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The Honourable David Kilgour

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Monday, February 14, 2005

• (1550)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Lib.)): We have with us today Jean-Marc Duval, ambassador of Canada to Colombia; José Herran-Lima, director of the South-American Division for the Department of Foreign Affairs; and Guillermo Rishchynski, the star, I believe. Apparently there will be two presentations.

[English]

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval (Ambassador of Canada to Colombia, Department of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Chairman, honourable members of the subcommittee, it's a pleasure and an honour to be here today, with this lovely Canadian winter, to speak to you about Canada's contribution to peace building, human rights, and development in Colombia. Thank you very much for inviting us to participate in this session of the subcommittee.

Let me say a few words on Colombia, a country where we find one of the oldest democracies in Latin America, with a history that has been characterized by chronic political violence and instability. Over the past 40 to 50 years, the expansion of armed insurgencies, their growing reliance on the illegal drug economy as a major source of revenue, and the inability of the state to exercise effective authority throughout the entire country have created a severe security and human rights situation. There has been some progress, but much more remains to be done.

Colombia remains a very important drug-producing country, supplying nearly 80% of the cocaine and heroin consumed in Canada and the United States. Proceeds finance the FARC, the ELN, and the AUC. The involvement of the three groups in narco-trafficking is a major source of violence in the country.

This conflict has claimed thousands of lives and displaced internally more than an estimated three million people, with women and minorities being disproportionately affected.

[Translation]

Since taking office in August 2002, President Uribe has been pressuring the illegal armed groups to demobilize, primarily through military means; it has been an overriding priority for him. According to the President, the conditions for peace will only be established if the security situation improves, especially by extending the presence of the government, both civilian and military, through the entire Colombian territory, and increasing the efficiency of the armed forces. The government insists this is being done in full knowledge

of the simultaneously need to promote and protect humans rights and civil liberties.

The government is currently engaged in the second phase of Plan Patriota, a large scale military operation against the FARC in the southern part of the country. Meanwhile, Mexico has agreed to facilitate discussions with the ELN and negotiations are underway for the demobilization of the 18,000 members of the AUC before the end of the year 2005.

[English]

Canada has participated actively in previous peace efforts in Colombia and continues to do so. My predecessor, Mr. Rishchynski, is here with us today. I will let him speak about his role during his three years in Colombia, especially as a participant in the Group of 10 Facilitation Commission, which was made up of Canada, Cuba, France, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Venezuela.

A few months after my arrival in Bogota, Canada assumed the presidency of the Group of 10. In April 2003 we invited the High Commissioner for Peace to address the group at a luncheon at the official residence to review the latest developments in the various peace processes and to discuss the future role of the group in any of those. He then informed us that the government did not foresee any special role for the Group of 10. It was the last time we met as a group.

[Translation]

In spite of that, we continue to seek ways to contribute to these peace efforts. In July 2003, the UK hosted a meeting on International Support for Colombia at which Canada was represented by senior officials: Marc Lortie, of Foreign Affairs Canada and Bob Anderson from CIDA. The participating countries and international organizations agreed on the London Declaration in which the international community: expressed strong but qualified political support for the government's democratic security policy, including support for peace talks with the illegal armed groups: urged the government to implement the recommendations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights promptly; and agreed to review and refocus its development cooperation programs.

•(1555)

[English]

During that meeting, the Canadian delegation underscored strong support for the work of the UN in Colombia; the need for the Government of Colombia to have frank, open, and direct dialogue with civil society; the importance of maintaining international investment confidence in Colombia; and the need to promptly implement the recommendations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The ambassadors in Colombia from the countries that participated in the London meeting—the EU, the EU commission, Norway, Switzerland, the United States, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Japan, and Canada—then established a group of 24 in Bogotá. Canada is holding the presidency until June 30 this year.

This informal group agreed to serve as facilitators in a dialogue between the government and civil society; establish with the government and civil society a framework for international development cooperation; and participate in a follow-up commission to the London declaration with the government and civil society. Numerous meetings of the group have since taken place with all partners, including government, civil society, and UN agencies.

The group was heavily involved in the drafting of the Cartagena declaration, which was approved by all participants at the meeting on international coordination and cooperation for Colombia on February 3 in Cartagena. In that declaration we reaffirmed the London declaration. We recognized the work of civil society. We supported the search for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict. We emphasized the work of the United Nations. We underlined the benefits of a humanitarian accord underlying the need for legislation that allows the realization of the principles of truth, justice, and reparation; encouraged the government to continue its effort to obtain results from the implementation of the recommendations on human rights in as short a time as possible; emphasized the need for the government to reinforce the existing means of protection to guarantee the rights of life and liberty of expression of union leaders, journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society leaders. We manifested the need for the government to strengthen its attention to the still very worrisome humanitarian situation; recognized the government's achievement in the challenges it faces; and made a strong appeal to illegal groups.

[Translation]

We acknowledged the importance of disarmament, demobilization and re-insertion of the illegal armed groups, but the international community also made very clear that we need a satisfactory legal framework, as expressed in the Cartagena Declaration, before we can consider any financing support, be it to the operations of the OAS office in Colombia or to any other proposal from the Colombian government.

[English]

I will let Mr. Rishchynski, who headed the Canadian delegation to the Cartagena meeting, speak about the Canadian statement at the conference.

As you can judge from certain of the points above, we have been active in trying to improve the situation on human rights in

Colombia. We all recognize that some progress has been made, including that involving the High Commissioner for Human Rights, but unfortunately much more is needed.

Among the positive changes that took place last year I would want to underline the now open and frank dialogue between the government and civil society, including some of the strongest NGOs in the country. That cooperation has been such that the office of the vice-president organized various meetings to review the implementation of the recommendations of the high commissioner, totalling some 40 hours of discussions.

Furthermore, we worked very closely with civil society partners in their preparation of a conference that took place in Cartagena on February 2, at which they presented participants with a global assessment of the situation in Colombia. It should also be noted that the NGOs and civil society produced their own declaration. The spirit of that meeting was far better than that of a similar encounter that took place in London the day before the intergovernmental conference.

Over the last year the embassy has also been very proactive in visiting different parts of Colombia. We made more than 20 trips outside Bogotá to allow us to acquire a better understanding of the situation and to show our support to human rights defenders in the field.

While in Canada I have also met with numerous Canadian NGOs to share our assessment of the situation and to consider how we could work together to improve it. These NGOs include Inter Pares, Peace Brigades International, KAIROS, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation,

[Translation]

Développement et Paix and Droits et Démocratie.

Our CIDA program promotes human rights and again, I will let my colleague speak to this. Foreign Affairs Canada, through its Human Security Program, has worked with various partners to reduce the incidence of internal displacement among indigenous people and to strengthen knowledge of women's human rights. The embassy has also been following and commenting on the initial legislation on alternative sentencing presented by the government last year.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our very close relationship with Canadian and Colombian NGOs, as well as with the office of Michael Fruhling, director of the Colombia Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who also visited Canada last November.

Thank you very much.

• (1600)

The Chair: *Señor* Rishchynski, you have the floor.

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski (Vice-President, Americas Branch, Canadian International Development Agency): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to appear once again before the subcommittee. I also appeared before you in September 2001.

[*English*]

In my current capacity as vice-president of the Americas at CIDA, I come this afternoon before you to speak to CIDA's programming in Colombia. I should perhaps start by saying that Canada and Colombia have enjoyed 50 years of bilateral relations, and CIDA has been an active participant in that relationship for the last 25 years, with programming in Colombia across a variety of sectors.

