



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 062 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, June 6, 2007

—
Chairs

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Mr. Rick Casson

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, June 6, 2007

• (1530)

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. This is the special joint committee meeting between the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development and the Standing Committee on National Defence, Wednesday, June 6, 2007.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): We're televised today, ladies and gentlemen. We're holding a briefing session on the handling of persons detained by the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Over the course of approximately 60 meetings, including today's meeting, the foreign affairs and international development committee has had the benefit of no less than 15 appearances by cabinet ministers in the 39th Parliament.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Similarly, the Standing Committee on National Defence has held 58 meetings. We've had eight appearances by cabinet ministers, and we thank our cabinet colleagues for being so generous with their time and responding to our requests, the requests we have made over their period of time in cabinet. We appreciate their being here today.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Those ministers with us here today are the Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Honourable Stockwell Day, Minister of Public Safety; the Honourable Gordon O'Connor, Minister of National Defence; the Honourable Josée Verner, Minister of International Cooperation; and the Honourable Helena Guergis, Secretary of State, Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): As usual, committee members, we will hear the statements and we will commence a previously agreed-to agenda for questions. We have asked the ministers to keep collectively the time used for their opening statements to 20 to 25 minutes. We will be very closely guarding the clock as we go through the rounds of questioning to make sure we have as much opportunity for questions as possible. I remind all members here at the committee, and ministers as well, to address both the questions and answers through the chair.

I'm not sure what the order of proceeding is for who is going to start, but ladies and gentlemen, you have 20 to 25 minutes. Please start.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you both, Chairman Sorenson and Chairman Casson.

Colleagues, I'm very pleased to be before the committee again, and I'm pleased, of course, to be here with my cabinet colleagues to discuss this important matter with you. Thank you for the opportunity to clarify on some very important matters, particularly with respect to detainees.

As you know, Canada's assistance to Afghanistan accords with our highest international objectives to promote global security, freedom and democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and of course, to reduce the terrible effects of poverty on a population that has been devastated by generations of war.

[Translation]

Delivered at Afghanistan's invitation, our support for the people of that country is part of a large international effort. It reflects a wide consensus between Afghanistan's democratically elected government and the UN and other world organizations, dozens of donor nations and the 37 participants in the UN-mandated, NATO-led international security assistance force.

[English]

The task in Afghanistan, Chairmen, is multifaceted: bringing security to a war-torn country, reinforcing the legitimacy of the state, reintegrating it into the international community, and fostering social and economic reconstruction.

CIDA was providing assistance even before 2001. DND is helping liberate the country from the scourge of the Taliban, and my department, Foreign Affairs, re-established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan since January 2002. Correctional Service Canada was engaged in mentoring and advising Afghan prison officials as early as 2002, and RCMP officers of course have been deployed since 2005. My colleagues will speak more specifically to those portfolios.

But our objectives collectively will only be reached by providing the tools to the Afghan government itself—the tools that it needs to serve its people.

• (1535)

[Translation]

To achieve an Afghanistan that is secure, free, peaceful, and sustainable, Afghanistan needs to develop effective and professional police, courts and prison systems. This is what will ensure that Afghans have confidence in their national government, leading to greater long-term stability and prosperity.

[English]

To that end, we recently concluded a supplementary or enhanced arrangement on the transfer of detainees with the Government of Afghanistan. This arrangement complements the original arrangement that was signed by the previous Liberal government in 2005.

One of the key elements of this supplementary arrangement is that it spells out in detail the full, unrestricted, and private access that our officials and members of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission will receive to all detainees transferred by Canadian Forces to Afghan authorities. This arrangement gives us the opportunity to help Afghans live up to their existing human rights and other obligations under international law, and encourage the application of the rule of law at all stages of the detention process.

In the last few weeks our provincial reconstruction team, or PRT, hosted an important human rights workshop attended by representatives of the army, police, corrections officials, the Attorney General's office, and the national security directorate of Afghanistan. This was the second of two planned workshops.

Canada is providing equipment and uniforms to police in Kandahar and financial support nationwide to ensure that the Afghan National Police salaries are paid securely and on time. I must say that one of the more touching experiences I had in visiting Afghanistan was to see the training, and Canadian officials turning over these uniforms, which were made locally but paid for by the Government of Canada, to the Afghan police. The pride they felt in those uniforms, which sported the Afghan flag, was nothing short of amazing. I'm sure it was very reminiscent of the feelings our own RCMP have upon graduation from Depot.

Enormous diplomatic resources have already been dedicated to Afghanistan.

[Translation]

For example, our new ambassador in Kabul is the most senior Canadian official in Afghanistan, and he is ensuring that our engagement remains focused on the core, overriding objectives that motivate and validate Canada's presence. In the south, we are installing a new senior civilian coordinator to lead our work in Kandahar and throughout the region.

[English]

We are increasing the number of working-level officials in Kabul and Kandahar devoted specifically to diplomacy, development, and security sector reform. We are not alone, of course. Canada works actively through the United Nations, where we are a member of a core group responsible for the annual reauthorization of UNAMA, the body that leads all UN political developments and human rights activities in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

We are also working within the G8. I chaired the session on Afghanistan at the G8 foreign ministers' meeting just last week in Potsdam, Germany. That meeting also brought in the Afghan and Pakistani foreign ministers for a special statement to encourage further action on border management issues.

[English]

Only two days ago at the Canada-European Union Summit in Berlin, the Prime Minister announced our participation in a pair of joint policing training projects.

Diplomacy holds everything together. It's what led to the Afghanistan Compact, which was signed in London and to which Canada and allies are key signatories, and other agreements that structure international engagement in Afghanistan.

We are leveraging our resources across government departments and collaborating with international partners to deliver coherent programming that builds security, prosperity, and stability in support of a national government that has the confidence of its people. I would suggest that this is one of the intangible but very real things we see happening in Afghanistan: the confidence of their own government and people to have a hand in their affairs.

This is the message I want to bring to you today, my colleagues. It's a message that we must continue to support the people of Afghanistan and their government as they continue to build and reconstruct their own country.

I'll turn it over to my colleagues.

• (1540)

The Co-Chair: Thank you, Minister MacKay.

Minister O'Connor.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence): Chair, members of the committee, before I begin I'd like to remind you why Canada is in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

First and foremost, Canada is in Afghanistan at the request of its democratically-elected, sovereign government.

Secondly, Canada is in Afghanistan to work alongside 36 other nations, under NATO command, and with a United Nations mandate.

And thirdly, and most importantly, we are there to provide for the security of Canadians.

[English]

Afghanistan was once a failed state that served as a haven for terrorists whose reach extended around the globe. In this mission Canada is doing its utmost to prevent Afghanistan from becoming that failed state once again.

As you know, we are pursuing this mission not only with aid dollars and civilian governance assistance, but with effective military force as well. Approximately 2,500 Canadian Forces personnel support the ISAF mission. They are helping to provide the secure and stable environment that is needed for the legitimate authority of the Afghan government to take root and for reconstruction and development to move forward.

In the course of providing that security, the Canadian Forces may capture detainees. This afternoon I would like to highlight how the Canadian Forces fulfill—

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Mr. Minister, we have a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I do not understand what is happening in the room today. We were asked to attend here today to have a discussion on the issue of detainees in Afghanistan. The ministers will have to explain what the RCMP is doing there, what CIDA is doing there, and what Foreign Affairs is doing there. I think we are veering off course, as our original objective, by the way, was to question the Minister of Defence. We have gone from one department, that is Defence, to five departments, and the meeting has been reduced from three hours to two. I think this is some kind of cover-up and I would like some explanation as to why, in the documents we were sent, there is talk about detainees, and why now, we are being told about Canadian Forces in Afghanistan in general.

Is this an effort to shield the Minister of Defence? Is that the objective?

[*English*]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): I don't think it's really a point of order. We've brought these five ministers here. We're going to have the opportunity to question them. Just as we do not determine which questions you may ask, it has been traditional in this House that we have afforded the ministers when they come the opportunity to say what they want in regard to their part of the file of Afghanistan. We'll listen to those ministers and we'll give you certainly an opportunity to ask whichever question you may choose.

This time will not come out of the minister's time. We would ask Minister O'Connor to continue.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: In the course of providing that security, the Canadian Forces may capture detainees. This afternoon I'd like to highlight how the Canadian Forces fulfill their roles and responsibilities regarding our detainee process in Afghanistan.

The procedures our military members must follow in detainee situations are clearly outlined in their theatre standing orders. These orders emphasize that the Canadian Forces must treat all persons humanely in accordance with the standard set out by the Third Geneva Convention. As a general rule, detainees captured by the Canadian Forces are to be brought back to our temporary transfer facility in Kandahar to be processed and questioned. If a detainee is found to be injured or wounded, that individual will receive the same medical treatment with the same urgency as a Canadian casualty.

[*Translation*]

In fact, all detainees must be medically examined when admitted to Canada's temporary transfer facility, and then again when they are transferred or released. This allows us to confirm that no physical mistreatment of detainees occurs while they are in Canadian hands.

• (1545)

[*English*]

While the Canadian Forces are authorized to detain and temporarily hold persons in Afghanistan, Canada maintains a policy of ultimately releasing detainees or transferring them to the Afghan authorities in accordance with Canada's overall policy objectives in Afghanistan.

