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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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•(1615)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): We are moving out of the in camera portion into committee business, and we are entertaining the motion brought forward by Mr. Patry.

Mr. Patry, would you speak to that motion, please?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Now that we are no longer in camera, I will read the motion:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development gives an official apology to His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diouf, about the disrespectful treatment which he received upon his arrival in Canada and recommends that the Canadian government does the same.

You all know what happened last week, when Mr. Abdou Diouf landed in Canada. This motion does not aim to set out in detail the problems he had upon his arrival in Toronto, in other words the body search and the interaction he had with security officials. We are simply of the view that the government blundered: the Minister for International Cooperation, who is also Minister for the Francophonie and Official Languages, did not go to Toronto as she should have done.

We believe that as the committee that is concerned by this matter, we must adopt a motion. It was disrespectful, and we ask Canada to apologize.

It is rather simple, really. We do not want to delve any more deeply into the issue nor discuss racial profiling in any way. We simply note that there was a problem and want to settle the issue with an apology.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): I just wanted to be clear on what Monsieur Patry in his motion means by disrespectful treatment. My understanding, and I was not there, of what happened to Monsieur Diouf was that he was asked to remove his jacket and to have that wand up and down to detect for metal. Is that what you consider to be disrespectful treatment? Is that what you're talking about?

Mr. Bernard Patry: This is enough for me, because when you have a diplomat come in and you see the passport, you're not entitled

to go through these things. You should have someone from security. You should have a minister with that person all the time. He has the same security measure as.... He has the highest security measures that a leader like Kofi Annan or Condoleezza Rice who come here have, and anybody of that rank. For me, it's disrespectful that this situation occurred.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Chair, let's just say this. The Prime Minister of Canada and the Minister of International Cooperation have both expressed their regret on this issue. They expressed a regret about this incident, and Mr. Diouf has accepted the regret and has said he was very satisfied and felt that his visit to Canada was very productive. He was given a great welcome in Winnipeg, wherever he went. I think that's suffice to say that we have done what we were supposed to do as a government and we have done it in doing that. I think it falls on us to act a little bit more responsibly on this issue, because it impacts all of Canada. When we have done it and we have stated it was a regrettable incident, and where Mr. Diouf himself has accepted the fact that despite the incident he had a great time—as he said in the speech he made—and that he wants the matter to be closed, I think it would be a good idea at this given stage to close the matter.

•(1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): I'm partly seeking clarification, because I hear Deepak saying that the Senegalese representative was fully satisfied, but we also had the Foreign Affairs minister asking for a full apology. It seems to me we need to know for sure which is the case. I personally agree with Deepak when he says this affects all of Canada. That's precisely why I think we do need to have an apology. I think it's appropriate for an all-party committee to express that. I think it's appropriate for us to recommend to the Foreign Affairs minister that he do the same, because we don't want in the international arena for it to be thought that we are completely insensitive to two things. One is the racial profiling that unfortunately is all too common these days, and secondly, we're playing a bit loose with what are our diplomatic procedures, which are well established and that we want to see respected.

I would support the motion, but it might help people to know, do we here have a difference of view that the person who was himself treated disrespectfully has said, no problem, I accept the regret—it wasn't an apology—which is certainly less than an apology, but the Foreign Affairs minister said that's not good enough and we are asking for an official apology? Is that what we're dealing with? Can someone clarify that?

The Chair: It's what Mr. Obhrai says we're dealing with.

Madam Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to remind members that 53 countries comprise the francophonie; they may be francophone or they may in some way use the French language. When the secretary of such an esteemed association travels to a country, he should be treated with deference. I am certain Mr. Diouf was not treated that way. Even when we go on missions as parliamentarians, people show consideration to us. Ministers would certainly be welcomed by their counterparts and bypass the usual processes. It is simply good manners. All countries, and Canada is no different... It happens on both sides. On the one hand, there is the francophonie, which has every reason to be displeased, and on the other hand, there are the citizens of Quebec and of Canada. I am certain that the same thing happens in English-speaking countries.

To regret something and to apologize for it are two very different things. I regret the fact that my grandmother has a headache, but I cannot apologize for it because I am not to blame. However, if I have hurt her in some way, I must apologize because I am to blame.

The fact that Canada insists on saying that it regrets the incident may seem strange to some. Canada should apologize because it is, first and foremost, responsible for what happened. Regret has nothing to do with it. Mr. Diouf is a very polite man. He is an esteemed diplomat and as a representative of 53 countries, he suffered a blow to his dignity. It would seem to me that the new government should hasten to correct this. This will not be the end of it.