CIDA shares the prevailing opinion of both analysts and actors in Colombia and in Canada that despite the relative progress achieved, the precarious security situation throughout Colombia is likely to continue for some time. Given the challenges in security, human rights, and peace-building that lie ahead for Colombia, our bilateral program will continue to be guided by this assumption and thus has formally adopted the following goals and priorities.

[*Translation*]

The main goal of CIDA's program in Colombia is to support efforts in Colombia to build peace and enhance human security. The priorities of our program are to first, to increase Colombian capacity to meet the basic human needs and protect the human rights of people affected by the armed conflict; second, to support equitable participation in establishing the foundations for peace; and third, to improve Colombian capacity to address some of the key causes of violence.

[*English*]

Before describing CIDA's specific efforts in Colombia, I wish to pick up on a point made by Ambassador Duval regarding the recent meeting in Cartagena of the group of 24 countries with the Government of Colombia in the international coordination and cooperation effort with the country. This meeting took place in Cartagena on February 3 and 4.

Our key message in Cartagena was that while Canada valued what it considers to be a privileged relationship with Colombia, we continue to use every opportunity to remind Colombia of her international obligations and commitments, particularly in the field of human rights. Indeed, we made it clear at the Cartagena meeting that Canada considered the recommendations of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as the standard for measurement, and that all stakeholders, including civil society, have a key role to play in judging the results or lack thereof.

We underlined at Cartagena that Canada viewed its role as that of a partner who was not only ready to share responsibility with Colombia and other international stakeholders, but was also ready—provided that Colombia led the way—to share accountability for demonstrable progress in the expansion of human rights, peace building, and democracy in the country.

We reminded the Colombian government that our aid program was developed in consultation with them and was in line with their priorities. However, we did express our concern over the lack of sustained investment and actions, at times, in Colombia in addressing key priorities, such as support for internally displaced people, security and protection of aid and human rights workers, and support for civil society's activities.

Much has changed in CIDA's programming in Colombia since the 1990s. According to preliminary figures, total Canadian aid disbursements in Colombia reached \$10.5 million in 2003, a marked increase from the \$7 million in fiscal year 1999-2000.

The reason our programming has increased and our priorities in Colombia have changed is a direct result of the current situation in the country. To cite some facts and figures, there are currently somewhere between 2 million to 3 million internally displaced Colombians due to the conflict in the country. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports that some 41,500 Colombians are living in Venezuela, Panama, and Ecuador, having crossed borders as a function of the conflict.

In a sober recognition of reality, there are estimates that some 14,000 children are presently involved as combatants, spies, extortionists, informants, sex slaves, and cooks in Colombia, and it is reported that a child in that country is kidnapped every 37 hours, many times into the service of an armed group.

Regrettably, women represent more than 50% of the internally displaced persons in the country and head more than 30% of households of internally displaced people. Women who are internally displaced have a much higher rate of domestic violence against them compared with non-displaced women.

The plight of the indigenous peoples in Colombia and the Afro-Colombian populations, which are important minorities in the country, are one of the greatest tragedies of this conflict.

Our program at CIDA is implemented by Colombians in partnership with proactive Canadians. What we are trying to do is to address the needs of these very vulnerable populations. We have changed our priorities radically since the 1990s. Since 2002, following the subcommittee's report on the human rights situation in Colombia, eight new multi-year bilateral projects have been approved, which CIDA is in the process of implementing.

Let me cite, if I may, some key programs in that regard. First and foremost is a five-year, \$5 million project that seeks durable solutions for the internally displaced people in northeastern Colombia near the Venezuelan border, a project that seeks also to develop the capacity of Colombia's civil society to collaborate in legitimate processes to address both the causes and effects of the armed conflict and forced displacement.

We are also involved in the creation of a national school for community justice, which will build on the capacity of civil society to analyze, advise, and design programs for mediation, conciliation, negotiation, and consensus, and pacts to improve the administration of justice and reduce conflict at the community level.

•(1605)

[Translation]

Canada continues to be a very important source of funding for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Columbia. By 2006, CIDA will have contributed \$3.3 million to this office.

[English]

Since 2002 we have focused our efforts in a very compelling way in the area of child protection. We have approved three new projects valued at some \$4.1 million, which are being implemented by key NGO partners including Foster Parents Plan of Canada, Save The Children Canada, and a consortium of UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration. These three projects are intended to support preventive measures that will enable children and adolescents to avoid becoming participants in the violence and provide increased educational opportunities and peace-building and leadership skills to children in some of the most affected areas of the country. Our minister has recently approved an extension of the Foster Parents Plan project in particular, which last year was celebrated by UNESCO as a global best practice in the area of child protection.

Ambassador Duval made reference in his remarks to the fact that drugs continue to fuel the conflict in Colombia, and CIDA has recognized the need to participate in alternative development strategies to ensure that those involved in legitimate rural and agricultural production do not find it necessary to move toward illegal activities. Last year we inaugurated a five-year, \$5 million rural recovery project, which is being implemented with ECOFONDO, a long-standing and respected partner with Canada in Colombia and one of the country's most prominent NGOs. It will support rural families, including indigenous and Afro-Colombian families, so that they will have viable economic alternatives to illegal drug cultivation.

CIDA is also in the process of establishing a program support unit to improve and increase efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of Canadian official development assistance provided in the country. With our partnership and multilateral branch colleagues at CIDA headquarters, we continue to contribute to important organizations working in Colombia such as Peace Brigades International, and also the work of the Colombian Red Cross, supported by the Canadian Red Cross here in Ottawa at their headquarters.

While bilateral programs remain central to CIDA's activities in Colombia, consultation with other branches is ongoing within our organization, and we are attempting to foster a whole-of-government approach that includes Foreign Affairs, IDRC, CIDA, and other elements of the Canadian government that have been meeting informally over the last two and a half years to share information, review programs and projects, and discuss strategies.

Mr. Chairman, after the committee's study on Colombia in 2002, CIDA took to heart the recommendations to focus its programming on issues associated with human rights and vulnerable populations. We are in the process of implementing that program, a program that Canadians can take great pride in. Regrettably, the situation in Colombia continues to be challenging, which means that CIDA and

Canada will need to continue to be engaged. I would like to think that at some level we are impacting positively on the lives of people, one by one, day by day, in the search for a time when in Colombia peace, justice, and equity will be what Colombians share, as opposed to the history of violence that has too often been part of their history for the last half century.

Merci beaucoup.

•(1610)

The Chair: *Muchas gracias.*

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ambassador, gentlemen, thank you for your presentation.

I certainly would agree it sounds like there are immense challenges in Colombia. This will pose one of my questions.

After 40 to 50 years of continuous aid... I'm sure Canada has been involved for quite a few years—I'd like to know how many years—and there has been aid from other countries around the world that are involved. Perhaps you could tell me how much aid is coming into the country on an annual basis at this time, specifically in the area of trying to develop and encourage human rights and the safety of the people.

What would be the international aid commitment to Colombia on an annual basis now?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: I can tell you, sir, that from a Canadian perspective we have been programming in Colombia for some 25 years, probably since the late 1970s. Today, with a figure of about \$10 million in bilateral assistance, we would say that three-quarters of that at least is directed in some way, shape, or form toward human rights programming. I'd hesitate to give you a specific figure for other donors, but we know, for example, that the European Union is heavily involved in programming associated with human rights, as is the United States, which has been a donor in Colombia prior even to when Canada became a donor.