The Canadian Forces will transfer detainees to the Afghan National Directorate of Security, and all transfers must be authorized by the commander of Canada's Joint Task Force in Afghanistan.

Every time a detainee is transferred, the authorities at the NDS are provided with a copy of our detainee arrangements. This set of arrangements makes clear Canada's expectations and Afghanistan's responsibilities concerning the proper treatment of detainees once they are in Afghan custody. A second copy of the arrangements is given to the detainee being transferred so the detainee is fully aware of his or her rights. If on the other hand the detainee is found not to be a threat and is released by the Canadian Forces, our military personnel give that person back all his or her possessions and try to help them get on their way. Regardless of whether a detainee is transferred or released, a report of the detention is kept on file by the Canadian Forces.

Throughout all of this, representatives from Foreign Affairs inform the right Canadian, Afghan, and international authorities, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, of what's going on at the required times.

In conclusion, the military's responsibility for detainees begins when suspected insurgents are captured. They are then brought to our holding facility, where they receive medical assessment and appropriate medical care if they need it. They are then processed for handover to Afghan authorities or released back into the community.

Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Thank you, Minister O'Connor.

Minister Day, I politely remind you that there are 12 of the 25 minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety): Thank you very much, Chairmen, and thank you also to my colleagues, particularly for your interest in the situation that is very important to all of us here, in Canada as well as in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

The areas falling under my portfolio relate to the RCMP and Correctional Service. There are nine police officers serving in Afghanistan, varying between Kabul and Kandahar. Eight are from the RCMP; one is a municipal force officer. That number is projected to move up to 22, following the Prime Minister's commitment. That will be done in the very near future.

There are two individuals from Correctional Service Canada who valiantly volunteered to work in Afghanistan to assist in capacity building in the prisons. I might add that the magnitude of the task is really something for us to consider, and also the accomplishment to date.

Historically over the last number of decades—or really, the last number of centuries—Afghanistan has been ruled variously, at the very best by a feudal type of system, but more commonly by warlords or invading armies. It has existed historically as a system of brutal revenge upon one's enemies.

Now we have a situation where detainees—that's the legal technical word—are not simply people who jaywalked and then were apprehended. These people are suspected terrorists. Most were apprehended in combat situations. They know no limits when it comes to the suicide killing of others.

In a very short period of time, we have seen the people in Afghanistan—the actual regime and those operating the prisons—go from a brutal revenge type of system to having a human rights commission, respecting our demand that even their enemies have human rights and need to be treated well in detention. There has been significant progress on that.

The reason I share that with you, as I conclude my remarks in well under 12 minutes, is that intentionally or not—and I'm not being accusatory here—the line of questioning that's been pursued over the last few months has had a certain tenor, implying that our troops were less than honourable in the apprehension, questioning, and the oversight of the so-called detainees, the suspected terrorists. I'm not saying that it was intentional, but that has been the air of the questioning, so much so that our troops tell us that they think they're being accused of doing wrong things. Yet the lengths they go to in order to show their humanitarian approach to these suspected terrorists has been noted.

I would hope that in the questioning that comes today—and I appreciate this time of questioning, I think it's valid—that is the sentiment expressed: that we are concerned about the treatment of suspected terrorists, but we are not approaching this in an accusatory tone towards our brave men and women in uniform.

• (1550)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Minister Day.

Minister Verner, Minister of International Cooperation.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation): Chairmen, dear colleagues, I am pleased to appear before you again to talk about Canada's crucial role in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan.

Canada is one of Afghanistan's largest donors. In 2006-2007, Canada allocated \$139 million for reconstruction efforts. We support development programs in Afghanistan that directly meet people's needs. Our goal is to help the people of Afghanistan to own their development.

I visited Afghanistan twice, six months apart. I met with representatives of the Government of Afghanistan who are deeply committed to rebuilding their country, including Mr. Zia, the Minister of Rural Recovery and Development, and Mr. Atmar, the Minister of Education. We talked about the issues involved in reconstruction and the progress achieved, and I can tell you that we are achieving results. I was able to see this for myself in the field.

In April 2007, for example, I visited a project in Sola Kalay, a village 25 kilometres from Kandahar. I sat down with members of the community development council to talk about the irrigation project they are executing through the National Solidarity Program, which is largely funded by Canada.

The National Solidarity Program—the NSP—and the Micro-finance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan—MISFA—are yielding extraordinary results. As of March 31, 2007, MISFA had provided savings and loan services to over 335,000 people, including more than 230,000 women. As of April 30, 2007, the NSP numbered 16,700 community development councils throughout Afghanistan, 27,000 approved projects and 11,400 completed projects.

As you know, the greatest difficulties are experienced in Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan, especially because of the precarious security situation. For this reason, Canada has multiplied its reconstruction assistance to Kandahar by almost eight times since 2005-2006; our aid has increased to \$39 million in 2006-2007. Of this amount, we have invested over \$20 million to meet people's basic needs.

Another of our priorities is to guide Afghanistan's fledgling democracy to maturity. For democracy to be stronger, people must have confidence in it. For this to happen, a democracy must be able to meet its citizens' basic needs. People are fully entitled to this human right.

As you can see, Messrs. Chairmen, all of our areas of intervention are closely interrelated. We must balance all these dimensions, so that the democratically-elected government can become stronger and people can have faith in it. A delicate balance exists in Afghanistan, and we must thus be perseverant.

Among our efforts, we support initiatives to strengthen human rights—especially the rights of the most vulnerable, such as women and girls.

Messrs. Chairmen, I would like to remind you here of the tragic events of this week, in which two women journalists from Afghanistan were killed. These tragic events strengthen our determination to promote a culture of human rights in Afghanistan, especially the right of women and girls.

On my first visit to Afghanistan, I met with Ms. Ghanzanfar, the Minister of Women's Affairs. She too is bravely doing her job. Let me remind you that in September 2006, the person responsible for women's affairs in Kandahar province was killed in front of her home after criticizing how the Taliban treated women. This must change.

Rights and Democracy, a Canadian organization, is working with decision-makers in the Government of Afghanistan, Parliament, and civil society to promote and protect women's rights, especially by proposing family law reforms.

We will also continue to strengthen the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. We want to provide more support for the commission's activities. It promotes human rights; it investigates human rights violations; it monitors and supervises the treatment of prisoners and inmates. The commission is a brand new institution that is establishing its influence on society. We are helping it to do so.

Mr. Sorenson, Mr. Casson, we still have many challenges to meet in Afghanistan, but we are on the right track. Our approach yields concrete results every day. I would like to remind you of a quote from Professor Barnett Rubin, Director of the Center on International Cooperation at the University of New York, a world-renowned specialist on Afghanistan.

• (1555)

He said that Canada is “one of the best donors in terms of the way it gives assistance”.

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): We have three minutes left in the time allotted for opening statements.

Ms. Guergis, do you have a few comments to make?

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade)): Yes, I do. I'll keep them brief.

Thanks very much, colleagues, for an opportunity to talk to you about some of the progress that I witnessed first-hand in Afghanistan. As we know, Canada is part of an evolving mission, and as they say, Rome was not built in a day. After 30 years of conflict, tyranny, and oppression, societal structures that we enjoy here in Canada are still in the very early stages of development.

That said, the strides made in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban have been immense. Things that we take for granted in Canada, such as a school system, or health care system, or even a banking system, are things that were virtually non-existent under the Taliban.

One of the most striking meetings I had, which clearly demonstrated to me the evolution of institution building, was at the headquarters of our micro-finance facility. I met with Afghanistan's minister of women's affairs, who arranged for me to meet with a number of women who are beneficiaries of our micro-finance programs. As you know, Canada is the lead donor of this amazingly successful program. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been granted small loans to start small businesses or make other investments in their future. They take great pride in owning their own business and having some small control over their own future.

Canada's micro-finance programs are building a lasting legacy of entrepreneurship that sows the seed of individual independence. In another meeting I had with teachers and children at the Aschiana School, I saw the school was teaching children the trades, fine art, history, and Afghan culture. More importantly, girls were going to school, and I presented a girl's gym class with a personal gift of soccer balls.

Canada not only supports education and training, but also meals and medical attention, which is literally turning their lives around. The presence of Canada and our international allies is giving these children and their families a future they otherwise would not have had.

Mr. Chair, beyond the hundreds of millions of dollars that Canada is spending on reconstruction, development, and poverty reduction in Afghanistan, perhaps the most important thing we are doing is

making sure that the solutions created withstand the test of time. Institution building is central to this, because these improvements have to be guided by and owned by the Afghan people, both nationally and locally, and they are. We must never forget that we are in Afghanistan at the request of the Afghan government and we must remember that it is not our place to command the pace or the way of Afghan development.

For example, under the national solidarity program, local village councils spend development funds and oversee the projects in their communities. This way of operating is important, because it respects Afghan choices and underlines the fact that the international community is there to help Afghans help themselves, and not to impose someone else's plans.

Let me say in closing that what I experienced there and what I saw gave me greater hope for the future, and I look forward to sharing some of the incredible stories that some incredibly brave women shared with me.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Thank you very much.

Thank you all. That's exactly on time. We've left the maximum amount of time we can for questions.

Mr. Sorenson.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): We'll go to the first round. The first round goes to the official opposition. Mr. Dosanjh and Mr. Coderre will do a split on time. You have ten minutes.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Thank you.

