringing stakeholders together to dialogue on these issues.

For instance, we've made reference to the NGO legislation. CIDA was able to support an association of non-government organizations to host a meeting that brought together members of Parliament from both parties and key stakeholders in civil society to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the legislation.

These get discussed in these fora, and when they make it to be tabled in Parliament, we may not get everything adopted that we'd like to see adopted in terms of democratic reforms. However, we are maintaining a democratic culture in the country, particularly at the local level.

Mr. Peter Goldring: It sounds like you're losing headway on the issue, given what the government itself seems to be doing, trying to pass legislation to prevent more of these grants coming to some of the NGO organizations. I would think things are turning backwards, are they not? How do you judge whether you are actually making any gains? Or are you making any gains?

The government itself seems to be closing in more and more on freedoms rather than any opening up. So is your money that is going into the country for rights, democracy, and governance actually having a countering effect with the government itself? Are they reacting to some of this? Are they resisting the idea that outside countries would be putting money inside their country to supposedly bring about reforms that they themselves may be quite resisting? Might this be having a negative impact on it?

Mr. Sam Landon: I think that's a valid issue that we have to address. What we do in the field is sit and discuss with our partners, our CIDA funding partners and the civil society organizations, and we ask them that question: is it still valid for them to be receiving funds from us? We ask every partner: is it a liability for you to be receiving funding from us?

Mr. Peter Goldring: Well, absolutely. I get the impression in what we're talking about that it informs in antagonizing the situation rather than helping the situation, and do we want to be part of antagonism until we...? I absolutely agree that the situation has to be resolved, but are we antagonizing them by putting this—

Mr. Sam Landon: No. What we have to do is ask ourselves what the alternative is. The alternative is giving no funding to these organizations and seeing these organizations closing down and being unable to operate in any way whatsoever.

Mr. Peter Goldring: But you're funding these NGO organizations that come in too and providing for these governance rights and other issues here that have been detailed, yet you're saying on the other hand that the parliament is now trying to pass legislation so those NGOs can't receive funding. That suggests to me that the government is reacting to the intrusion of Canadian dollars into the area. Is there any sense of that?

• (1710)

Mr. Sam Landon: Oh, that's exactly what the legislation is intended to curb, foreign funding to local NGOs.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Well, I guess the question really is on the balance of what is being accomplished and what is happening here. I would hope that due consideration is given so this wouldn't be aggravating the situation.

[Translation]

The Chair: Do you have a question, Mr. Clavet?

Mr. Roger Clavet: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I have a question concerning Mr. Lemelin's remarks about the various programs funded by CIDA in Zimbabwe. I'd like to know if local political initiatives are encouraged with a view to curbing political unrest. In concrete terms, what kind of programs could be carried out locally?

Since we're fortunate to have here with us someone who is just recently back from this region and who normally works in the field, is it true, as Mr. Calderwood was saying earlier, that although there has been a reduction in politically motivated violence, the human rights situations remains very poor?

I'd like to hear your views on the real situation in Zimbabwe, from a political as well as from a human rights perspective. But first, Mr. Lemelin, how is it possible, with the example you've given, to work locally at the political level?

Mr. Michel Lemelin: The whole issue revolves around whether it's possible to maintain the vibrant, healthy democratic culture for which Zimbabwe is renown. Basically, what we're doing is funding initiatives by Zimbabwean groups. We're not actually doing the work ourselves, but rather supplying them with the resources. This means that there is still room for dialogue in Zimbabwean society as well as with opposition parties. Several ZANU-PF party members have taken part in activities that have been backed not only by CIDA but also by other creditors. These involved discussion of such crucial issues as amending the constitution to ensure freer, more open elections. Obviously, results have been poor, considering the government decisions that were ultimately taken. However, if we don't fill this small gap, what's left for us We must seek to maintain a transitional approach.

[English]

Mr. Sam Landon: I guess I can provide another example. I provided one already.

One of the other programs we support is a program of peace committees that are being established around the countryside at the district level. This is bringing together local members of both parties, as well as key stakeholders in the community—church leaders, traditional leaders—to deal with the issue of political violence, identifying perpetrators of political violence and identifying appropriate responses.

This has really created a level of tolerance at the local level and an understanding of party politics and the democratic process, etc., and I've seen this first-hand. Whether this is filtering up to the highest levels at the moment is hard to give you any results on at the moment. I think we need to continue and to sustain support to that type of work at the local level in the hope that this will have an effect at the higher level.

• (1715)

Mr. Roger Clavet: Would having a special envoy there, as was suggested by different organizations, be a good way?

Mr. Perry Calderwood: We have in fact received and heard that suggestion from a number of NGOs, and the government has looked at it very carefully and welcomes the idea. On reflection and consideration, the government's assessment is that conditions are not right for a special envoy to play a productive role. You may be aware we have special envoys doing good work in Sudan and in the Great Lakes region. But those are environments where all the parties involved are prepared to meet with a special envoy, whereas in the case of Zimbabwe, indications are that that's not the case at all, so we do not see great value in it.