We are here as parliamentarians. I have before me two parliamentary secretaries representing their minister. We have had several occasions within this committee to pass motions as parliamentarians on behalf of the foreign affairs committee; parliamentarians collectively make recommendations to Parliament and to the government as to the best possible measures to take.

Either for Senegal or for these 53 countries, or for the sake of this government proving that it knows how to welcome and show consideration for diplomats, I would like to see this motion unanimously passed.

•(1625)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Lalonde.

Mr. McTeague.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): I agree with what Ms. Lalonde just said and with the motion introduced by my colleague Mr. Patry. Clearly, we have to send a direct message in order to make sure it never happens again. It is important for the committee to act in such a manner as to preclude this situation ever recurring. The committee acknowledges the situation. I understand that the government expressed regret. However, we live in a diplomatic world, and it is important to know and to continue to respect protocol between countries. It is important not only for a member of a delegation, but also for a former representative of a country. If it had happened to one of our former prime ministers as head of an international organization, our country would have adopted the same position,

[*English*]

to have in fact an apology. I support it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McTeague.

Mr. Obhrai, go ahead, please.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: He'll go first and then I'll go.

The Chair: All right, Mr. Van Loan, go ahead, please.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: In the spirit of diplomacy and good relations, as we indicated, it is regrettable that the Secretary General of the Francophonie was subjected to the same kind of search that ordinary Canadian travellers are subjected to. That regret was expressed, and in the spirit of that, I believe the Secretary General made it clear that he wanted to move on and that he had heard that. In fact, you heard that in the speech of the Secretary General of the Francophonie in which said he was very pleased. He indicated:

[*Translation*]

The francophonie feels very much at home in Canada, and it is always a great pleasure for me to come back. I am truly delighted to see you all here for the first time at this ministerial conference, in the welcoming province of Manitoba. I would like to start by thanking the federal and provincial authorities for the remarkable welcome we received. It is a testament to the vibrancy and spirit of francophone solidarity of the Canadian people.

[*English*]

I believe the Secretary General expressed his satisfaction in his own words. I think if we wish to have positive relations, the way to do that is to, in the spirit of the Secretary General, focus on and accentuate the positive nature of those relations and not try to generate a diplomatic incident greater than any of us needs to have.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, go ahead, please.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I heard a couple of words here, and that's why I need to talk about it.

Under no circumstances was the stature of Mr. Diouf challenged. We all recognize he's a very important individual. He is the head of the Francophonie, and therefore he is coming out here for a very important conference. That is why the Government of Canada had expressed their regret. Otherwise, if Mr. Diouf was not an important individual and did not have a diplomatic passport, we would have not expressed a regret, but we have. The Government of Canada has expressed regret.

The only other issue that came out over here was about racial profiling, and I don't think it was racial profiling on this issue. I don't think we should go to the fact that it was racial profiling. I agree that the Foreign Minister of Senegal may have said that, but the fact of the matter is there was due respect given to Mr. Diouf. We expect that he enjoyed his stay. We have expressed all our regrets; we have said the word "regret". I think it's time to move forward and close the incident.

Therefore, I will say, let's call the question, Mr. Chair.

• (1630)

The Chair: We still have more people on the speaking list.

Is it the will of the people to have the question now?

Mr. Bernard Patry: I'd be ready for one intervention and then the question.

The Chair: We have Madam McDonough. We have two more on the speaking list. Can we go through the two and then call the question?

Madam McDonough, go ahead, please.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I have two quick points. One of them is very minor, and I think it's just a translation thing. In the second line of the English version it says, "gives an official apology". I think "offers" is the correct term, both in terms of the intended meaning and in terms of the translation. Offering an apology seems a bit more in keeping with what we're talking about.

Secondly, I think all the more reason for us to express an appropriate apology is the fact that Monsieur Diouf was incredibly generous and gracious and indicated that he was doing his part to go more than halfway to say he wanted to restore the most positive possible relations. I think, as Canadians, through the official representation that we're calling upon, the Foreign Affairs minister, an appropriate apology should be offered—since he has gone more than halfway—rather than an expression of regret, and then we should put it behind us.

I think then it won't be something that's an open sore; it won't be something that remains as an irritant. It clears this away, and that's the end of it. He's already indicated that he is so disposed. I think we need to hear that from this committee as an all-party gesture, and we need to hear it from our Foreign Affairs minister.

I hope we'll support this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam McDonough.

Mr. Casey, go ahead, please.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): We have expressed our regret and it's been accepted. If we pass this motion now, we'll just bring more attention to it and re-open the thing. I don't think it is an open sore now, but if we bring it up and it gets reported, we'll just re-open the thing and aggravate it. I don't think we should pass it.