With all of the actions or omissions of the government in the last few months, it is only natural that one begins to suspect what the government is doing: you have the case of the Afghanistan 2006 report, which was claimed not to exist and then was released heavily edited; you have the access to information committee having difficulty studying that particular report and that issue; then, there's invoking national security for simple information, such as when a bureaucrat read a report; and then first announcing a new detainee transfer deal in Federal Court to shut down a lawsuit, rather than briefing the House of Commons on it beforehand.

In view of all of that, I have a couple of questions. First, the Department of Defence has indicated to the foreign affairs committee, in response to a request for a minimal amount of information concerning detainees who have been held by Canadian Forces and may have been transferred in Afghanistan, that the information would not be provided on the grounds of operational security.

The question is this: can you clearly articulate how providing this information would in any way jeopardize our operational security? I'd like some concrete examples from Minister O'Connor.

• (1600)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Dosanjh.

Minister O'Connor.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I can confirm, Mr. Chair, that for operational reasons we do not provide information on how many persons have been detained or transferred by the Canadian Forces, or any other details. The public release of information on the number of detainees held, transferred, or released by the Canadian Forces and any related details would be detrimental to our military operations. For instance, the enemy could exploit the information for propaganda purposes and towards other operational objectives. The enemy could use the information for planning, surveillance, and other operational purposes.

I must point out that operational security is a military decision, not a political one. This is a military decision. We are conducting military operations at this time. The military have declared this to be operational security.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Minister O'Connor, I don't buy that. This is an important issue for the country.

The Pentagon, of all people, has lists of people they are holding in Guantanamo Bay. Here is the list: you can get it off their website.

Obviously the United States of America does not believe releasing the names of detainees or the number of detainees is a matter of operational security for their forces, who are also in Afghanistan. Why is it that we alone—Canadians, the Government of Canada—believe you have to be that secretive?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Dosanjh. Minister O'Connor.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, I guess the answer is that Guantanamo Bay is in Cuba and there is no war going on there.

These are prisoners who the Americans have transferred from Afghanistan and from wherever else. I don't know where they got all of them, but they've been transferred to Cuba. We are talking about detainees in Afghanistan, in support of the Afghanistan government, who are either held in our facility very temporarily or in government facilities.

So it's quite a different matter.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I should also respond to the preamble. Mr. Dosanjh has repeated this fallacy a number of times. The request that was made for a report from the Department of Foreign Affairs was not a specific request for Afghanistan. It was a world report, and thereby was not available. A world report on detention does not exist. When specifics were requested and provided, then in fact the Department of Foreign Affairs did turn over the report, as they have previously.

These reports—as the honourable member would know, being a member of the previous government—go back to the year 2002. They are handled, treated, disclosed, and redacted in exactly the same fashion as they have been since 2002, and by members of the department, not at the political level. You've had testimony before the ethics commission that indicates that this is in fact the case. There was never any political interference or a hands-on approach taken with respect to redaction.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Minister MacKay.

We'll move to the opposition again.

Mr. Coderre.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, we are participating in a “Save Gordon” operation today. I see everyone sitting around this table, but in reality, no one is questioning the Afghanistan mission nor the extraordinary contribution of our men and women. However, we can see that the government's incompetence and the way they have behaved in managing this crisis, which is of its own making, raises questions.

We are here today at the request of the Standing Committee on National Defence, particularly because there have been problems. Mr. O'Connor, your department is carrying out an inquiry on two detainees who, according to allegations, have been victims of brutality.

I will go straight to the point. You talked about transfers. When we work alongside the Afghan National Army, during its operations, there is a difference between the word “transfer” and the word “handover”. That means, for example, that if we detain someone, arrest them

• (1605)

[English]

on the spot, on the field. During the operation, you have what you call an “it depends” concept, meaning that the person can just hand over that person to the Afghan National Army.

If so, how can we be sure that the agreement will apply there, and how can we be respectful of the Geneva Convention when we know, from an article in *The Globe and Mail*, that at least two individuals disappeared at that time? How can we protect our troops if we cannot even apply those kinds of agreements on those issues?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Coderre.

Minister O'Connor.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, the member just referred to the Geneva Convention. We of course maintain a high standard. We have our troops following the Geneva Convention.

Just to explain the process, in a combined operation involving Canadian Forces and any number of choices, but let's pick the Afghan National Forces here, the Canadian Forces will not transfer any detainees taken by Canadian units, including those taken by the OMLT, who are the advisers, or transfer any to Afghan forces or any other forces. During combined operations, the Afghan forces retain responsibility for their detainees taken by their personnel, and we retain responsibility for our detainees. We process our own people.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Minister, does that mean that in this kind of operation, right away there will no longer be people that we will immediately transfer to the Afghan authorities? If we immediately hand over a person that we have just arrested to the Afghan authorities, that person is no longer our responsibility. That is why I am making the distinction between the transfer of detainees, for which there is a process under the agreement, and an operation in the field, where you have simply arrested a person and said:

[English]

“Your problem now.” Do we have such a thing as “your problem now”, and those agreements won't apply?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I'm reading from the standing rules followed by our Canadian Forces there, and there is no reference to any handover. If we take somebody and arrest them, they are processed by us. If other forces who are with us at the time take people, they process them. There's an example today in Afghanistan, where we have a Portuguese company with us in our battle group, and if they were to take detainees—and I'm not aware if they have or not—in this case they would process them through us, because they do not have an ability to handle detainees. So we would handle them through the Canadian system, and then we would hand them on with proper due process to the Afghan authorities.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Minister, by what you have said, you have in a certain way confirmed that there is a double process. You have operations that allow for transfers and others where we say—

You yourself were a general and you have experienced missions. During an operation, we can directly hand over a future detainee to the Afghan forces, but this person will be an Afghan detainee, he will not be a detainee transferred by a Canadian. That is why there is a difference between a handover and a transfer.

How can you assure us that when there is a handover—First of all, there will be no record. Without a record, there will be no paper trail. If there is no paper trail, we cannot carry out any monitoring or visits. How can we then be assured that, regardless of the situation,

in a combined operation, no matter what, you won't have any handover?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Coderre.

Very quickly, Mr. O'Connor.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: There aren't two processes; there's one process, and when Canadians capture an individual, they record all of that individual's details. The normal process is that the individuals go back to Kandahar to our holding facility, where they are medically inspected, etc., and are then handed on to the proper Afghan authorities. We don't hand them over to the Afghan army; we hand them over to the proper security forces.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Thank you, Mr. Coderre.

Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Over to the Bloc Québécois now, for 10 minutes

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you. I will be sharing my time with Mr. Bachand.

Welcome. I have to tell you at the outset that for me, it is extremely disturbing that there seems to be no concern at all for the people that have already been transferred to the forces that in English we call the NDS, the National Directorate of Security, or the Afghan police, who are not known for being gentle, and may have mistreated or tortured people who have been in their custody. There seems to be

absolutely no concern for these people. They have been completely forgotten.

I congratulate the newspapers and the journalists for the work that they have done. They help us to see things clearly and to defend the interests of Quebeckers and of Canadians. Mr. Attaran, a university professor, explains this absence of concern in this way:

Canada is well aware that there are serious problems with detainees, and that it could be accused of war crimes—That is why it does not want to know.

That is my first question.

I have another question. This lack of concern, despite the investigations and the embassy staff's report, was only discovered once again thanks to the work of journalists and to our questions. This famous report, which at first they refused to disclose, and which was then censored, was sent in part to a newspaper in its original version.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted a motion to have these diplomats, this embassy staff, testify, and yesterday we received three names and the confirmation that we will be able to hear from these people next week, by videoconference.

Will you allow them to testify?

I will stop here.

• (1610)

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Just before the response, Mr. Bachand, do you want to ask your question now?

Okay, go ahead, and then we'll get to the response from the ministers.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: First of all, I would like to come back to the possibility of carrying out joint operations. I don't believe that it is possible. We had the agreement studied by specialists, and they say that there is a legislative gap. It is obvious that if the Canadian army arrests any Taliban during an operation, the agreement will cover that situation. If it is an Afghan-only operation, it obviously would not come under our system, but if it is a joint operation with the Afghan army, things are not so clear. If a Canadian officer arrests a Taliban and hands him over to an Afghan group on the spot, we will lose sight of that detainee. I believe that that constitutes a legal void. I believe that that situation must be rectified because it exposes the Canadian government and its soldiers to potential prosecutions before the international courts. Within the framework of a joint operation, all detainees must be treated in the same fashion.

Furthermore, have you considered the possibility—and I raised this issue with NATO—of establishing prison facilities that would be jointly managed by NATO and the Afghans? I think that would completely eliminate the risk of torture, because there would be a common administration and we could see what was happening there every day. Torture does not only happen in the field of operations, but also in the prisons. I want to know if Canada has asked NATO if it would be possible to set up such a system.

As far as the famous state secrecy is concerned, I am often told that certain things cannot be revealed to me, because otherwise they would have to kill me. I am wondering why security clearances in Canada are more stringent than those in the United States of America. We have the list of the 759 prisoners, we know what their citizenship is, where they were born and their date of birth. How is it that Americans can get this information whereas it is impossible for us? I feel that this matter goes too far. Normally, I accuse the Canadian government of being in bed with George W. Bush. On the other hand, in this case, you are going even further than him by not allowing us to see these lists.

