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Chair

Mr. Lee Richardson

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC)): Order. Welcome to all.

The subject of today's meeting is the study of the ongoing free trade negotiations between Canada and Colombia—for those of us who are still negotiating—with a focus on environmental impacts and human rights concerns.

Our witnesses today, from the Canadian Labour Congress, are Ken Georgetti and Sheila Katz; from Canada Pork International, Edouard Asnong, president, and Jacques Pomerleau, executive director; and, courtesy of Ms. Murray, environmental consultant Geoff Garver, to discuss the environmental aspects of the agreement.

We're going to begin, as usual, with opening remarks from each of the three delegations appearing today. We've asked them to limit their remarks to seven minutes. That way we have an opportunity to return to our usual order of questioning. All members should have an opportunity to ask a question.

I'm going to ask the president of the Canadian Labour Congress, Ken Georgetti, to give opening remarks.

Mr. Ken Georgetti (President, Canadian Labour Congress): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to your study on the environmental and human rights impacts of the proposed—now concluded, I guess—Colombia trade deal.

Our congress is the voice of 3.2 million working women and men across this country. The Colombia file has been our most long-standing one, because what's been happening in Colombia offends Canadians. It offends us because we care deeply about rights, about the rule of law, and about justice, fairness, human rights, and worker rights.

Our congress has written the Canadian government repeatedly over the past year urging the suspension of these negotiations with Colombia until a full assessment of the humanitarian and human and labour rights crises are fully evaluated. We were disappointed, therefore, to see Saturday's stealth announcement that Canada has chosen to ignore caution and proper concern before proceeding with this very controversial deal. We note with some pluck that it was announced on a Saturday, when basically no one is paying attention.

Colombia has had serious difficulties convincing the U.S. Congress that it deserves to have a trade deal with the United States. Because of that, to bolster their chances with Canada, one

would think they would have been careful to show some political will towards solving the worst human rights and workers' rights abuses, which are endemic in that country. Instead of using their resources to tackle the real problems, the Uribe government has spent millions of dollars on public relations and lobbying campaigns in both of our countries to tell the world that the situation in Colombia is improving.

We would suggest that they are lying. Little has changed. Indeed, we fear that things are likely to get worse, because the mere fact of negotiating a trade deal becomes a validation of the Colombian government's actions and attitudes towards workers, and it will strengthen the expectation and the practice of impunity.

Furthermore, if this deal goes ahead, it will have a devastating impact on small and medium-sized businesses, which generate the highest number of jobs in that country. That, we suggest, would lead to more unemployment, poverty, and the root causes of this crisis.

The climate of terror among union activists restricts the workers' abilities to form trade unions, to negotiate salaries, and to improve the miserable working conditions that now exist. It provides corporations with a pool of very cheap, fearful labour, which in turn, I guess, will generate higher profits for someone. The Colombian government claims that the situation regarding the murder of trade unionists is improving, shown by the fact, they say, that only 39 trade unionists were murdered in 2007.

So the body count for 2007 is down to 39. Yes, I guess that's true. I don't know. But 97% of those who committed these murders in the past have not been charged, a conviction rate that provides absolutely no incentive or repercussions for actually taking someone's life. Indeed, while we're on the body count, please note that there have been 26 murdered trade unionists so far this year, 2008. That is an increase of 70% over the same period last year. So much for improvements in murder rates. We didn't know murders were tolerable, even at one.

This morning, from Geneva, we spoke with our own representatives and with Carlos Rodrigues, the president of CUT, Colombia's largest confederation, at the annual ILO conference there. Both reported that an important special session on Colombia was held last week to examine the full range of problems facing trade unions in Colombia. A case of labour rights violations in Colombia continues to be, probably, the ILO's most difficult and long-standing file. The government claims to be making progress, but the unions there claim that it's unacceptably insufficient to remedy the real, serious situation.

Before closing, though, I want to say a few words about the so-called labour side deal. Our government brags about the so-called improvements in the labour cooperation agreements they recently concluded with Colombia, because they convinced both parties to respect ILO core labour standards and because there are provisions for a party to pay a fine of up to \$15 million a year for labour rights violations. In our view, this is just a little more than empty rhetoric to distract from the real issues. Canada and Colombia, as members of the International Labour Organization, are already obliged by law and by treaty to uphold and respect core labour standards, as stated in the preamble to the ILO constitution as well as in the 1998 declaration on fundamental rights and principles at work.

Without getting into it too much, I just want to ask, seriously, three questions. First, where is the public support in this country for this deal? I don't see it. I don't hear it in the streets. What's the rush?

Second, what's in it for Canadian workers or Canadians or Colombian workers?