In terms of total aid flows to the country, I don't know if we have information that's up to date with respect to those commitments, but both at the London conference in 2003 that Ambassador Duval made reference to and at the recent meeting in Cartagena of the group of 24 countries it was reiterated that human rights programming would continue to be a fundamental base of all bilateral development assistance into the country, and as a principal mechanism therein, continued support to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which many of us see as the *sine qua non* in terms of measurement of progress in the country.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Then suffice it to say that on an ongoing basis it would be many times the Canadian contribution into Colombia for those areas.

The Chair: Did you wish to answer, Mr. Rishchynski?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Yes. It's just to say that from a Canadian perspective, we're probably mid-table in terms of overall programming. The EU and the U.S. are clearly leagues beyond us in terms of annual development assistance, but at \$10.5 million we compare very favourably with people like the Dutch, the Swedes, and others.

Mr. Peter Goldring: But how much is it in total dollars? We might be in mid-range on our commitments, but how much in aid would be coming into the country of Colombia on an annual basis from all of the countries that are contributing.

• (1615)

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: U.S. assistance alone to Colombia, and this would include assistance it provides of a military nature, probably exceeds \$2 billion a year, but a lot of that is not aid in the same sense as what we deliver through our bilateral program. But if you look at donors such as the Nordic countries and France, Holland, the U.K., and Spain, you'll see that all of us are in the same relative order of magnitude, with programs of somewhere between \$10 million and \$20 million a year. There is an awful lot of investment being made by the international community, particularly through the multilateral system as well, through the UN agencies.

Mr. Peter Goldring: During another meeting last week it was of concern to me that the Government of Zimbabwe, for example, was attempting to pass legislation to prevent NGOs within their country from receiving outside aid. Would it be fair to say this isn't the circumstance in Colombia, that instead the Colombian government itself recognizes the need and is in fact quite open to aid from NGOs in other areas?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: That is correct, but there have been statements from time to time with respect to the work of NGOs in the country. Canada has raised attention because we feel the government has a responsibility to ensure the protection of human rights workers and aid workers across the country, given the important work they do for those victims of the conflict.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Given the recognition and that the government would appear to be cooperative on aid and would also appear to listen, I suppose, I suppose, to suggestions from international organizations on how they can improve their human rights status, does the international community have the same level of reach and dialogue with the other elements in the country with respect to problems internally?

First I would ask this. In the notes here it indicates that the Government of Colombia has committed itself to removing anti-personnel mines and probably—and I'm saying "probably" because it should probably be expressed as a question—to participating in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, that is, to not using child soldiers, not recruiting them into their own army. I would hope that international pressure would prevent that from happening, but what about other forces with the country itself? Do they have any acknowledgement or acceptance of what I would call very basic levels of human rights—at least, in their internal disputes?

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Duval, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: Thank you.

You're talking about the other three groups.

Mr. Peter Goldring: That's right.

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: We have no contacts. That doesn't mean we cannot pass messages, but we have no direct contact with members of the other three groups. We pass messages, first, through the church, which has good contacts with all of these groups; second, with the International Red Cross; and also with the UN. But no bilateral mission has direct contact—well, I won't speak for the others; I'll speak for Canada. We don't have contacts with the other three groups.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Does having no contact mean they're not observing any of the no land mine or child soldier statutes?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: We try to get their attention as much as we can. When, for example, Colombia destroyed its last stockpile of land mines last year, there were some articles where the international community called on the illegal groups to do the same thing as the government.

You talked about the children in these three groups. According to Human Rights Watch, roughly 25% of the members of these three groups are kids. There was a lot of publicity when the book was released in September 2003 with people from Human Rights Watch in Colombia to have a press conference. That's how we can try to pass the message, but we do not have direct contact with any members of these terrorist organizations.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Madam, you have the floor.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Ambassador, gentlemen, good afternoon.

I would like to put my first question to Mr. Duval.

Does Canada acknowledge that there is a real armed conflict in Columbia?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: The answer is yes. In fact, the word "conflict" is in the Cartagena Declaration.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: As Canada's official representative you acknowledge this fact, but does the Colombian government acknowledge it?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: President Uribe began his speech in Cartagena by telling us that there was no conflict in Colombia.

• (1620)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Canada and Colombia therefore have opposite perspectives. He does not feel there is a conflict.

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: That is correct.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: If my memory serves me well—and correct me if I am wrong—, the non-governmental organizations have asked you, in your capacity as chair of the G-24, to do everything you can to make the Colombian government admit that there is an armed conflict in their country.

Can you tell me what you have been doing to make sure this happens?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: I don't know if you have the text of the Cartagena Declaration, but paragraph 6, where references made to the G-24 members, states the following:

They supported the efforts and recognized the advances in the search for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the situation of internal violence generated by the conflict with the illegal armed groups...

I wouldn't say that we managed to have the word "conflict" included in the text at the price of a conflict with the Colombian negotiators, but some very extensive discussions with them were required.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Could you tell me, so that I understand the semantics, what you mean by "they"?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: That refers to the G-24 member countries.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I would like to know what you yourself did to have Colombia acknowledge that there was an armed conflict within the country.

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: This document was crafted with the Colombian authorities. At first, on a Monday morning at 8:00 a.m., we had a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the High Commissioner for Peace. During that meeting, the high commissioner told us that the word "conflict" was not acceptable to the Colombian government.

We met again on Friday and we were told that including the word "conflict" in paragraph 6 would be acceptable. That is what Canada did, in fact that is what the troika did, because we were three ambassadors within the G-24 working together to convince the Colombians to accept that the word "conflict" be included in the Cartagena Declaration that we were negotiating with them.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: How did the other countries react?

I'm sure you are aware that the Canadian NGOs were very disappointed when they learned that you had not manage to have Colombia acknowledge that there is an armed conflict in their country.

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: I myself make a distinction between the government and Colombia. As far as the president is concerned, clearly there is no conflict. He told us that at a meeting that was held with the NGOs on December 15 in Cartagena.

In terms of the members of the G-24, it is mainly the troika, that is the Brazilian and Spanish ambassadors as well as myself, that took responsibility for the negotiations between the group of 24 countries and the Colombian authorities. After the Monday meeting, when we told our colleagues that putting the word "conflict" in the declaration was not acceptable to the government, there was a certain amount of discomfort, for lack of a better word.

We continued those discussions and finally managed to have the word "conflict" inserted in the document. Perhaps you know that consideration of a bill providing a legal framework to the process with the AUS was going to start the next day in Parliament. Just to illustrate to what extent the government did not want to use that particular word, I would just tell you that when you were given a copy of the bill in Cartagena, we were told that it had been further somewhat modified and that four senators had been withdrawn, including senator Pardo. Wherever the word conflict was mentioned, it had been struck from the government's version of the text, except

in one place. Thus, in a bill with 55 clauses, the word "conflict" is only found once. That is the government's position. We have tried to explain to the best of our abilities that there will be consequences to this, that we have not managed to change the President's mind.

● (1625)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Ambassador, I would like to ask you a question that should also be addressed perhaps to M. Rishchynski. I don't know which one of you should answer.

In Colombia, the government supports impunity. Not much is done to punish those who were guilty. This situation has been denounced by the NGOs that we are familiar with and by Amnesty International. The government is just as guilty as were the factions. This issue is lands that have been taken away from women, and that that has been going on for a long time.