Mr. Chairman, it is important for parliamentarians to be able to get as much information as possible because they are accountable to their constituents. I cannot accept being told that it is impossible to disclose something as simple to us as this list of detainees.

I will leave you the remaining time to answer.

• (1615)

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Thank you.

We have four minutes left for responses.

Mr. O'Connor, are you going to start?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'll perhaps respond.

[Translation]

I will first of all answer Ms. Lalonde's question. I will speak English, for the sake of clarity.

[English]

With respect to war crimes and these allegations, Mr. Chair, I want to put it on the record that no one—no one—has been able to produce any evidence whatsoever that a Canadian soldier, diplomat, or aid worker, or otherwise, has ever been complicit or directly involved in anything remotely resembling war crimes. I find that type of allegation and that type of torqued rhetorical characterization as completely offensive to not only soldiers but also the entire mission that's going on in defence of the people of Afghanistan. So let's put that aside.

With respect to the question Madame Lalonde posed on retroactivity, of our efforts to protect detainees, let's not forget, as Mr. Day quite rightly pointed out, that the detainees here in question are suspected Taliban terrorists. Having said that, they are of course, like a prisoner in Canada, like the worst offenders in Canada, entitled to due process and entitled to be treated, until such time as due process has been completed, to a presumption of innocence and protection in compliance with humanitarian law and international conventions.

Mr. Chair, the efforts by Canadian officials, now that this new enhanced agreement is in place, does include an effort to cooperate with Afghan authorities to locate and to query Afghan officials as to the treatment and well-being of detainees who were turned over to Afghan officials. Again, I underscore that the actual holding and detention of these individuals is in the Afghan authority.

We are there, obviously, to try to support them in every way in building capacity and also in making sure they're meeting

international standards in the best possible fashion, and we'll continue to do that. That's what this enhanced agreement was very much aimed at doing.

With respect to her further questions about employees from the Department of Foreign Affairs, we've had testimony from the Department of Foreign Affairs. I want to refer to a comment from Ms. Jocelyne Sabourin, who appeared before a committee regarding allegations around a report, a redaction. I'm quoting from her testimony:

With regard to being directly told by a minister's office to redact, I am not aware of such a practice. We

—meaning her department—

are at arm's length, and it doesn't happen.

She went on to say:

The redactions are done with the involvement of the program area. In my office, I'm the delegated authority. At the end of the day, I'm the one making the decisions on disclosure. The minister's office is not involved in any of the review.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Mr. O'Connor.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Yes, just quickly, you had two questions.

The first one has to do with combined operations. As I said earlier, Canadians handle their detainee system, and other countries handle theirs, even in the combined operation. When it comes to Afghan forces with us, normally we have an operational mentoring team with each company. Our standing orders are that, if a member of our mentoring team picks up a detainee or captures an individual, they are processed through the Canadian system, not the Afghan system. So if a Canadian captures somebody, it goes through the Canadian system.

Your second part is about Guantanamo. Again, you'll find my numbers may be a little off, but there are about 20,000 Americans in Afghanistan, in different forces, and they, I assume, are taking detainees. I have no idea how many they are or where they are, but they're not going to Guantanamo—or I don't think they're going to Guantanamo. So they're not reporting what's going on in Afghanistan because there are current operations going on there, and neither are any other countries that are in NATO. So we are following operational security.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. O'Connor.

We will now move to the New Democratic Party, for 10 minutes.

Ms. Black and Ms. McDonough.

• (1620)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): We will share our time.

I want to respond to the concluding remarks Minister Day made, because I was the first member of Parliament to raise the issue of detainee transfers in the House of Commons, the very first day Parliament sat last year. I want to clearly put out that no one in my party or, in my estimation, in any opposition party made any kind of aspersion or comment about Canadian Forces personnel on this issue. What we were questioning was your government's commitment to human rights. And we were questioning the inadequacy of the agreement that was signed on detainee transfers. Never once were we questioning the role of the Canadian Forces. I just want that on the record.

During the whole discussion and the questions—I'm responding to what you said, Minister—in relation to how this whole issue has been handled, we've had instances when we've been informed by ministers in the House—misinformed by ministers in the House—about the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We've been misinformed about the role of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the resources they have to do their job. Clearly, our questions at all times were on the role of the government and on the government's handling of human rights.

We've had a board of inquiry into detainees, and there's been a report from them saying that detainees whom Canadians have taken have gone missing; they can't find them. I want to ask Minister O'Connor this: Of the detainees Canadians have taken in Afghanistan, do you know where they all are now? Can you tell us the status of the detainees taken by the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Ms. Black. Just to remind you, let's continue to make sure that both questions and answers are through the chair.

Madam McDonough, do you want to pose your question at this time?

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to say that in your opening statements today, Ministers, you once again cited the security of women and children and the protection of human rights as the principal focus of Canada's efforts in Afghanistan. Yet, during the recent visit to Afghanistan by the Prime Minister, he remained dead silent—dumb as an oyster, as we would say in Atlantic Canada—while the leading human rights campaigner for Afghan women and children, an outspoken advocate for bringing warlords to trial for human rights abuses, was arbitrarily suspended from the Afghan Parliament. For what? For criticizing the ineffectiveness and corruption that is rampant in that body.

Why was the Prime Minister and your entire government absolutely silent on Malalai Joya's suspension? If the Canadian government doesn't support this proven champion of Afghan human rights, why would the people of Afghanistan believe that Canada's mission in their country will protect their human rights?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Madam McDonough.

There are a number of questions. I think the first one posed was to Minister Day.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Thank you, Chairman.

I don't know that it was so much a question to me as a commentary. I appreciate the commentary. It's exactly the type of response I've been trying to elicit for months from opposition members instead of having them, in their questioning, casting a negative pall over the actions of our soldiers. In fact, we have heard today again from the Liberal member, Mr. Coderre, that there's some kind of game going on—with sort of a wink, wink, nudge, nudge—with our soldiers and theirs. So that type of veiled accusation continues.

We have no difficulty in any way, shape, or form being questioned about government actions. I'm talking about the actions of soldiers who have been noted, even by Afghan forces and those who've been apprehended by Canadians, in their reflections on the actions of our soldiers, to have been nothing but exemplary.

It has been unfortunate. I said that I'm not saying it is intentional, but it has been unfortunate that our soldiers feel an accusatory tone towards their actions. There's nothing wrong with questioning government actions, but our soldiers have been honourable in this whole process.

• (1625)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): We'll go to Minister O'Connor and whoever else may want to answer.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Yes, to my knowledge, our forces have recorded every detainee they've taken since the beginning of the Afghan mission. We also have medical records for them, and so on. But the Canadian Forces do not have any responsibility, as such, to monitor what happens to detainees in the Afghan system.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Perhaps I can pick up on that point, Mr. Chair and colleagues. That is exactly what this enhanced arrangement is very much aimed at achieving. Clearly this arrangement that was placed in effect a few months ago is still morphing into an effective system of monitoring.

There were shortcomings in the previous arrangement that we know were highlighted by some of these complaints by detainees. What we have now is a greater system of reporting. I would suggest we have a higher standard when it comes to the obligations placed upon the Afghans themselves. We have greater unfettered and private access available to Canadian officials, diplomats, and personnel from Corrections Canada. That also extends to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. It is also meant to enhance access from the International Commission of the Red Cross.

So this enhanced arrangement, Mr. Chair, as it has been referred to by many, including noted journalists and others who have closely followed this issue, is now the standard. In fact other countries are looking to this example as a way to improve their own monitoring.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Minister MacKay.

You still have some time, either Ms. McDonough or Ms. Black.

Ms. Dawn Black: The question is, where are the detainees now? Do we know where they are? Monitoring, Mr. Minister, is supposed to be part of what's taking place here.

Hon. Peter MacKay: As I said, Mr. Chair, this is exactly what's happening. We now have a much greater ability to track the detainees to ensure the standards that are expected are being met. The Afghans themselves, of course, clearly understand the expectations when it comes to detainees who were turned over by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. They will not only ensure that we know about their whereabouts, but their treatment will conform with international standards—the standards we have clearly set out.

Our ambassador in Afghanistan, Arif Lalani, now meets regularly with Afghan officials, including the head of the security, with whom he has met very recently, to continue to underscore our expectations.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, if I could, we wouldn't want the record to show that once again five ministers remained dumb as an oyster in the face of Malalai Joya's plight, so I wonder if I could ask for a response around the status of Malalai Joya and whether it is still the government's position that they have no comment on this grotesque, undemocratic, arbitrary suspension for having criticized the corruption and the ineffectiveness of parliament?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Some oysters have pearls, Mr. Chair. I'll allow my pearl to the left to respond to that question.

Some hon. members: Oh, Oh!

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Minister Verner.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate being given the opportunity to remind all of my colleagues of the degree of commitment of the Canadian government and my department to women and to girls.

Within our world of communications, news travels fast and we have perhaps forgotten what the Taliban regime meant for women. This is perhaps a good opportunity to remind everyone. This regime is certainly one of the most atrocious the planet has ever seen. Women were not allowed to work nor to walk alone in the street, and when they went out they had to be accompanied by a close family member, of the male sex. They were denied access to the public baths and to education, and this also applied to little girls.

I think we should remember the arbitrary executions that took place in public arenas, before tens of thousands of men and teenagers, for minor offences.

One story I was...