Finally, how can Canada's government, re-elected on an anti-corruption and accountability agenda, stomach the current conditions in Colombia? If this government we're dealing with in Colombia doesn't respect human life, do you really expect them to respect trade agreements, simple words on paper? I don't see how that equates. Just asking these questions means this deal must be absolutely rejected and rethought.

• (1545)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Georgetti.

We'll proceed to Mr. Edouard Asnong of Canada Pork International.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Edouard Asnong (President, Canada Pork International): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable committee members, Canada Pork International is the export marketing development agency of the Canadian pork industry. It is a joint initiative of the Canadian Pork Council and of the Canadian Meat Council. Its membership includes the national and provincial associations of hog producers, as well as federal federally registered pork packing establishments and trading companies.

We are thankful for being given the opportunity to express our views on the current free trade agreement negotiations between Canada and Colombia.

Traditionally, Canada has been the largest pork supplier to the Caribbean, to Central America and to Colombia. Over the years, we were able to get Colombia to recognize our plant inspection and export certification procedures. In practice, all Canadian federally-registered establishments can export to Colombia.

Recently, our trade position has been seriously eroded by a series of free trade agreements concluded with the USA to the point that the Americans have now become the largest foreign pork suppliers in Central America and in Colombia.

In 2006, Canadian pork exports to Colombia reached a peak of 3,245 tonnes, worth \$3.4 million. Although total Colombian pork imports are increasing, our exports to that country declined in 2007 to 2,520 tonnes, worth \$3.0 million

[*English*]

Economic conditions in Colombia are improving quickly; so is the demand for pork products. Unfortunately, unless Canada enters into a free trade agreement with Colombia, our industry is very likely to be out of that market soon. Colombia's WTO tariff bindings on pork range from 70% to 108%. Colombia's applied tariff rates range from 20% to 30% on some products. The U.S.-Colombia FTA provides for tariff phase-outs on most key pork products within five years. This will provide a tremendous advantage to our U.S. competitors.

The Canadian pork industry has let it be known to the Canadian negotiators that we need an agreement that would be as close as possible to what the Americans got, in order to remain competitive in Colombia. As most of you are aware, our industry is currently in a difficult situation, and we cannot afford to lose any markets of significance, such as Colombia. Therefore, our industry is fully supportive of the current negotiations and strongly wishes that a favourable FTA could be successfully negotiated with Colombia in the very short term. It is our understanding that the committee is studying the current negotiations with a focus on how environmental impacts and human rights concerns are addressed in trade agreements.

We looked at the U.S.-Colombia FTA and we noticed that it includes a strong commitment towards internationally recognized labour rights and environmental protection. In our view, it should be easy to negotiate the same commitments in a Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Asnong.

Finally, we'll hear from Geoff Garver, who is an environmental consultant.

Mr. Geoff Garver (Environmental Consultant, As an Individual): Good afternoon, members of the committee and Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure and an honour to have the opportunity to appear before the committee today.

I'm here principally to make some brief remarks, focusing on my experience as a senior official at the NAFTA Commission for Environmental Cooperation from 2000 to 2007. I'm less familiar with the particulars relating to the Colombia-Canada negotiations because there's just not that much information publicly available on those negotiations. I wish there were more.

The idea behind the NAFTA environmental side agreement, or any other side agreement, is that to have an even playing field for trade, you need to have an even environmental playing field, so that countries will not use weak environmental laws or weak enforcement to attract the economic benefits of trade. Without a level playing field, you have a race to the bottom.

The CEC, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, was a bold step back in the early 1990s. It was really the first time—at least in North America—that governments decided to open the trade and environmental arena to closer cooperation and expanded opportunities for public participation. The biggest innovation in that set of agreements was the supposed teeth of the environmental side agreement, a citizen submission complaint process and a government-to-government dispute resolution process.

I have submitted to the committee a detailed article that I have just had published in the *The Environmental Forum* in the United States, with my views on how those mechanisms are not working.

I want to tell you, though, a quick story that I think is symptomatic of what's happened in the NAFTA experience, and you should be aware of this as you consider additional trade agreements and additional environmental side agreements.

We had a case at the CEC filed by a man named Angel Lara García. He filed that complaint in 2003. He was the neighbour of a small shoe parts manufacturer, and all he knew—because he was illiterate, blind, and almost deaf—was that the smells from that factory were making him and his family sick. He got tired of the lack of action from Mexican authorities in controlling the problem, and he finally found out that he could come to this North American commission to try to get a review of the lack of enforcement.

We filed a submission in 2003, and we completed a final factual record, our detailed report of the investigation, last November. Normally the governments are supposed to allow publication—because the agreement calls for a vote to allow publication of those reports—within two months. It took until May 30, 2008. It took six months in this case, and when the CEC went to contact Mr. Lara García, they found that he had died in April while waiting for the final factual record. That's the story of what's happening at the CEC right now: delays, lack of serious attention to environmental issues, and, unfortunately, a lack of commitment on these very important issues.