The Chair: Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: First of all, I would like to give my party's strong support to CIDA's activity in continuing under these particular circumstances to support civil society organizations. I think it's very important that CIDA continue to do that.

I would like to get back again to the special envoy issue, though, that two or three of the NGOs that were here talked about.

Wouldn't there be some merit in giving some focus to Canadian policy on this country? Even if, as you say, in the short run the government in question refused to meet him or her, in terms of coordinating activity with other African countries, coordinating activity amongst international NGOs outside the country, focusing on the problems of that country, wouldn't there be merit in having a special envoy? One hopes at some point the Government of Zimbabwe itself would agree to meet with this person.

Mr. Perry Calderwood: As I said, our assessment is that there would not be value in it. In fact, if you look at Zimbabwe's history over the last three or four years, we've seen how effective President Mugabe has been in using well-intentioned initiatives and turning them on their head. That's another consideration that should be kept in mind.

It's not clear to us that the optics of a Canadian special envoy travelling around Africa trying to solve Zimbabwe's problems would in fact advance our interests.

I heard part of the previous discussion before coming here. We found in various fora such as the human rights commission at the UN that initiatives from the northern countries very often are well-intentioned but frustrated by Africa's view that Africa should be taking a leading role in addressing Zimbabwe's problems and helping Zimbabwe.

Our approach has been one of talking to key Africans who we think can be helpful and urging them in the direction that we think is the right direction. But we have to exercise some caution in the way we approach it.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Well, you heard the earlier discussion. It seems to me the suggestion that was made could still have merit: to meet with those countries that would meet with the representative of Canada—which is anything but a colonial or a neo-colonial, racist society. But set that aside; it's a difference in judgment. I respect that.

The other issue that came up, and maybe you were here for it too....

I make reference to your statement today. As you know, workers' rights are amongst the categories of internationally recognized rights.

In fact, the right to a union is the only right that is to be found in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to unions is the only one. We heard a devastating report on the condition of workers' rights in that country earlier today. There's no mention of it in your report to us today.

When I asked the general question whether we ever deal with workers' rights—whether the Department of Foreign Affairs, in discussing the human rights situation in a country, ever refers to workers' rights—the answer I got, if I understood it, was no. My question is why.

Mr. Georges Whalen: I think I was here during that part of the discussion, and I have to admit that I would beg to differ, that that isn't the position of the government.

I think all foreign services officers who have been in the field report on human rights issues. It's a core part of the mandate of general relations sections at embassies throughout the world. In going through that, in conjunction with the section in Ottawa that looks after broader human rights concerns, they go through the various parts of the mandates.

You may be aware that the Government of Canada is co-participant with the union representatives in the ILO meetings, which I think were referred to, that took place last June. Zimbabwe was looked at, and that delegation, which was a joint government and other organizations delegation, gave a strong statement on the lack of compliance that Zimbabwe had shown with the recommendations of...I think in the ILO it's not called the special rapporteur, but it's a person who has been charged with pursuing the issue.

I think it may be that sometimes the shorthand that's used in overall briefs will refer more to freedom of association, which is a broader freedom, but in my mind includes and does not cover all of the aspects of freedom of representation in labour situations. So I think that may go some way to answering your question.

● (1720)

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I appreciate that clarification, and I appreciate hearing that last year, if not in the December statement, in an earlier meeting at the ILO, the Government of Canada did talk about workers' rights. I think that is important.

I personally happen to think it should be singled out. There's a strong correlation in the history of the development of strong democracies. Empirically, it has been shown, where strong democracies develop and are sustainable, it correlates strongly with the development of independent trade union movements. I think it's always worth underlining that reality.

I will leave that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Fine.

Anybody on this side?

Hon. Paddy Torsney: I have a couple of things.

I have a copy for all members, and I have given it to the clerk, of the IPU report on the 32 parliamentarians who have been subject to human rights abuses. It will be distributed.

Second, I wonder if we could perhaps get a copy of the statement Mr. Whelan was referring to, or some kind of reference point. I think there's some dispute.

I wonder if Mr. Calderwood could outline, perhaps, what the conditions are for a special envoy. If there's some kind of a description we can get—and you don't have to give it now—for when the conditions are right, that would be helpful to this committee.

To the CIDA folks, there are some who would argue the situation is so difficult that maybe CIDA shouldn't be doing anything there and that perhaps we shouldn't be agitating the human rights groups. Interestingly enough, most of the NGO community, who is behind Mr. Goldring, was quite agitated by his perception that they shouldn't be supported. He can't see them; they're behind him. I wonder if the witnesses from CIDA could in fact explain why we continue to operate in Zimbabwe. We all have constituents who are concerned that the government should take a very hard line with Zimbabwe, and perhaps some would argue that we should get out of all activity completely and totally.

Mr. Michel Lemelin: First of all, as I mentioned before, there is still some space for dialogue. I guess we made the choice that it's better to occupy the seat rather than being completely out of the picture. The program or the presence that we would like to maintain is basically what can we do during that transition that is still developmental, that is useful to Zimbabwe, and that would keep us in the picture, prepare in a certain way our assessment of the condition to be able to return to a sort of normal practice in terms of development with Zimbabwe.