The Chair: We'll leave the final word to the one who brought forward the motion, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I just want to say that we're discussing regret and apologies—those are the two words. For me it's already there. If the minister had apologized at the beginning it would be over. Right

now it just keeps going. I didn't say it was racial, it was talk about racial...this talking in Europe.

I just want to read something to you. It's four lines from today's *The Ottawa Sun*:

Apology For Seal Hunt Crack

The Minister of Fisheries, Minister Loyola Hearn, has apologized to the Humane Society of the United States for suggesting that several members of the animal rights group have been charged with interfering with the seal hunt. While it's true some members were arrested, Hearn issued a brief statement yesterday saying he has since learned no one was actually charged. "I apologize for suggesting that charge has been laid", Hearn said in a news release.

That's it. He said "I apologize", and nobody asked questions about it. It's closed.

I want to close it. I'm the chair of all the francophone parliamentarians in the world, and I'm going to be asked questions about this on behalf of the government. That is why I think it's important for this committee to say, "Listen, we apologize, period."

I'm ready for the question.

• (1635)

The Chair: The question has been called. I'll read through this:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development gives an official apology to His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diouf, about the disrespectful treatment which he received upon his arrival in Canada and recommends that the Canadian Government does the same.

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

Mr. Bernard Patry: I would like to move that this will be reported in the House of Commons as a first report from this committee.

The Chair: Are we all in favour of that motion to report it to the House?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: This did bring to mind one issue. I was under the impression that we had 24 hours' notice on motions. This one came in after the close of business hours yesterday, which left very little time to deal with it and respond to it.

I understand from inquiries made with the clerk today that what constituted far less than 24 hours' notice constitutes 24 hours' notice. So I am wondering if we could perhaps amend our orders and procedures so that we require, say, noon the day before a meeting or literally 24 hours before the meeting commences—one of those two alternatives—as a notice period for motions.

The Chair: You've heard Mr. Van Loan's concerns.

I have heard this kind of concern about the 24-hour notice at every committee I've been on. Does it mean an actual 24 hours? The answer to that is no, it does not mean a literal 24 hours. Generally, it is interpreted as meaning the day before. However, I think it becomes contingent on each member at least to extend courtesy to the other members—what comes around goes around, as they say—because other motions were in earlier. We had them; that was appreciated. This motion came to our office after our staff was gone.

An hon. member: It was disrespectful. I apologize.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: It's quite interesting to know that this committee has changed the definition of 24 hours; 24 hours means 24 hours. It doesn't mean you give midnight and expect it at 8 the next day. That's not 24 hours. So why is it that you, Chairman, have decided that 24 hours is not 24 hours?

The Chair: We stand to the same rules and procedures as the House of Commons, and 24 hours in the House of Commons is not 24 hours; it is the 24-hour period beforehand, Mr. Obhrai. We will stand to the same rules.

However, what we're saying is—we've completed this one—this may be something that we want to amend for future motions. Because some members get it after their staff have gone, they don't get it until 8 or 9 the next morning. If you have a morning meeting—it doesn't necessarily apply with a regularly slotted time—you're given two hours' notice in real time.

It's a courtesy we're asking for. The chair may deal with this at a later time, if motions habitually come in at 8 p.m. or 5:30 p.m. and there's a meeting the next day.

We've always worked with a consensus. I don't think it was intentional; sometimes it takes time to translate and have things happen.

Mr. Patry.

•(1640)

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Van Loan, I think you've got a point. There's no doubt about it. When we're sitting in the afternoon—like right now—there's no problem. In the fall, we'll be sitting on Tuesday and Thursday mornings; that'll be our next slot. If we're coming back from the hotel or from any travel and we arrive here at 8:30 or 8:45 a.m., we don't have the time to look at it deeply.

I think you could look it at in the future, and we'll be ready to look at it to get a full 24 hours. There's no problem with this.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: We will cross that bridge when we come to it.

[*English*]

Mr. Bernard Patry: If you really feel there's a problem with any of these motions, you could have on the government side.... We'll be ready to look at it very carefully, and going with yourself....

The Chair: It's for this reason that other committees are at 48 hours, and initially the recommendation for our committee was 48 hours. We moved it to 24 hours in good faith that we'd get time to see motions.

We work well together and we're going to keep working well together. If this happens again, I'll deal with it and we'll deal with it.

Mr. Van Loan's was not necessarily a motion; it was a suggestion.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I was seeking consensus and hoping we could bring forward an amendment, whether it be noon, or 24 hours, or something like that—a real 24 hours.

The Chair: Let's work on getting those motions in.

Even Mr. Patry's motion—hey, you know what? Give us a little time to look at it. I don't think it was done with the wrong intentions. Give him the benefit of the doubt this time; give all of you the benefit of the doubt. But next time, we'll look at it a little closer.

This meeting is adjourned.

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