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I twice asked a very specific question about Malalai Joya and the government's position. I've heard nothing but filibustering, with all kinds of vague references that this committee does not need to have a lecture on.

I'm asking if any of these five ministers cares enough or knows enough to speak about the status of Malalai Joya, or have you never even raised it to this date with the Afghan government?

And no, I won't stay home and stick to my knitting.

• (1630)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): I didn't hear that comment.

Unfortunately the time has expired for that round of questioning. We're moving over now to the government side, to Mr. Obhrai. To start off, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be sharing my time with my colleague Russ Hiebert.

I would like to thank all the ministers for coming out here today. It's their strong commitment to ensure that Canadians are aware of what is happening in Afghanistan.

Canada's participation in Afghanistan involves our military, diplomats, CIDA employees, correctional officers, and members of the RCMP, as all of you have indicated. However, there is still the perception out there in the public that progress has not been achieved yet.

Can you outline how Canadian leadership—and you have given a brief outline—is being exercised in Afghanistan and, most importantly, outline our successes and challenges?

Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Go ahead.

Hon. Peter MacKay: On the development side I'm going to allow my colleague from the International Development Agency to speak to the specifics of your question about the tangible proof we've seen—specific references to the Afghanistan Compact, which sets out benchmarks that are to be achieved in areas of development itself, in reconstruction and programming.

On the diplomacy side, we know that we have a very high level of engagement in Kabul between our ambassador, Arif Lalani, and his counterparts and officials inside the Afghanistan government. All of this, of course, happens very much under the umbrella of security, and all of this happens in the capacity building that we are seeing with the police and the Afghan National Army, including the prison officials, of course. We now have a much better grasp of the expectations that must be met and of how we intend to do the necessary follow-up. We are constantly monitoring this situation. We are following up.

I'll come back to an earlier question with respect to the whereabouts of Afghan detainees. This takes time. Let's be very frank. This is a mission now that goes back a period of time. The Afghan authorities have given us assurances that they will give us the location of Canadian detainees to the best of their abilities. But look, many people in Afghanistan do not have street addresses; they don't have birth certificates. There are many who bear the same name. These are conditions that actually exist, Mr. Chair. This is the reality we're dealing with in Afghanistan. It's not an easy task to track individuals, particularly those whose stated purpose is to avoid detection.

These detainees have spent a great deal of their lives living incognito. They have made it their life's work to avoid detention and capture, so they're not exactly expected, in many cases, to be cooperative when providing information—and let's not forget what's in the al-Qaeda handbook: you are to immediately make allegations of abuse and torture upon being captured by coalition forces.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yes, we have indeed seen progress in Afghanistan, particularly in Kandahar. Why? Because as security has improved, we have been able to make progress at the same rate.

As an example, we spent \$5 million in Kandahar last year. This year, we were able to multiply that amount by eight. That allowed more than 500 community development councils to complete approximately 500 projects, the list of which is obviously available on our website. These are irrigation, training, health and children's vaccination projects, and an obstetrical and neo-natal care centre that is part of the Mir Wais Hospital. This centre can serve almost 1,000 women per year and offers them a safer and healthier environment where they can give birth to their children. They were also given the measles vaccine.

Yes, significant progress has been made. The more security allows us, the more we are able to offer concrete results to the population of Kandahar.

• (1635)

[*English*]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Very good. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hiebert is next.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have two questions, one for Minister Verner, and one for Minister Guergis.

For Minister Verner, the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan is a complex task, and critical to that task is capacity building. Capacity building: I'm talking about teaching Afghan authorities how to better manage their own affairs. That means teaching everything from how to manage prisons, to how to properly deal with detainees, to developing a bureaucracy to build and maintain a sewer system, highways, basic infrastructure that's all so critical to the future of Afghanistan. I'm wondering if you could expand for the committee on the concept of capacity building, and the progress that's being made. As well, perhaps you could explain to the committee what Canada's contribution has been to capacity building in Afghanistan.

My second question is to Ms. Guergis.

Minister, some here in Canada, particularly the NDP, are calling for a complete pullout of our forces from Afghanistan in one breath, and yet they claim to stand for women's rights and children's rights in the next breath. You had an opportunity to meet with a leading women's rights advocate in Kandahar recently on your visit. I'm wondering if you could expand a little bit for the committee on what Canada's presence means to the rights of women and children in Afghanistan, and perhaps you could dispel this myth that's being perpetuated by the NDP.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Go ahead you have three minutes

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you for that question, colleague.

Reconstruction and development in Afghanistan does indeed pose a challenge. This country has known decades of war and conflict, but for the first time, it has a democratically-elected government.

Canada, like many other donors, expects to help the Afghan government to take matters in hand. We have a multitude of programs. For example, when the time came to draft the Afghan constitution, CIDA worked together with people from Rights and Democracy from Montreal. These people worked together with some 60 Afghan female NGOs in order to ensure that the rights of women would be included in the constitution. In order to do so, a lot of research was done. These people helped the women table their briefs and ensure that they were well prepared for their presentations.

This is a giant step for the women of this country. They had lost all their rights; they had none left. It is only one example, but it is a very important one. It is by continuing to educate the Afghan population that we will achieve great progress in terms of human rights, particularly for women.

[*English*]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): There's a minute and a half left.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thanks very much. First, I agree with you, it is very hypocritical in my opinion for the NDP to sit here, particularly today, and launch some personal attacks on us with respect to our not giving her a comment at her demand with respect to Madam Joya. Of course we are monitoring this situation very closely because what's going on has some impact on women's rights at some point. But it is their Parliament. As I said early in my remarks, it is for the Afghan government and the Afghan people to make decisions about how their lives will go forward, and we're there to assist them in their decisions.

I want to talk about Rona Tareen specifically, whom I met in Kandahar City, and the stories she told me about what it was like under the Taliban before the international community was there: how her little girl could not go to school, how women could not own a business, how there were women whose bones would break during childbirth because they were not permitted to go outside to have sunlight so they could get the vitamin D they need. This is not something that they were able to have. What she clearly said to me with tears in her eyes was how much she appreciates Canada's presence there, because now her little girl is able to go to school. She gives clear credit to Canada and to Canadians. She knows the Taliban is working; they are being successful in breaking the resolve of the opposition parties in Canada. She clearly knows this, and her message to us, and the message she asked me to take back here, was to tell Canadians, please do not leave, do not go, and do not turn your back on us now, because all will be lost. We cannot fool ourselves; there would be mass murder.

• (1640)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move into the second round. I want to remind all committee members that the second round is now a five-minute round, so keep your questions and your answers concise and we'll get as many in as possible.

We'll move to the official opposition. Mr. Wilfert and Mr. Martin.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, Mr. Martin and I will put our questions first, and then we'd like the answers from the ministers.

I just want to say, first of all, Mr. Chairman, that there's no loyalty test in terms of our troops. Everyone in this room supports our troops, and any suggestion otherwise is totally unacceptable.

We've heard from the Minister of Defence with regard to the use of the rationale of operational security. I'm not sure how this differs from World War II, when we saw on newsreels all the time, and also in Vietnam, each week, the lists of the number of captured or killed. However, given that the minister has used this continually, I'd like to ask the minister this, through you, Mr. Chairman. In the case of Amnesty International and other cases that have been brought forth with respect to the detainee issue, and particularly the case that was brought forth by Colleen Swords, who makes the determination in these cases that the government officials cannot provide essential evidence? Is this yet another case of ministers who don't want to take responsibility?

I'll turn it over to Mr. Martin.

The Co-Chair: Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ministers, again, I echo my colleague's comments. Nobody in this House does not support our troops. Everybody considers our troops to be working at the highest ethical standards under extremely difficult circumstances. We are very, very proud and very, very thankful for all that they're doing in Afghanistan and around the world.

Now, this issue came to light a few weeks ago. The Afghan government said they were going to have a complete and full investigation; however, we have not heard anything about this investigation. So I'd like to know whether or not you can tell us when the final report of this investigation is going to be completed, and if you will allow the final investigatory report to be given to this committee in an unedited fashion.

My second question is this: has the monitoring of the Afghan prison systems that were allowed in the new agreement started, and are Canadians involved in that?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, Mr. Wilfert's question was about some specific trial that I'm not familiar with. However, he brought up the issue of operational security. I can tell you that we, within the political process, do not interfere in operational security, and I doubt when your government was in power whether you did also. Either the police authorities or the security authorities or the military authorities declare issues operational security to protect their military operations—in this case it's Afghanistan—and we, as politicians, do not interfere in that process.

With respect to the actual trial, I don't know what trial you're talking about.

The Co-Chair: Mr. MacKay.

Hon. Peter MacKay: To respond to Mr. Martin's question about whether we have now begun a new and more detailed process as a result of the enhanced arrangement, the answer is yes. I'm aware, based on the most recent information, which was just this afternoon, from our Afghanistan Ambassador, Arif Lalani, that there have in fact been five visits to detention facilities since the signing of the supplementary agreement, and that officials during those visits have stressed the importance of a full and unrestricted private visit, which was to take place and did take place.

They made it clear that these provisions of visits were also to be extended to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross. Officials have also underscored the need during those visits to treat detainees humanely and to live up to the expectations with respect to international conventions and their own domestic law.

Afghan authorities, based on that information, have given assurances that they will, which is of course also the spirit and intent of the enhanced agreement that was signed on behalf of Afghanistan by their defence minister, General Wardak, and our ambassador to Canada.

