



House of Commons  
CANADA

## Standing Committee on National Defence

---

NDDN • NUMBER 041 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

---

EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, March 20, 2007**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Rick Casson**

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

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

## Standing Committee on National Defence

Tuesday, March 20, 2007

• (1055)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)):** Order, please.

We have been provided with a motion that's been deemed in order. The motion is from Dawn Black and states:

That the committee schedule a meeting to examine and discuss the handling of detainees in Afghanistan, and that the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff be invited to appear.

Ms. Black, do you have comments?

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Thanks very much for this, Mr. Chair.

Actually, I modelled my motion on the one the chair brought forward at the last Parliament, on Agent Orange.

I think we're in an unprecedented situation here. Although the minister did apologize in the House yesterday, I think you all saw that the issue totally consumed question period—from all three opposition parties. I think it's very important that the minister come to the committee so that we have an opportunity to really clear this up and not have it consuming all the House time as well.

There's also the other issue of the deputy's remarks. I've gone back to look at Rigby's remarks, and the letter he sent doesn't deal with the issue satisfactorily, in my view. So I think it's important that we as a committee take this issue forward. We know there are four detainees now that we have not been able to follow up on or find out where they are. It puts into question what exactly those four detainees the Canadians took into custody are doing. Are they back planting IEDs now against our own people? Is that a possibility? Have they been killed? Have they been tortured? We simply don't know.

I think it's an issue of absolute critical importance to bring the minister here in order to have all of our questions answered in a committee hearing rather than having it continue in the House of Commons during question period.

**The Chair:** Are there any further comments?

Mr. Coderre.

[Translation]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** I have no objection to discussing this file. However, we do have a specific agenda. To me it is clear that we must finish studying the matter of supply. It is continually raised in the house. So we're going to talk about it. It is a complex topic. I think that we have to examine the situation of the of military police commission chair.

I know that three or four investigations are currently scheduled. I have no objection to our scheduling a meeting, but we cannot do so today. I can't tell you on what specific date we should schedule that meeting. We must first of all finish examining the matter of supply.

[English]

**The Chair:** We do have a schedule put before us. The motion asks that the committee schedule a meeting to examine and discuss the handling of detainees and that the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff be invited to appear. So I guess the first issue we need to deal with is that we're going to need to have a meeting of the steering committee to decide when that meeting would be, if we decide to go that way.

Anybody else? Mr. Hiebert.

• (1100)

**Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I feel that requesting the minister's presence before this committee is unnecessary. He has clarified for all members in the House of Commons the arrangement between the Canadian Forces and the Afghan authorities. His statements are available for all members to review, as well as the public. Therefore, the minister would really have nothing more to add to his current comments than what's already been said. I would hate to see us waste any more time, when our valuable time is currently dealing with issues that are pressing before the committee. And I would agree with Mr. Coderre that we have other commitments we need to address.

**The Chair:** Mr. Coderre has already spoken. I'll go to Mr. Cannis first.

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

After hearing both points, first, I wouldn't use the word "unnecessary" as much as I agree that there are other more important things. Secondly, it has been addressed in the House, and thirdly, there's an investigation unfolding. I would not see it as a high priority at this stage. That would be my position. Maybe later on it could be addressed. Most likely as the investigation unfolds we might be in a better position.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** I think that the issue of detainees is important and that we must discuss it. Yesterday during budget day the minister attempted to apologize with regard to the Red Cross issue. He does not read his briefing books; that's another problem. The fact remains that the transfer of detainees is a reality that we must take into consideration. I am ready to discuss the old agreement with my colleague, its signature and so on, but I think that we must...

[*English*]

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** There's a point of order.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** The comment was made that the minister did not read his briefing books. Do you have evidence of that? If not, strike it from the remarks.

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

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** That's not a point of order. Keep your powder dry, and it will be helpful.

**The Chair:** Denis, keep the comments less inflammatory, please.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** I simply want to add that the situation of the detainees must be taken into consideration. There is an issue involving monitoring and matters relating to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. The topic is relevant, but I would like this discussion to be held at the steering committee so as to determine how we can include this in our agenda. In the meantime, the clerk could verify when the minister and the Chief of the Defence Staff are available.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Well, I'll let you wrap up, but I think we need to vote on the motion. If the motion does pass, then I think that series of events will have to take place, but we will vote on it.

Ms. Black, you can wrap up.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** I really take exception to one of the government members' saying that it would be a waste of time, because after all, this is an incredibly important issue.

The letter we've received from the deputy minister isn't fulsome in its explanation by any stretch of the imagination. In terms of the investigations that are happening right now, the Department of National Defence is attempting to halt the one with the MPCC, or put intimidation, at any rate, on that investigation.

You know, I would think that the government side would understand that the issue is going to stay on the front pages of the papers until it's dealt with in a satisfactory manner. I believe the way to do that would be at this committee, with the Chief of the Defence Staff, who signed that agreement. And when you read the agreement, you can see it was cobbled together by a number of other agreements. It's totally unsatisfactory, totally shoddy. The minister and the Chief of the Defence Staff need to come here to tell us how they're going to fix this problem so that Canadian men and women in the military are not left in a dangerous position. The way it is right now, they are left in a dangerous position.

**The Chair:** Okay, I would ask the question.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The meeting is 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.**