We hope there will be a change. That's what I said three years ago here, or two years ago, and it's bound to change one day. We prefer to be ready at that time, but I honestly don't know how much time we can stand the position we're handling now. It costs money, and it costs effort. But you have to think also—and I have the experience of that in a few other countries—that dismantling a program and pulling out completely, to come back two years after, is extremely costly. You lose plenty of knowledge, plenty of influence, networks and everything. What we're doing in Zimbabwe now is still worth doing. That's why we're still there.

• (1725)

Hon. Paddy Torsney: What happens if we pull out? What would be the effect if we don't do the HIV mother-to-child care program?

Mr. Sam Landon: I think that's an important question, because if we're going to consider any dramatic change, we need to know what the effect would be.

Leaving the HIV/AIDS situation aside, perhaps members of this committee are not aware that there are probably 15 to 20—I wouldn't want to be held to any number—human rights or governance

democracy-promoting organizations or civil society organizations in operation in Zimbabwe at the moment. I would say that's arguably more than most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. These organizations are creating space, although it's minimal space.

We have to remember that this regime is dominated by a few at the top. Through the projects that we have supported—for instance looking at the electoral legislation, and having civil society groups do research on electoral legislation in the region—they've been able to be seen as key players and key sources of information of government ministers, who have come to them and said, "We will not officially acknowledge that you've been engaged in this process, but we see you as potential sources of information." They can test how the population is going to react to these types of legislation.

Again, I can't say that we're seeing results at the senior level, but if you are reaching senior politicians, who maybe fall in line when they have to but not all the time, I think we're making some progress there. You pull out of that, you lose all of that possibility. These NGOs would all close down, would have to operate from outside the country, if at all, and illegally. The government in Zimbabwe could close down all opposition, as I think the picture painted by Jim MacKinnon has demonstrated.

In the area of HIV/AIDS support, anything you can do in Zimbabwe.... In a country that has 25% HIV/AIDS prevalence, we need to be there to be supporting the country.

The Chair: We have a couple of minutes, and I'd like to ask a couple of questions.

It almost seems like we're talking about two different countries, listening to your presentations and the group we just heard from. I know we're not; we're talking about the same country.

I must say, Mr. Calderwood, for you to read out the announcement that the MDC was not going to be able to come to Canada, as if somehow the invitation had come from your department, when in fact your minister and the Prime Minister have not indicated a willingness to meet with Mr. Shangari, I find that a bit thick. Do you have a comment on that?

Mr. Perry Calderwood: I didn't mean to suggest who had invited Mr. Shangari. Quite frankly, I don't know who did, so I don't have a comment.

The Chair: Your colleagues, Mr. Calderwood, who worked really well during the apartheid regime in South Africa, I think, as Mr. Landon was just saying, would like to see us do all the space-building we can in Zimbabwe and help all of the NGOs. I know they operate under, as we heard, extremely difficult conditions. But we did brilliant work in bringing down that regime. I would like to think that CIDA would continue to help anybody—and I've been to Zimbabwe—who has some ability to manoeuvre, however small.

Do you have any comment on that, Mr. Lemelin?

Mr. Michel Lemelin: I guess I agree. That's exactly what we're trying to do. It's not at all easy. There are risks to that. There are risks of being seditious, in a way. There are risks of exposing also the people we are supporting. That's another aspect of it. We're trying to do everything within the legality and with transparency, and with the clear understanding that we can pull out of any arrangement or agreement if things are not sustainable for us to stay.

• (1730)

The Chair: Why don't you ask to increase what you're doing with civil society?

Mr. Michel Lemelin: Pardon?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Why not maximize the initiatives undertaken with civil society?

[*English*]

Mr. Michel Lemelin: I think there is a question of absorptive capacity also. I mean, the space is there, but it's not that wide. The new NGO bill might cause us some difficulties to continue on with some of the things we're doing. On balance, there is also a question of approach toward various countries in Africa and in the world. That's the balance that we find acceptable for the moment.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any further questions?

Thank you very much for coming.

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Chairman, before you go, since we operated in such a collegial way here, I wanted to explain my reason for abstaining on my colleague's motion.

I apologize for not having had time to read it, even though it was sent around in advance. I had some concerns about the nature of this organization but not the question they're raising about the absence of freedom of association in Cuba.

I just wanted to say that.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): That's exactly how I interpreted it. I completely understand.

The Chair: Mr. Kenney, please.

Mr. Jason Kenney: I'm sorry I missed that. That's why I came to the meeting, but I had to leave for a minute. I wanted to comment that a number of other NGOs are concerned with the status of human rights in Cuba. The motion rather explicitly mentions CLAC, with which I'm very familiar. I'm glad; I want to commend my colleague for the motion. I hope that other NGOs concerned with this issue would be welcome and invited.

The Chair: Could you send a list of individuals?

Mr. Jason Kenney: I will, yes.

The Chair: Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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