Mr. Chair, that process is now well under way. It will evolve, of course, and we expect that we will have more information available to us based on that increased access. As a result, I suggest there will be greater oversight and greater input from Canada on the human rights situation inside those facilities where detainees turned over by Canadian military officials will be held.

• (1645)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Minister MacKay.

We'll move to the government side, to Mr. Hawn, for five minutes.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ministers.

Today is the 63rd anniversary of the D-Day invasion in 1944, an historic day that was the start of liberating a people who had been held captive by an evil regime for a long time. As part of a great alliance then, Canada set an example for other nations on how to conduct an effective and ethical military operation while helping local populations get back on their feet. When I spent last Christmas outside the wire with the troops in Afghanistan and we travelled in convoy through the villages, I saw the same thing: Canadian troops conducting an effective and ethical military operation to the demonstrated approval of the local population. The images of children giving us thumbs-up as we passed and people getting along with what for them was a normal life are still clear.

Minister Verner, can you comment on the example that Canada is setting for other countries today, 63 years after D-Day, on how to get a tough but necessary job done while respecting the people we're there to help, combatant and non-combatant alike?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Hawn.

Minister Verner.

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: I think that the best answer that could be given to your question, dear colleague, is once again to cite the partners we are working with in Afghanistan, who are respected and very well known. Allow me to mention a few who have been there for a long time. Some were even there before we got involved in Afghanistan.

I am thinking amongst others of Nigel Fisher, the head of UNICEF Canada, who said that thanks to renewed efforts in immunization, deaths attributable to disease, for example measles, have fallen dramatically.

I am thinking of Chris Alexander, who is a UN mission representative in Afghanistan, who recently said:

If progress has been made in Afghanistan, it is because the country has had the advantage of benefiting from exceptional people in the field [...] (the Canadians who served in Afghanistan were not only outstanding representatives of their country, but also the best to come to Afghanistan's assistance.

There is also professor Barnett Rubin, who said that Canada is "one of the best donors in terms of the way it gives assistance".

Mr. Gordon Smith, of the University of Victoria, said:

I have been impressed over the last year and a half by the degree to which we have been able to comprehensively increase our development aid to Afghanistan, particularly that centred on the Kandahar region.

In short, a whole series of well-known people who work in Afghanistan believe that we have to help this country emerge from several decades of war. These people all link our military presence in Afghanistan with our ability to help the country and help the people to rebuild.

[English]

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you very much.

Last fall, the defence committee had a presentation by the Senlis Council. It was full of, I suspect, deliberate misrepresentation about alleged mass starvation within an hour of Kandahar. Minister Verner, can you comment specifically on the level of food aid and agricultural aid development, like farm irrigation in Kandahar province, which I suspect bears no resemblance to the Senlis report at all?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Hawn.

Minister Verner.

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, colleagues, for giving me the opportunity to revisit this issue.

We are in Afghanistan because we really want to help the population, we really care about meeting their needs.

Are there still challenges to meet in Afghanistan? Absolutely. That is why we must stay there. That is why in terms of development, among other things, we will be there until 2011.

One thing is clear: we all want to help. Officials from my department met with representatives of the Senlis Council last week. We asked them a certain number of very specific questions in order

to find out where the camps and people were; we wanted to go and help, because according to their allegations, these people were dying of hunger.

I know that other organizations working in the field asked the same questions, because they are concerned about helping people who are in need. I have to say that we are still waiting for answers. That is what I can tell you for now.

In the meantime, I can tell you that the director of the World Food Program clearly stated that thanks to Canadian aid, they were able to provide 10,000 metric tons of food to people in need last year. We expect to double that assistance this year, to bring it to 20,000 metric tons.

• (1650)

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Thank you very much.

We'll go over to the Bloc Québécois and then back to the government.

Five minutes, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Allow me to remind everyone that today's briefing deals with the treatment of detainees by the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. That is the real issue. We have heard all kinds of other considerations that, as far as I am concerned, make me think that we have completely wasted our time.

However, in a desperate attempt to get a real answer to the questions we are asking, I would ask Mr. O'Connor if, yes or no, he knows what happened to the prisoners that were captured by Canadian soldiers. Where are they now?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Just before Minister O'Connor answers that question, I'll say that I don't consider it a waste of our time to be talking about women's rights in Afghanistan or the development and the assistance that has been provided to the people of Afghanistan by the Canadian government. I hardly consider that a waste of time.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: The subject of today's meeting is indeed—I have the sheet in front me—the people detained by the Canadian Forces. We have been trying to get answers for months in the House. We did not get them. We asked for this session with the primary goal of getting these answers.

This is not the time to water down the debate and to make sure that we get no more answers today than we have gotten in the past.

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Mr. O'Connor, do you want to respond to the question?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: As I said in my opening comments, the Department of National Defence has certain responsibilities with respect to detainees, and that is from initially capturing them, processing them, etc., and making sure they're medically fit, etc., and they're handed over to the proper authorities. The Department of National Defence does not monitor what happens to detainees once they go into the Afghan system.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: How can you assure us that these people are not being tortured?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: There is an agreement, an extended agreement, that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has just spoken about and I'm going to have him talk about the monitoring process. But Defence doesn't do monitoring; it captures and processes.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, the system that is in place under this enhanced arrangement has a clause aimed directly at the subject of notification on any change in the material status of the detainee. It reads:

The Government of Canada will be notified prior to the initiation of proceedings involving persons transferred by the Canadian Forces and prior to the release of the detainee. The Government of Canada will also be notified of any material change of circumstances regarding the detainee including any instance of alleged improper treatment.

And I underscore the word "alleged" here, Mr. Chair, because just as the detainees themselves are entitled to due process from time of detention to determination, I would suggest as well that the Afghan authorities, at whom these allegations are aimed, are also entitled to the presumption of innocence when it comes to any investigations that are ongoing. If there has been improper treatment towards a detainee and it's proved and is borne out, then appropriate action would be taken by the Afghanistan government and we would support them in that regard.

The training that's taking place inside prisons, this improved access, including private access to examine detainees and to hear about these allegations, I would suggest is going to do a lot to raise the standard of professionalism inside their penal institutions.

Hon. Stockwell Day: I might add, Chairman, in response to the question—

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Go ahead, Mr. Day.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Though for reasons quite appropriately articulated by our Minister of Defence, Canada does not produce lists for quite understandable security reasons, as is true with other nations, in the facilities to which our corrections officers have been granted access—there's three of those—the Afghan authorities themselves post the numbers. In the large Kandahar facility, at approximately the time of the 17th visit of officials—there have been over 20 visits now—there were 838 people in that particular facility. That's on the Afghans' registry. In the national defence, the Afghan NDS facility, also in Kandahar, there were 40. And in their police facility there were 35.

So if large numbers were suddenly to go missing, that would be very evident. That registry is open for inspection, though it is not our job, nor our responsibility, to do the monitoring. And if there was

any radical change in those numbers it would be evident, it would be reported, and would have to be accounted for.

• (1655)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you.

We'll move to the government side again, to Mr. Khan and Mr. Goldring. You have five minutes.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, colleagues, Ministers, for being here. I'll be very short and quick.

Since everybody is putting things on the record, I'd like to do the same. Mr. Chairman, I want to point out for the record that it was the Liberal government that deployed the troops in Afghanistan without debate and without vote. It was the Liberal government that deployed troops to southern Afghanistan. It was the Liberal government that approved the inadequate detainee agreement. I congratulate the government for improving upon it.

As far as the human rights issue is concerned—

The Co-Chair: We'll have a point of order from Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I'm just wondering if it's the report that we're supposed to have from him that he's making right now.

The Co-Chair: That's not a point of order.

Continue, Mr. Khan, we will not take that—

Mr. Wajid Khan: Thank you, sir.

As far as the human rights issue brought up by the NDP is concerned, this government stands up for human rights. The examples are many, such as the Air India inquiry, the Maher Arar apology, the Chinese head tax, and the Japanese internment.

I am also perplexed by the comparisons drawn by my colleagues between the Second World War and the current conflict. That was a war between states. It was not a war between a state or NATO versus transnationals and insurgents. That is not a state. The examples of Guantanamo Bay and Afghanistan also perplex me.

However, my question is to the Minister of Development. Very quickly, could you confirm for me, madam, that there are 335,000 Afghans benefiting from small loans and that 75% of them happen to be women? There are 10,000 families being fed in Kandahar, reaching 3.4 million for the World Food Programme; and 350,000 children in Kandahar—again, the dangerous area—have been vaccinated against polio...targeting seven million.

My question is to you, madam: after Operation Medusa, what projects, if any, are taking place in Kandahar and the environs? And Minister of Defence, my question to you, sir, is whether the operation to secure Kajaki Dam is a military operation, or is it for the purposes of provincial development?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Khan.

Mr. Goldring, do you have a quick question, to give the ministers time?

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Madam Secretary of State, you had indicated that you visited Afghanistan just recently, and you gave some very compelling remarks on your interactions with Afghans. I'm wondering if perhaps you could comment on whether you had been speaking to some of the military who were there too and whether they shared your same sense that we are doing well for the people of Afghanistan. Do you have any other stories about your interaction with the people of Afghanistan that were particularly poignant? And could you comment possibly to clarify their sense on the continuation of Canada's involvement? Do they have a fear if Canada is not?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Madam Verner, or perhaps first to Mr. Khan's and then Madame Guergis? I'm sorry, Mr. O'Connor.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I have just two quick things.