That being said, CIDA, a provider of millions of dollars, does have a plan. CIDA gives money to countries that demonstrate good governance. A Canadian woman is in prison currently. Her name is Ingrid Betancourt. First, I would like to know what Canada is doing to assist Ms. Betancourt and her family who, by the way, live in my ridings.

Second, given that Colombia is not demonstrating good governance, why is CIDA still giving it several millions of dollars?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: I will try to answer part of your question and then I will ask my colleague to continue.

With respect to impunity, I will read what appears in the last sentence of paragraph 9 of the Cartagena Declaration. This is what is written:

They took note of the recent changes in the legal system aimed towards the strengthening of justice and of the fight against impunity.

As of January 1st, the Colombian government has amended its legal system, not in the entire country, but only in some departments. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these new changes. We can only hope that the problem of impunity will be settled, because, we cannot deny that it does exist. A legal change has been instituted, and we will try to work with the government to improve the situation.

Let us also look at paragraph 15. One of the successful results of the meetings in London and in Cartagena de Indias was to identify six thematic blocks to better coordinate international cooperation for Colombia. One of the thematic blocks is the strengthening of the rule of law and human rights. We hope that by working with Colombia in the six key areas identified by the government and civil society, we will help the country improve its approach to the rule of law and human rights.

I would like to deal with one final point relating to paragraph 10. This is what is written:

... the need to reinforce existing protection measures in order to guarantee the right to life and freedom of expression of trade unionists, journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society leaders...

I can tell you that this was added one Friday after our meeting with one of the largest Colombian NGO's, Alianza, some members of which had been threatened. Some of their projects outside Bogota had also received threats, and they had asked us if we could, in negotiating, try to include a reference to this right. We stated it at the beginning of paragraph 10, for the government and for the illegal groups, it is at the end of paragraph 10.

The Chair: Mr. Rishchynski, would you like to add something?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I would like to add a few words about impunity. Why is there impunity in Colombia? It is not really because there is a lack of compromise in the country's written law. It is, rather, a matter of intimidation that exists in a context where violence is prevalent, and has been for the past 50 years.

In many parts of the country, the government has no presence. The State is simply absent. The citizens cannot seek protection from the State which has left them on their own. In that context, impunity is the consequence of institutional weakness. There is intimidation when people seek justice and the system cannot respond or protect these people.

Why is CIDA still present in a context where there is very little governance? We are there because of the victims among the Aboriginal people, the women, the displaced persons. The problem has become so serious that we believe we have a responsibility, as a donor country, to direct Canadian programming to the victims, to try to do whatever we can for these people and give them a little hope.

That is Canada's contribution to the country. We cannot change the Colombian context. Only the Colombians can do that. However, perhaps Canada can be there to improve the living conditions for one or two Colombians. In that way, we can build a critical mass within the civil society, within those parts of the government that want to change the legal environment and eliminate impunity. We must work with that sector in the hope of accomplishing something good. That is why we are still there.

• (1630)

The Chair: Madam, your time is up.

[English]

Mr. Broadbent.

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

First of all, I was pleased to hear about the emphasis the Government of Canada has had both in CIDA and in other parts of our foreign affairs activity in supporting civil society organizations, whether it's women's groups, indigenous people, or concerns about children. These are all to be commended.

There is, however, a notable gap, and before I come to the gap and ask questions about it, I want to use part of my time—and I want to be interrupted if I run out of time, and I will come back in the second round if I don't get to the questions—on this. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first draft written by a Canadian, prominent among the rights is the right to an independent trade union. In the covenant on political and civil rights, which came some years later, prominent there is the right to an independent union—in

both covenants, political and civil rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, and the right to an independent union. It is the only right that came in the post-war system that is to be found in all the principal documents of the UN. I want to suggest, because of the complete absence of reference of the discussion of the right and existence of independent trade unions in Colombia in documentation, that this is a concern.

I was reminded of it, as many people in Canada were, watching memorial programs about the Holocaust and what went on in the concentration camps. Appropriate emphasis was put on the Jewish community. What was not mentioned very often was that in addition to the Jews who were there, there were trade union leaders, social democrats, and socialists.

I would suggest it's not accidental that in the UN system right after the war, the rights of independent unions were crucial in all three UN instruments, because social scientists have found in the evolution and development of democratic societies that the presence of an independent trade union movement is a crucial variable. In fact, an American human rights scholar has recently said it's a sort of bellwether of other rights, whether the freedom of association for men and women to organize exists or not.

It's this background that concerns me, that in the briefing that was done last March, for example, of the NGOs prior to going to Geneva, the workers' rights situation in Colombia wasn't mentioned, nor in the documents for today.

I have the most recent report of the ICFTU, which is the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and what's in that? Well, what's in that is that Colombia is the murder capital of the world when it comes to independent trade unions. In the most recent year, 90 trade unionists were assassinated in that country for attempting to do what they are obligated to do morally, which is to organize independent unions. There were another 295 who received death threats. I'm told 95% of the murders committed have remained unpunished. It's widely believed the people responsible are the paramilitary organizations that have carried out their brutal, vicious, murdering activity with the tacit support of the state, or the Government of Colombia.

My question is why, in preparing documentation for us on human rights, given the importance of the right to an independent union in the development of a democratic society, we have no reference to the fact that Colombia, of all the countries in the world, is the murder capital when it comes to trade unionists?

We have representatives of the ILO. In preparing documentation, for example, for this meeting or for briefing our NGOs in March, why do we not consult with the ILO people and ask them for their reports on what's going on in Colombia?

I welcome your comments.

• (1635)

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: Thank you, Mr. Broadbent.

The trade union situation in Colombia is very, very bad. I'm not arguing with your opening remarks. I have some different numbers than you, but the issue is not numbers here. The situation is very, very serious.

We talk about the union leaders in the Cartagena declaration. I didn't mention them in my general statement on human rights, but they are mentioned in the same paragraph 10 that I was referring to earlier.

We have a situation in Colombia where you get roughly 800,000 union members affiliated with roughly 2,300 unions. Some of the union leaders are benefiting—if I can use that word—from the protection system of the Department of the Interior. There are still a high number of deaths every year. The numbers I have here I can give to you.

According to the *Escuela Nacional Sindical*, the national school of syndicalists, 60 trade unionists were murdered between January and November; the government puts the number at 37. Again, no matter what the figures—37, 60, the 90 you have in the brief, the 295 death threats, 95% impunity according to your report, Mr. Broadbent—it's a very serious situation.

I can assure you that we try to address it with the question of impunity, to make the comment time and time and time again to the government that they have a problem with impunity. Last year there was a meeting that the Vice-President called with the Minister of Foreign Affairs two or three weeks before the annual ILO meeting in Geneva. That was at a time, you might recall, when Ecopetrol was on strike and the situation in the country, especially in the city, was very tense.

We quickly turned to the question of impunity. It is recognized as one of the most serious issues the country has to address with trade unions, with teachers, etc.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: May I just interrupt to ask one question on this?

Dealing with impunity is important, but as you just said, the situation is horrendous. I would have liked to have heard that as part of the opening statement.

I come back to my general democratic concern. I am concerned, of course, about the individuals who were murdered in that country, but in terms of democratic institution building, it's very important. Most of us are unaware that the city of Berlin, for example, throughout Hitler's reign never voted for Hitler in a majority. I repeat, in the 1930s, when Hitler was making progress all over the rest of the country, he never won Berlin. One of the major reasons he didn't win Berlin is that there was a democratic trade union movement. The development of studies, I repeat, around the world, including the strongly established industrial democracies, show there's a very high correlation between the recognition and support of these rights for ordinary working men and women to get democracy, if you like, in the workplace....