One, just to make certain there's no misunderstanding on numbers of prisoners, those numbers don't have any relationship to Canadian detainees; they are criminals, etc. Just so there's no misunderstanding, the press doesn't report that there are huge numbers of detainees.

The other one is with respect to the Kajaki Dam. The intention of securing that area—and right now it's penetrated by a lot of Taliban—is to unleash its ability to generate electrical power. Electrical power is in great need in the south so that industry and normal folk can live properly. They need power, and that's what's behind that.

I'll hand over now to Ms. Verner.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and my dear colleague.

The figures you gave are indeed precise and they are available on our website. It is important for the Canadian population to follow the overall results. This website is therefore regularly updated.

Based on the published figures, operation Medusa has allowed us to increase the number of development projects in the Kandahar region to approximately 200. This operation also allowed the population to elect some 150 community development councils.

You mentioned data concerning micro-credit, among other examples of results in Kandahar. The most recent figures available show that 335,000 Afghans, of which three quarters were women, took advantage of small loans. Moreover, MISFA, the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan, the organization that manages these funds, has just opened offices in Kandahar, which is good news for the people of that province.

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Minister Verner.

We will move to the opposition side, with Mr. Patry and Mr. Eyking.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My question is for Minister O'Connor.

Minister, recently two individuals detained in Afghan prisons told Correctional Service Canada officers visiting their penitentiary that they had been mistreated.

Did the Canadian authorities investigate the matter?

There is no way to find out. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Department of Public Safety keep passing the buck.

As a result of asking questions, we learned, from the spokesperson for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ambra Dickie, that relevant information on this matter had been forwarded to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

What was this relevant information? Why is this information available abroad but not available to Canadians through this committee? Why the silence?

Minister, I would like to reiterate that you are accountable to the people through Parliament and this committee.

Would you commit to providing this committee with the findings of the inquiry into the allegations made by these two inmates, and to provide the correspondence on this issue between the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, the International Red Cross and the Afghan International Human Rights Commission?

Thank you.

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Minister O'Connor.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chair, that's not within my realm of responsibility in the defence department, so I'm going to hand it over to Minister Day and then Minister MacKay.

Hon. Stockwell Day: I have worked with the member for a number of years and I believe his question to be sincere, but I need to correct his suggestion that there was confirmation of maltreatment. If my understanding is correct, as of today there have been four cases since February where individual prisoners have alleged they were maltreated. Our officials, who try as best they can to accurately report everything they see and hear, did not see visible signs of that. However, when an instance like that is reported, it is passed on to the appropriate Afghan authorities.

It also should be noted that people who are classified as Taliban and al-Qaeda—and there are links between the two—have been instructed to say when questioned that they have been tortured, whether they have been or not. That is not in any way to diminish the possibility that somebody may have been tortured. I just share that with you so you can see the difficulty officials have if they are approached by a prisoner who says they've been tortured and they don't see any actual signs of it. They also know that these people have been told to say they have been tortured. It makes it difficult for them, but they do report the allegations. There have been four such reports to date, of which we are aware.

• (1705)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Minister MacKay, please.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Just to follow up on Mr. Day's comments, that is in fact the case. On the allegations of abuse the member refers to that occurred in April, Canadian officials immediately informed Afghan authorities in Kandahar. They were passed on, and the information relevant to those particular cases was provided to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, as it should be, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Governor of Kandahar and the director of the national security directorate at the facility in Kandahar were also given the information we had in our possession. The information relevant to this case will be pursued by the Afghan authorities, and they will of course in time report back to us, as per the agreement.

So we've taken these allegations of abuse very seriously. We've acted upon them inside the parameters of this new enhanced agreement, which is proof that it has already begun operation. The names and locations of the detention centre where this allegation originated were provided, and the two individuals in question made their complaints in the presence of NDS authorities.

So there is no question that the Afghan authorities themselves are aware of and seized with acting and reporting on this particular allegation.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Thank you. That concludes that time span.

We go over now to Ms. Gallant, of the government, and then back to the official opposition.

Ms. Gallant, five minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Through you, to the Minister of Public Safety, first of all, in response to your comments, I would like to confirm, as MP for the riding that is home to CFB Petawawa—and that is the “Training Ground of the Warriors”—and on behalf of the women and men who serve there in Canada's armed forces, that they are distressed over the opposition intimating that they are somehow guilty of war crimes.

Now, this committee did travel to Afghanistan, and one of the places we visited was the hospital. It was truly extraordinary the way our medical military personnel would tend to our wounded, sometimes having to pronounce them dead, and then with the same level of professionalism, treat the insurgents and the Taliban. It's truly incredible what they're able to do.

The soldiers and their families do not understand why members of their own country's Parliament seem more concerned over the well-being of those who seek to destroy them than their own soldiers' safety and security.

Now, when the defence committee visited Afghanistan, we did see the training school for the Afghan National Police and were briefed by Mr. Fudge on the training of the Afghan National Police, and on the fact that they had to begin at the stages of literacy, and then human rights, even before they got into the police training.

My question is this. Perhaps you could please report more details on the activities of the RCMP in Afghanistan—border security—as it applies to your department's jurisdiction.

Minister, here at home your department is responsible for safeguarding public infrastructure and emergency preparedness, recognizing that security must first be established before infrastructure can be developed. What steps have been taken to safeguard the critical infrastructure, from the standpoint of civilian protection in Afghanistan?

Hon. Stockwell Day: There are a number of questions there. I'll try to address them as succinctly as possible.

On the question of infrastructure, it's important that Canadians know our troops literally risk their lives daily, in many cases to protect the people who are doing the development work. These people are there, at Canada's offering, to do anything from working at health care facilities to helping agricultural development and looking at education facilities. They literally, in many cases, have to be escorted and protected when they go about their work. In fact, when they've completed a project, that project has to be protected.

All the projects that are done, as Minister Verner indicated, are for the good of the Afghan people, and yet for the Taliban and the other insurgents, it is their mission to kill the people who are doing the good work, including Afghan people and foreign development workers, and also to destroy the very projects that are meant to raise the standard of living in Afghanistan.

So Canadians should know that our men and women in uniform are literally giving their lives to that ongoing development. It's an important factor.

In terms of some detail, one of the days that I was in Afghanistan, not too long ago, I observed our RCMP officers there training Afghan National Police. I had wondered before I got there how the Afghan nationals were going to receive training from, let's face it, people from another country. I was impressed at the level of openness of these men—it was mainly men; it was all men on the particular division that I was looking at—to receive training. In this particular case, our RCMP officers were showing Afghan police how to stop an approaching vehicle, but respecting the lives of people in it—so not stopping it with rockets, but stopping it—how to have the people exit the vehicle, how to check a vehicle that possibly has explosives embedded in it, and to do it in a way that would not only be safe to the former inhabitants of the car, but also to themselves.

This was a day-long exercise. The Afghan National Police officers were intent on learning how to do this. They seemed incredibly appreciative. At the end of the day, they were given, as they are at each stage of training, a certificate of training. I can tell you, with their new uniforms, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs has indicated that we're supplied, with the knowledge that they had, they stood proudly at attention. They received these certificates and they were feeling so good about what they had learned.

I say this to opposition members. It's okay to talk about the good things that are happening in Afghanistan. You don't have to worry about that. It's quite proper to criticize the government, but it's okay to talk about the good things too.

• (1710)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Minister Day.

We'll go to Mr. McGuire.

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I think the government members and ministers should stop making these offensive and demeaning remarks about where the opposition is coming from, where the Parliament of Canada is coming from, in supporting our troops in Afghanistan. It demeans everybody. Particularly, it demeans the ones who are making these remarks.

I want to continue by saying that our troops are doing everything we're asking, NATO is asking, and this country is asking them to do. One thing that it doesn't appear we are doing is this. The Taliban continuously recruit, and particularly in Helmand and Kandahar provinces, and we're told this is happening because we're not getting food to those populations that are supposed to be pacified. We're not getting the schools built in those two provinces. We're not getting health care centres built in those two provinces. We're not getting food anywhere within a couple of kilometres outside of Kandahar city. Why aren't we deploying more people through our development agencies and through our food agencies, and really making an impact and making our military success worthwhile? There's no point in having military success when we can't follow it up with civilian success on that side.

We're continually told that we are falling down on that. It's not just the Senlis group. There are other groups saying we're having very minimal impact outside of Kandahar city and Kabul, in the rest of Afghanistan. What are we doing in Helmand province and Kandahar province, where our soldiers are, in that regard?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'm going to let the Minister of Defence answer with respect to the security side. I think Madame Verner can similarly provide statistics that quite frankly contradict your assertion that progress is not being made and that food supplies and development are not taking place.

I do appreciate what you've just said, though, that patriotism doesn't have to have a partisan stripe. I think that's why I would reiterate the earlier comment that we should be very proud of what Canada is doing there. We can all disagree on perhaps the methods through which it's happening, but this is a Canadian effort. It's not a political party effort; it's a Canadian effort.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: I'll just quickly answer, and I'm going to hand over to Minister Verner.