I'll just leave it at that and say it would seem to me that CIDA's programs should put more emphasis, as one of the human rights, in the development of independent trade unions to get this firmly established in civil society. Certainly, when we were talking about what's going on in the country, especially if it's the worst country in the world when it comes to trade union rights, I, for one, would have liked to have heard more about it.

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: I would just comment, if I may, Mr. Broadbent, that the Government of Canada clearly is aware of these

concerns. In fact, I would say to you, sir, that our refugee program administered by Canadian Citizenship and Immigration has made union leaders a focal point in terms of accepting refugee claimants. Many Colombian union leaders have found refuge in this country; we may need to take more. But in that context, I think we are trying to do what we can.

Your point with respect to CIDA programming is a point well taken. I know we are addressing this in the context of the community justice initiatives we're doing, for example, the National Community Justice School style of project, which allows us to work at the level of communities, so people understand that the right to be able to join a trade union is an inalienable right of citizens.

We could do more, and that's something we will take back and report to the committee at a future date.

• (1640)

The Chair: If there's time, we can come back to this.

Do you have something to add, very briefly, Mr. Duval?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: Yes, I have something to add very quickly.

You might be aware, Mr. Broadbent, that during the Ecopetrol strike last year, some people were kindly asked to stay home. The court came out last week with a decision asking Ecopetrol to take most of these people back as employees of the company and members of the union.

The Chair: Mr. Bains.

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

First of all, thank you very much for coming out today.

I need your help to understand some of the programs you outlined in your remarks, Mr. Rishchynski, specifically item 17(a), the project that seeks durable solutions for internally displaced persons. Was the program started in 2002?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: It began around 2001, but it actually hit its stride in 2002.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: So it's a five-year program. Does that timeline still hold true?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Yes, sir.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: What solutions have been developed?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: This is in the northeastern part of the country near the border with Venezuela. These are people who have been displaced from their homes and their traditional areas of activity. It is virtually impossible for these populations to consider going back to that situation because the level of security in the areas they came from is simply not there. Rather than their being displaced without any livelihood or any form of economic viability, this program seeks to work with them to find ways to ensure that they do have a livelihood and they are receiving the kinds of skills training that is necessary. We want to ensure that in the areas where they now are congregated, usually around the city of Cúcuta or in Pamplona, near the border with Venezuela, the opportunities are there for them to engage in legitimate economic activities so that they can remain viable and will not be forced, as is often the case in Colombia, to seek economic viability through illegal means, such as by becoming members of an illegal armed group or getting involved in drug cultivation. So that's what we mean by durable solutions.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: What other stakeholders are involved? Are other countries involved in this program?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Indeed they are. Project Counseling Service of Scandinavia is a prominent partner. Inter Pares is the main Canadian NGO involved in this program. In fact, what we're looking at here is an international consortium, with Scandinavia and Canada being involved in working with these groups to establish programs that will ensure their economic viability and lessen the threat against them and their dependants.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Roughly how many people are involved in this program in terms of Canadians? Do we have an idea?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Do you mean the number of Colombians involved or Canadians?

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Both, but I was gearing it more toward Canadians.

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Most of the staff who deal directly with the internally displaced families are in fact Colombians who are engaged by the program. Many of them know the area. Clearly, being able to speak the language is essential in dealing with families who are primarily from rural areas. These are people who have been involved in the agricultural sector, not urban dwellers, and they have been forced to leave the countryside to go to the cities.

There is an ongoing presence on the part of both Canadian and Scandinavian NGOs in monitoring the activities. In fact, one of the positive things that has been established is a relationship with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, which is involved on the Venezuelan side of the border in attending to many families who have fled to that geographic location.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Will the program continue after the five-year timeline or will it be shut down? How will that play out?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: I think much will depend on the local security situation. If the situation in that part of the country is such that people can go back to the farms and houses they had to flee from because of acts of violence, then we'll look at tailoring the program accordingly. It is impossible to say to you today what might transpire in 2007, so we remain engaged. If it becomes necessary to continue this program or perhaps shift our focus to another region in Colombia where the displacement problem has flared up, we will do so.

The good news is that the number of internally displaced persons in the country has fallen over the course of the last year.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: I believe you stated it's three million.

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Yes, two million to three million. The number of new cases of displacement was lower this past year than in previous years, but it's still at the level of over 100,000 people annually.

● (1645)

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Is this the first year that has been on the decline?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Yes, the first time in a very long time. Will the trend continue? It isn't enough that displacement goes down, it's the confidence of people to go back to their homes. That can only be provided by a guarantee of security and the knowledge that in going back to their homes, they're not going to be subject to the kinds of violence and intimidation they were before. So an improvement in the overall security situation is absolutely essential to long-term solutions for the displaced.

At two million to three million people, we're talking about many people who were displaced a decade ago or longer. People continue to be displaced today as violence flares up in one part of the country or another. So it's a continuing challenge and problem. The social services provided to many of these people are critical, because the displaced are, in a sense, dealt with as a class that no one wants to provide services to, such as access to health and education.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Are the people who have been displaced predominantly farmers? Can they be classified in a specific category like that?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: I would think that the majority of recent displacement in Colombia has been of rural populations because there is a struggle to take the land, to move that land to utilization for illegal drug cultivation.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: What kinds of jobs or activities would they be engaged in? As farmers, how would they integrate back into society?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Some of them have mechanical-type skills, working with motors, for example. To be a farmer in Colombia in this day and age involves some level of rudimentary skill, at least, with respect to machinery. With upgrading of skills, training, possibly those people can move to working in light industry and things of this nature, but it all depends on levels of education in many instances. Colombia has a reasonable rate of literacy in the country—in excess of 85%—so these people at least have some semblance of education.

The big problem for the rural poor in Colombia is that they're caught between a rock and a hard place—either they displace or they become the forced labour, if you will, for the illegal drug cultivation. Many of them feel that the only solution ultimately available to them is to flee. And when they flee to urban centres, they quickly find that they can't get medical attention, can't get education for their children, and so they're forced into illegal activity again as the only source of economic viability. It becomes a vicious cycle for them. That's the kind of thing we're trying to address in a very specific geographic region of Colombia, one that we chose strategically, because we found that there was not a lot of service from the state. Regrettably it's one of those areas that I mentioned in response to a previous question, where the presence of the state was less than fulsome.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Is it safe to assume that this pilot project will go to other regions as well? Have the other regions been identified?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: It could conceivably, but many other donors are working in other regions of the country. The European Union, for example, has selected the Magdalena Medio. The Magdalena Valley is an area of their activity, working with displaced populations. The British are looking at other parts of the country. We're trying very hard through donor coordination efforts to ensure that we don't duplicate, so we're not tripping over each other as donors in the same parts of the country. By choosing the northeast tactically with the Scandinavians, it then allowed other donors to focus on other parts of the country, be it the Atlantic coast or the Pacific coast or the interior valleys where the coffee regions are, and through that, bring the most assets to bear, if we can say that, from the international community to support the UNHCR, which is present in Colombia, in the work that they're doing, insofar as planning to deal with attending families.

One of the great tragedies, if I may, is that when you're displaced in Colombia, the Red Cross and the local government network of social solidarity will provide attendance to you and your family for a period of three to four months, but then the emergency assistance ends. What happens to these people? They are really left to their own devices. It's then that we try to pick up the ball, as it were, with respect to families that are facing long-term displacement, and ensure some level of viability for them in their lives.

The Chair: Mr. Goldring, next round.

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

Mr. Ambassador, breezing through the backgrounder, I find this note in there:

Indigenous rights are among the most advanced in the world, however the Colombian government has not complied with many of its obligations, making indigenous people among the most victimized in the conflict and most marginalized in society.

This is a theme throughout, that there are rights. Mr. Broadbent was mentioning the trade difficulties because of the murders and the crime, and saying that the trade organizations too have rights on the books, that the civil society have rights on the books, and that the government may perhaps be the problem. It's a government that's in denial of recognizing that there is a conflict going on, a government that perhaps really is at the base of the problem. Perhaps the area of human rights in which we're providing support may more effectively be geared and directed toward electoral reform and governance enhancement.

What percentage of the aid that is going into the country now is directed in those areas? After 25 years of putting aid into the country and 40 or 50 years during which we've identified there's a long-term problem, has this been mainly attributable to problems and difficulties with the government? Perhaps we should be working more toward electoral reform and bringing good governance.

• (1650)

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: Thank you.

The situation with the indigenous is a serious one. On the first part of your question, they represent 2% to 3% of the population. They have, if my memory serves me well, something like 30% of the territory. By constitutional right, they have two seats as senators—I think they have two seats as senators. There are some guarantees provided in the constitution. That's the good part.

The bad part is that they've been suffering tremendously this year from various events. Some of their leaders were kidnapped. The indigenous people organized a protest, walked throughout the country, and obtained the release of some of their leaders. Others were not as fortunate. You'll find some of them around the Sierra Nevada, close to the Caribbean Sea. It's a mountain of roughly 5,000 metres. Because of movement in the valley by groups, the paramilitary, the indigenous have to move higher and higher up all the time, leaving behind some of the centres that are important to them for their religion and culture.

It's an issue the government has. Through their policy of democratic security, the government is trying to expand the security presence of the state in most parts of the country. It is still a challenge. The number we hear is that they established a state security presence in 158 cities in 2004. That's not enough, and the government knows that. We keep telling them it's nice to have security, but you need another presence from the state for education, health, and training to make sure the people there not only get a police officer, a police station, and an army presence, but also can benefit from all the other services the state is providing.

In December 2002, when foreigners were kidnapped in the Sierra Nevada and released before Christmas, there was a report prepared by various organizations, including the church. One of the stronger recommendations that came out was to tell the government that the security presence was well done, but we need the rest of the state to be there to provide full services to all Colombians.

Mr. Peter Goldring: What are we doing to encourage this within the electoral reform of the country itself? Are they receptive to working with them?

We had issues in Haiti, for example, where there are also extreme difficulties and where the government here has appointed a member of Parliament to draw some attention and to focus on the situation.

I suppose the question is twofold. Are we doing enough in helping the electoral advancement of the country itself? Would it be recommended to appoint a member of Parliament to draw vocal attention to this issue and address this on a more regular basis?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: I can say, Mr. Goldring, from the point of view of laws, that Colombia probably has a stock of laws on the books that in the written word exceed our own in terms of both depth and sophistication, but the problem is in the practice. What we have, in my personal judgment, is a society where violence has reigned for the last 50 years to the point where it is now the first solution for most problems as opposed to the last recourse. We have homicide rates that exceed those in Canada in certain parts of the country by factors of 100, and this is exacerbated by a problem that guns are in wide circulation in the population. As a result, you have a recourse to violence in the society writ large that is frankly rather overwhelming for Canadians who go and live there, when we see it in terms of murder rates in cities that are the size of Toronto that literally far exceed what we in Canada can rationally comprehend.

The problem we have in Colombia is that in the absence of a national consensus to change the process.... They had constitutional reform in 1991 that created a constitution of over 250 articles, but the constitution still remains an inorganic document in terms of ensuring that the practice of the rights enshrined in that constitution are not susceptible to the waves of violence that have wracked the country. When you add to this the fact that illegal narco-trafficking is fuelling, with money, a kind of society where the bad guys—if one can use that term—are better armed than the good guys, you're in a situation where it's just a vicious circle that perpetrates itself.

We, in that environment, have elected to focus more and more of our attention, with our modest aid dollars, on victims, in a recognition that those who the state cannot for any reason attend to and those who are most vulnerable are where our values as Canadians can best be put forward. From that standpoint, we do what we can.

The committee visited Colombia in 2001. It had very extensive consultations, called witnesses in the country, at the embassy, to try to understand the culture of violence that has dominated in this society. And gratefully, last year we did see some reduction in the incidences of violence, but we're still looking at murder rates, frankly, in the society as a whole that are utterly unacceptable.

• (1655)

The Chair: Mr. Goldring, you were shortchanged last time, so make it very short, please.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Is there a strong effort internationally to participate and to work on good governance if Canada is not there? What types of resources are they bringing to bear to that, and are they making any headway on it?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Absolutely. We and other donors are working closely, for example, with the office of the human rights ombudsman, which is an entity of the state. We're working, for example, with the attorney general's office of Colombia on things like witness protection programs, to ensure that those who come forward as witnesses are not subject to the wanton violence we see. We're working with the prosecutor general to ensure that in prosecutions being brought forward, they have the kind of technical support and assistance necessary to bring forward the cases in a manner that's consistent with some sort of judgment that results in justice.

What we require in the environment is a cultural mindset change away from one that sees violence as the first recourse to one that sees violence as the last.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Thank you.

The Chair: Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Rishchynski, you must not misunderstand what I said earlier. I have travelled to a number of countries, and I have seen the people from CIDA working there, and I find that they do a wonderful job. I am not challenging the value of the programs, which are undoubtedly quite acceptable.

However, the situation in Colombia is a special one. We have known for some time that what goes on there is not normal. Public opinion was made aware of that fact with the news of drug trafficking, of course, and more particularly the traffic in human organs. That is when, here in Canada, people sat up and began to take notice. And they spoke out against this situation.

Today, there is an internal armed conflict. All of us here at this committee, including myself and you, and the ambassador, are well aware of the fact that the Colombian government sanctions torture, harassment, and mistreatment. Everyone knows that. You have just said that there is no internal agreement in Colombia. There is no willingness to change the situation.

Canada provides services to help those who are displaced. It is a commendable endeavour, but I often get the feeling that we are running around in circles. When it comes to diplomatic relations, I have no doubt that Mr. Duval, our ambassador, is doing a wonderful job, but how, when you are chairing the G-24, and you have not been able to change the situation in Colombia over the years, can you react in seeing that Canada devotes millions of dollars in aid to the people of that country? The fact that a conflict exists is acknowledged, without any real action being taken, as if there is no real willingness to get involved. And then, Canada turns around and provides aid to Colombia. Does that not look like a waste of money to you?

• (1700)

The Chair: Mr. Rishchynski, you have the floor.

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Ms. Bourgeois, I would simply like to tell you that many Colombians want the situation in their country to change, but they are afraid. They are exposed to a level of threats and violence that we, as Canadians, cannot hope to understand. These people receive telephone threats at home, their children are threatened and kidnapped. This is something that we, Canadians, cannot relate to.

Most Colombians do want the situation to change. We are working with those groups in the civil society. There are also elements within the government that are seeking change as well. That is where we are directing our efforts. We cannot say that everyone in Colombia is a drug trafficker and everyone is involved in wrong doing. Most people marched in the streets of the larger Colombian cities to say *No mas*, a few years ago. Unfortunately, in view of the fear and intimidation, it is difficult for them to act on their own. They are seeking the support and help of the international community. That is why we are there.