I can tell you I've been there four times now, and that's not an accurate representation of what's going on in Kandahar province. I can't speak for Helmand province, but in Kandahar province our troops are spread throughout the whole province, and support aid is spread throughout the whole province. There are thousands of families coming back who have returned to Panjwai and Zhari, and all these other districts. Life is returning there, and food is getting through. Certainly from my perspective and according to the reports I'm getting back from the troops, that's not quite an accurate representation of what's going on there.

But I'm going to hand over to Minister Verner.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, the Province of Kandahar still poses a challenge. We need to understand

that the security there is extremely precarious, hence the need to work closely with our troops. That being said, some progress has nevertheless been achieved in Kandahar. According to figures provided to us by the World Food Program, 10,000 metric tons of food have been shipped there and this number is expected to grow to 20,000 by next year.

Irrigation canals have been built in Kandahar. When I went there, I even went beyond the PRT, to the village of Sola Kalay, in order to meet with the community development council. I had an opportunity to meet with farmers working in their fields and they showed me the irrigation canal which, thanks to Canada's financial support, had enabled them to irrigate their land and grow crops. Roads have been built there. We have announced a sweeping polio vaccination program. In the Province of Kandahar, approximately 350,000 children will be vaccinated. The program has almost been completed, and according to the discussions that I had with the World Health Organization representative when I went there, this disease has practically been eradicated there.

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Minister Verner.

That is the end of the second round. We'll go to the third round.

Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you, I'd like to ask Minister Day a couple of questions.

Members of the Canadian military are over in Afghanistan fighting valiantly every day, but we know that they're not the only ones. There are civilian police members, the RCMP, and members of Correctional Service Canada in Afghanistan, supporting the Provincial Reconstruction Team's efforts to rebuild that wartorn part of the world. Can you tell the committee how many RCMP and Correctional Service Canada members are currently working in Afghanistan, and what is their mission?

Also, in an earlier answer, you mentioned that the RCMP officers were assisting in the development of an Afghan police force. What progress has been made so far towards increasing the effectiveness of that police force?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you, Mr. MacKenzie.

Minister Day.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Briefly, first to reflect on the discussion around the table about the particular line of questioning, this has been a civil discussion today. There has been no abusive language, with one very notable exception.

All we are saying here is that when all the questions for month upon month are about apparent or alleged mishandling of suspected terrorists, when that's the only line of questioning—and those questions are appropriate—and we never hear about anything else, that's why, as Mrs. Gallant has said, troops start to get a certain message. That's all we're saying.

In terms of the RCMP, there are presently eight RCMP officers. There are moments when this might change, as when a visiting officer or two might be over there for a specific purpose, for the transfer of information or for training. They are there principally, but not entirely, to train and mentor the growing capacity of the Afghan police. It is growing, and this is brand new to the Afghan people and police.

This is the first time they see human rights being applied in police work, and they are responding to it very favourably. That is principally, but not exclusively, the RCMP's mandate.

In terms of our two Correctional Service officers—there are only two over there at the time—they're doing a formidable job in terms of visiting these facilities. Their mandate is to encourage capacity building within the prison system. As we've already said, they report if there are allegations of abuse or torture, but principally their mandate is to mentor, guide, and lead the capacity building within the prison facilities.

They are also making reports on what they feel would be positive additions in terms of infrastructure or even in terms of some of the basic elements of life. These are third world prisons; make no mistake about that.

In all of these questions, it's which direction in which are things going, and the direction in which they are going is the direction of improvement. There is a long way to go, but they have made a very good start. Our officials have made a very good start, not just working with the Afghan officials in the police forces and the prisons, but the level of acceptance of Canadian officers by the Afghan officers is very high, and something we can be proud of.

• (1720)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): You have one minute and twenty seconds.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: The last part of that question was about their assisting in the development. Have you seen what the progress is? How are we making progress with the Afghan police, and what are some positive steps they have been able to make with the help of Canadians?

Hon. Stockwell Day: I have seen it with the police in action in their training. When I was over there—as I think I indicated earlier—I was not able to get outside the wire to the prison, because some attack warnings had been received through intelligence on that particular day. I am responding to reports from our officers and others who have been there.

If I could close with this comment, the questions today from the opposition were appropriate in terms of what they're asking; however, it is worth noting that there has not been one question, either today or at any time that I've ever heard, about what we are doing to make sure the so-called detainees and suspected terrorists are not escaping to kill more Canadian soldiers and civilians. This is heard very rarely. There's a lot of concern about treatment, and we say that's appropriate, but very rarely do we hear questions about what the Taliban has been doing not just to Canadian soldiers but to Afghan citizens.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Thank you, Mr. Day.

We're moving over to the official opposition. Mr. Eyking.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to see you here, Rick, helping us organize this chaos.

The CIDA minister continues to paint the rosy picture of her rollout of aid in Africa and Afghanistan. There's a report today in the *National Post*. It's a quote on the failure of the anti-drug program, the anti-poppy program, in Afghanistan. There are some quotes here from some international sources saying:

There is something inherently wrong with the entire program, from the complicated application process, to confusion over what projects are eligible, to the sheer impossibility of working out who's actually doing the approving and the rejecting.

It states that the Afghan bureaucracy is cumbersome and can only roll out so much of the program. There's been \$3 million allocated to this program, and it's ineffectual and it's not being rolled out properly. The Senlis report has been often criticized here today. The Senlis report has some good ideas about dealing with the poppy eradication, and it's only fair to our troops that we deal with the whole situation of the poppies in a proper way. The Americans are not doing it in a proper way. We should not be following their suit.

I'd like to ask the minister of CIDA what she is going to do about increasing and getting some efficient rollout of the program and showing some results. As Mr. McGuire mentioned, in those two southern provinces the poppy cultivation is up as of last year.

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The member's first question pertained to the Special Anti-Drug Program Fund. In March 2006, Canada gave one million dollars as part of a grant to the United Nations Development Program. Our contribution was earmarked for the part of the fund focusing on supporting economic activities and sustainable subsistence methods. Canada, which sits on the project steering committee, which is to meet next month, will be examining the whole issue of project progress very closely.

The other part of the member's question pertained to the Senlis Council report. I would simply like to add to what I already said, namely, that we always consider the various proposals made to improve assistance in Afghanistan. That is why we are there, Mr. Chairman.

The fact remains, however, that the Senlis Council did make numerous allegations and, further to a meeting that took place last week between representatives of this council and my departmental officials, many questions were asked. Why? Because we do want to continue making progress in Kandahar and elsewhere. I must tell you that we are still waiting for answers, because the representatives could not provide them during the meeting.

• (1725)

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Mr. Eyking.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Thanks for that answer, I guess, in a way. The proof is going to be in the reduction of acres. That's where the proof is going to be. You can do all the studying you want, but unless you see a reduction in acreage, we are failing over there.

My next question is back to the monitoring of the prisoners. We have an agreement in place. Has the monitoring started? Who is monitoring—which one of our departments is monitoring the prisoners? What resources is the government putting into it?

Hon. Peter MacKay: To answer the question directly, of course the monitoring has begun. There have been five visits. That's based on information—I'm not sure you were here earlier—by which the Afghan ambassador informs us that five visits have been completed. Of those visits, they stressed the need for the Afghan authorities themselves to comply with the enhanced agreement that these unrestricted and private visits were to take place and that at the same time the further capacity building within the detention system itself was to continue. That, of course, is being assisted by Correctional Service Canada.

In addition to that, this enhanced agreement, as you know, guarantees that there will be a clarification as far as the lines of communication go as to responsibility. There are commitments by the Afghan government itself in regard to international standards of human rights and their own domestic law. Any reported abuse that involved detainees who were turned over by Canadian Forces is to be followed up, and we are expecting fully that a report will be returned to us.

That having been said, the ambassador informs us that the head of security, who is acting as the senior adviser to the President himself, advises him that this will be adhered to. This was the same information that was relayed to the Prime Minister directly by President Karzai on his recent visit.

This process is well in place and is creating a great deal of confidence with respect to future situations around detainees.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Rick Casson): Thank you, Mr. MacKay.

Mr. Del Mastro is next.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I would submit that you cannot wave the flag of support for the forces but only ever offer criticism for the efforts that our Canadian Forces and our officials are making in Afghanistan.

You cannot stand for human rights and equality while campaigning to abandon our efforts to ensure a permanent end to the abuse and oppression of the people of Afghanistan.

This meeting was called regarding alleged potential detainee abuse in Afghanistan, but there is a broader issue of abuse that we know, and that was documented under the Taliban.

My question is to Secretary of State Guergis. It's clear that many in the opposition are either unaware of or don't want the message of the significant gains that we are making in bringing human rights and equality to Afghanistan. Can you talk a little bit about what you witnessed on the ground in the first-hand testimony you heard when you were in Afghanistan?

● (1730)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Go ahead, Ms. Guergis, very quickly.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Thanks very much for the opportunity.

You know something? You're absolutely right, it is really important to point out that there have been too many members from the opposition here either rolling their eyes or complaining that we are making an attempt here to show Canadians and express to Canadians the incredible progress that is being made in Afghanistan.

There has to be balance. They want to know about the progress. They want to know what our brave Canadian men and women are accomplishing.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson): Thank you for your comments.

The bells have started, and according to our Standing Orders, we must adjourn.

I want to thank all members for their questions today. Especially, I want to thank the ministers for the very good answers and for the clarification of some of the concerns that were brought forward in that motion.

We are adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.