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: I would like to add something. The fact that I chair the G-24 does not entitle me to be involved in the relations that other group members have with Colombia. I act as a coordinator. There is a consensus, but each country has its own foreign affairs objectives.

Within that framework, the work that we have done with the Colombian civil society, the change that has occurred in the 18 months between the meetings in London and Cartagena de Indias, is incredible. On February 2nd, in Cartagena, four large NGOs came together, including Alianza which organized the meeting day with the civil society. Also in attendance were, of course, the Church, three representatives of the private sector including ANDAS, which is the largest employers' organization in Colombia.

All of these people worked together. We worked with them, we asked them to give us an overview of the situation in Colombia and to draft one joint communiqué, instead of two or three. The people from the civil society, whose interests are so different, the largest NGO, the employers and the Church, all managed to take part in a four-hour conference and draft a single communiqué. That is a demonstration of the ability and willingness of the civil society to work together.

Last Wednesday, I met with the participants for a follow-up, to decide what we would do in coming months, how we could work, either to carry out the projects relating to each of the six themes, or to continue to work on implementing recommendations on human rights, with everyone around the table. I don't think that is reflected in the Cartagena Declaration, nor is it in the report on human rights.

However, let us not forget that in May and June of last year, after making some rather harsh statements about the NGOs, the president nevertheless did meet with them. The civil society and the government are communicating. It is not perfect. It must go beyond a simple dialogue. I think this proves that progress can be made and that it is worthwhile for us to remain there to work with the civil society.

[English]

The Chair: *Ça va.*

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to go on more specifically with the situation of trade union rights in Colombia. I have here the ICFTU report, the most recent report for that country, which came out about the middle of 2004. Just for my colleagues, it doesn't give the source. This is the ICFTU headquarters in Brussels, of course, which produced the document.

According to this, it says:

A reform of labour regulations was imposed, without any form of consultation or social dialogue whatsoever, which resulted in longer working hours, restrictions on collective bargaining and the loss of previously acquired rights.

Further on, it says:

Trade unionists face attacks on their lives, freedom and integrity, in addition to the liquidation, reorganisation and merging of companies, the relocation of production to sweatshops...in free trade zones, as well as the implementation of anti-union strategies by employers, armed groups and agencies.

And there is one last reference, where it said in the same description that of all the violations against trade unionists, overwhelmingly—in fact, mostly murderous violations in the category of human rights in general—were against trade unionists.

So I come back to that and the general description of the ICFTU about the “consequence of the reforms” and the lack of consultation with the trade union community. Do you think their conclusion drawn from this and the results...? And of course in the last couple of years—surprise, surprise—trade union membership has dropped off a fair bit.

Would you like to comment on that?

• (1705)

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: I cannot comment on your figures, Mr. Broadbent, but I will agree with you that the situation is extremely serious. I'm the first one to recognize it, and I think I tried to do that in my first response to your original question.

There have been some of the elements you mentioned; TELECOM is one example, Ecopetrol is another, and EMCALI is another one. The government is trying to reorganize these entities to make them more profitable. How it does that...there's only so much we can get involved in with all of this. Where we can get involved directly are through things like the Cartagena declaration, where we call on the government to respect the right of life and the right of expression of people, including union leaders. They are here. The reason we're talking about union leaders specifically is because we know the situation. We can work with them to strengthen their justice system in a way that finally people who are threatening these people, who are killing them, will not enjoy impunity but will enjoy time in jail, as they should. That's what we're trying to do, generally speaking, to alleviate the problem of union leaders.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: In that context, in my previous work, when I was at the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development in Montreal, I went into a number of our embassies in Latin America, many of which were doing very good work on rights issues. If there was a specific violation, for example, of women's rights or indigenous peoples' rights, very often the Canadian embassy would officially object.

My question here is—and I don't know in detail myself, I'm accepting this from what I normally would regard as a credible source—when they say there is a tearing up of previously acquired rights for working people, would the Canadian embassy, if this were the case, intervene with the government and say, just as we don't expect women's rights to be violated or indigenous peoples' rights to be violated, so too we expect workers' rights not to be violated?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: The answer to that is yes. I'll give you an example.

I met twice with the leader of the TELECOM union. He was even here in Canada I think a year ago. So twice I spent an hour with him talking about the situation of the TELECOM union in the country. That's the kind of moral interest, moral support, we will give to somebody and his members facing a very difficult situation.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: But would you go to the government and express your concern about what you heard from him?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: I can tell you that at the meeting I was referring to, which occurred a while ago, roughly a year ago, before the annual ILO meeting in Geneva, when the vice-president called a meeting, there were six of us, six ambassadors, and we spent an hour talking about the situation with Ecopetrol and also talking about the problems the government has with impunity. That we did and we're still doing it.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I have one final question.

Could you tell us more generally in terms of CIDA programming in Latin America how many programs and how much money do we want put into activity fostering the development of, say, trade union rights?

• (1710)

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: We are active to some extent in some of the other Andean countries with respect to supporting union activities. But I must say, frankly, Mr. Broadbent, that we have tended to focus our efforts in supporting the offices of human rights ombudsmen and ombudspeople across the region. We're doing so in Bolivia, we're doing so in Peru, we're doing so in Colombia, and we've worked to some extent with a similar entity in Brazil.

We find that working through these ombudspeople provides us with a basis where there is a mechanism for bringing recourse to bear for grievances of a specific nature, and short of that, representations with ministries of labour, which is something the current ambassador and the previous ambassador in Colombia have done.

But I think your point made earlier with respect to specific elements of CIDA programming that might be better directed toward supporting union issues specifically is clearly something we're going to look into, and we hope to come back to the committee at some point in the future and let you know where we are.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We pass to Ms. Torsney.

Mr. Broadbent, is this your document on Colombia?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: That wasn't mine. It was provided to me and it was passed around.

The Chair: Can we put this in as part of our record?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I would appreciate that, and I was referring to it.

The Chair: I don't know if you've had a chance to look at it, but the situation wouldn't look any different now, for 2004, than it did for, say, 2003, would it?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: It might be better, but one thing about numbers in Colombia is you have to take any number with a certain reserve. As I mentioned earlier, according to one source, the number of union leaders killed went up; according to another, it went down. I think what is important is not the numbers per se, but whether the

trend is getting better. I think it's probably getting better this year. We saw less homicide. We saw fewer people being kidnapped. On the other hand, you know what is less? I can tell you what is less. Homicides, three years ago, were roughly 3,000. This year the number is only 1,000. So it is a huge improvement. Everybody, including the president, will recognize that we've made progress, but we still have a long way to go.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Chairman, just for the help of the clerk, this is from the annual survey. That's the name of the document. It's the annual survey of union rights around the world done by the ICFTU, published in Brussels in 2004.

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, when Mr. Broadbent said trade union membership was down, I wondered, because I imagine at this rate it's a pretty risky venture. I just want to clarify that I was thinking it would take great courage.

The members around this table may be interested to know that members of parliament in Colombia have also been subject to kidnapping and what have you. At least one took refuge in Montreal for a while, and has actually gone back to do that work, which is incredibly courageous. At some point someone said they don't seem to be changing things, but it seems a number of people are doing incredible work to try to make a difference and create the kind of country they all want to live in.

When you reported, Mr. Rishchynski, that every 37 hours a child is kidnapped, I looked around this room and wondered if we could imagine living in this kind of environment. It came up in some ways today—and it came up when we were talking about Zimbabwe, and it has come up in the House a few times—that CIDA is doing work in countries that have some living conditions that we want nothing to do with. Governments seem to be unable to deal with these situations.

I would just like some clarification. We obviously talk to the Government of Colombia about its priorities. We certainly talk to the NGO community. We don't fund the Government of Colombia. We fund civil society and NGOs and people who are making a difference, both on direct humanitarian need and on a whole series of initiatives, so it's perhaps an opening for some examples.

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: We do, in fact, support some organs of state. The organs of state are those I mentioned earlier: the human rights ombudsman, an organ of state reporting directly to the congress; the prosecutor general's office, in terms of the judicial system and the rigour that's required with respect to preparation of evidence and things of this nature; and the attorney general's office, in a very specific initiative associated with witness protection. So there are entities of the Colombian state that do in fact receive assistance from Canada. But the overwhelming majority of our programming is delivered through Canadian organizations and/or Colombian civil society organizations, as a means of ensuring that our assistance reaches those who have the most compelling needs.

• (1715)

Hon. Paddy Torsney: I know there has been a huge initiative to remove the stockpile of land mines, which will help somewhat, but it seems there's a proliferation of small arms. Is there anything through the Americas? There are certainly some initiatives internationally, but is there a real push on in the OAS, and particularly in South America, to deal with the incredible number of armaments, which creates part of the chaos? If the bad guys are better equipped than the cops, you're never going to get anywhere.

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: I don't have the figures with me here, but last week the Ministry of National Defence came out with how much money the three groups are earning through drugs. It's more than a billion dollars a year. Can they buy what they see fit to buy? The answer is yes. Can they control the border? We hope not, but these things are not air-dropped. So it's very.... They have a lot of money.

The state is making efforts to control its border, not only for the traffic in arms and refugees and drugs and everything—they are talking to some of their neighbours. They are talking to Peru, with whom they have an agreement. They're trying to talk with others, like Brazil. Venezuela, these days, is a little bit different. They are trying to control their borders with their neighbours, but the resources at the disposal of the three armed groups are such that, yes, at times you have the impression they're better equipped than the army.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Who's supplying all of these armaments? Are governments allowing the export of all these guns and weapons?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: No. You can pick your country of origin. People say it comes from Ecuador, it comes from Venezuela, it comes from the sea, it comes by road. If you look at the trade in the chemical precursors they need to produce their drugs, Colombia is not producing any of them. They're all imported. It's illegal trade. They are still being imported.

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: I would just add that the reason guns continue to proliferate in an environment like this is the utter lack of security guarantees. Until such time as people believe that putting down their guns and turning them in will not result in someone better armed coming after them, the situation will continue to be exacerbated in that respect.

One has to create a different kind of culture in an environment where regrettably violence has been the solution to problem solving; hence the decision we took tactically in CIDA to start focusing on kids. If the next generation in Colombia continues with the kinds of attitudes that proliferate in the current one with respect to the primacy of the gun as the way of having economic viability and obtaining the things one wants in life, then the country is actually going to be a prisoner of that cycle for some time to come.

By working at the community level, by working with children, our hope is that we can begin to demonstrate that there are alternatives and that there won't be a need to take up the gun as a means of economic and personal survival, as currently might be the case in the country.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Mr. Rishchynski, is the national school for community justice part of that initiative?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: Indeed it is.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: I guess, lastly, it always seems when we leave these meetings that if there were something we could ask Canadians or our constituents to do beyond saying a lot of prayers.... Is there something they can do in terms of making a difference? Are there initiatives like fair trade coffee that we could identify for them to try to help out this country?

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: There are many options.

For one, start with small projects. There's a school south of Montreal—Greenfield Park—where last year, because the janitors there are Canadian-Colombian, the kids got together and designed little things with a Canadian map and Canadian scenery, collected \$800, contacted the wife of the president, and said: “We have \$800. To which school can we give that money?”

That little project with kids.... There is no limit to what you can do to help people go to school, or, as Mr. Rishchynski mentioned, to keep them out of the vicious circle. Twenty-five per cent of the members of the three groups are kids, defined as below 16 years of age. Some of them were probably born in the jungle, and that's all they've seen. With them it's another story, but for those who are still in “normal conditions” the aim would be to try to keep them out of that attraction.

Most of these kids live in poor families that have no income. The parents have no money to get them to school. When somebody comes and says, I'll give you x hundred dollars if you'll join me, they just go and join. If you read the report from Human Rights Watch about this, it's just terrible.

The kids would be a good place to start. If you talk to people in your riding.... We're not looking at a million dollars here. Sure, we can find a good project for a million dollars, but kids would be one area in which to start.

• (1720)

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: I would just, as a final word, underline a comment that was made by the then President of Colombia when he visited Canada during the April 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City.

The President appeared on all of the morning shows in Canada, such as *Canada AM* and CBC. He made an observation that I never forgot, because I think it's as true today as it was in 2001. When he was asked by a journalist what message he would give to Canadians about Canada and the situation in his country, Colombia, he said, “My message to Canadians, and particularly to Canadian young people, is to tell them that when you do drugs, people in my country die.”

I think that is a very compelling message. The drug trade has poisoned a society that is otherwise of a high level of intellectual sophistication, a society of enormous skill. When you visit Colombian cities, you see cities that aren't far removed, in terms of some elements of quality of life, from what we have in this country. That poison, which has now been inculcated into the very body of this society, must be extricated. It is the consumption of drugs. As long as there is a demand, there will be somebody out there supplying. This has now taken up, really, Colombia in all of its parts.

When young people in this country are attracted to drugs as something cool, in other parts of the world people suffer because of it. I think that's a message we have to start underlining an awful lot more.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: As the former chair of the Special Committee on the Non-medical Use of Drugs, I also hope the government will continue to implement our all-party recommendations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Does anyone else have questions?

I used to be a drug prosecutor, so I have a rather different view on that, I suspect. In fact, I know we have different views on that, but—

Hon. Paddy Torsney: That's okay, your way is not working.

The Chair: You said, Guillermo, that 14,000 children are presently involved as combatants, spies, extortionists, informants, sex slaves, and so on. Is there nothing more that the people of Colombia, the government, and the governments of other countries can do to get those numbers down a lot?

Mr. Guillermo Rishchynski: All you can do is support the reinsertion programs. The hope is that kids ultimately see that there has to be a different kind of future for them than simply picking up a gun. Gratefully, it seems the desertion rates are on an increase in certain parts of the country. We need to dedicate the kinds of resources necessary to show kids who give up that way of life that there is something viable in coming in from the cold, as it were, and looking at something different. But it's ultimately linked to

education, to opportunity, and to economic viability. With the kind of money that is generated from this trade, as the ambassador indicated, a life as somebody shining shoes is not a very viable alternative in terms of the kind of cash you can have.

We continue to work with organizations like Save the Children, like Foster Parents, like UNICEF, because they are at the forefront of dialogue and action with children, either to keep them from going or to give something viable to those who have been with the illegal armed groups when they come out. We just have to keep at it and hope the numbers continue to go down.

Mr. Jean-Marc Duval: If I may add something, the government has an objective of creating 1.5 million new places at school. So far they've created 700,000, so they're halfway through to their four-year target. Some people will criticize that number. Some people will tell you they don't have the teachers, but the first step is to create these places, and that they have done.

• (1725)

The Chair: On behalf of all of us, *si je peux, je veux vous remercier*. I think you were extraordinarily good witnesses, and we're all deeply touched by what you've said.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for coming.

[*English*]

We stand adjourned.

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