Unfortunately, that's not an isolated case. The last four factual records, three of which happened within the last two years, have taken an average of six months to vote for publication. It's supposed to take two.

I have very serious concerns about the CEC, and I think it's very important that the committee take time to understand what's happening in this agreement, the oldest experiment in this environmental and trade arena, before going too far, too fast with other agreements.

Has the CEC been effective in protecting the environment? A review of the CEC's almost 15 years will show an enormous amount of information on the North American environment—and I would be happy to refer committee members to some of the CEC's significant reports—but measured against its potential, my view is that the CEC has fallen far short and that it is primarily the fault of the three governments who oversee it.

There's an inadequate budget, which has held steady at \$9 million since 1995; there's been no increase, so it's obviously been a real decrease. There's been a lack of imagination and creativity for an agreement that allows cooperation on an unlimited number of North American environmental issues and at a time when those environmental challenges are increasing. There is nothing in the agreement or in the program at the CEC paying attention to North America's outsized ecological footprint. The most innovative aspects of the CEC, as I explained in my article that was made available to the committee, have been minimized or reduced to dead letters.

● (1555)

There have been some positive developments in the CEC. The CEC has helped Mexico eliminate the use of DDT on an accelerated basis, and it has produced a lot of interesting reports, which again I could refer you to. But there have also been problem spots. For example, the CEC did a report showing how trade corridors at the borders cause significant air pollution.

I want to emphasize how I think future side agreements could be improved. First of all, reaching out to the public and stakeholders and giving everybody room at the table is key. This is what was different about the NAFTA package, and this is what I'm afraid has been moved away from in recent free trade agreements involving the United States and Canada. The CEC has had limited success, even with its ambitious program.

The Joint Public Advisory Committee, which was created as a main body of the agreement, has not succeeded in reaching a significant portion of the North American public. The countries have done everything they can think of to weaken the public's citizen submission process. If the Proulx agreement is the model, which I assume it is, the weak commitment that the parties should not weaken environmental laws or enforcement to attract economic benefits of trade is a disappointment. There are no mechanisms in the environmental cooperation agreement for the Proulx agreement for an effective engagement of civil society.

Let's go back to my example of Mr. Lara García. At least at the CEC he could file a complaint and get an objective independent review. Under the Proulx agreement, he can only submit a question to a bureaucrat.

My recommendations for future trade agreements are as follows. They should set up independent commissions or mechanisms that can provide honest, objective information on the trade and environment link; we need honest brokers of information, not more political spin that is only focused on promoting trade. We need programs to monitor and address environmental impacts of trade, which need adequate funding and follow-through. A much stronger effort needs to be made to bring in the provinces, since they have shared jurisdiction on environmental matters and are primarily responsible for much of the resource development that is involved in trade. There need to be much more meaningful mechanisms to engage civil society to provide meaningful forums for discussion, debate, and involvement.

Finally, I urge you to make a more serious study of the NAFTA experience and open up the debate on what is working in the NAFTA experience and what needs improvement, both on environment and on labour.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garver.

We'll begin our first round of questions with Mr. Bains.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I just want clarification on how many rounds we will have for questions.

The Chair: I think we're going to be fine today. We could probably go through with the first round of...

Hon. Navdeep Bains: I just wanted to make sure my colleagues get an opportunity to ask questions as well.

The Chair: I think we'll have lots of time today, if we stick to seven minutes for questions and answers. Let's stick to the schedule, seven minutes for questions and answers.

Mr. Bains.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Thank you very much, Chair.

The comment was made earlier on in the remarks by the CLC with respect to the fact that an announcement was made to complete the negotiations for the free trade agreement with Colombia on a Saturday when nobody would notice. But people did notice. The issue was raised in the House again today. It's a serious concern.

This committee travelled to Colombia, as many of you know, to Bogota, and met with government representatives. We've been studying this particular free trade agreement with Colombia for quite some time now, for a few months, meeting with a whole range of witnesses and spending Canadian taxpayers' money on this, addressing the mandate we developed on human rights and the environment that was accepted by all committee members.

As ordinary taxpaying Canadians, what is your view of the fact that before the recommendations were completed by this committee, before the report was completed, the government completed negotiations? I want the CLC's thoughts on that, please.

Mr. Ken Georgetti: I guess it's a matter of respect for the process. I would expect this committee's report would be important and a guide to the negotiators and the representatives of the Canadian

government. I would have hoped they would have taken into consideration the concerns that all the presenters made to the committee in the recommendations the committee made. It seems to not be the case. It seems to call into question once again Canadians' reliance on the government being willing to listen to their views before they make decisions.

• (1600)

Hon. Navdeep Bains: In your opinion, why was the agreement rushed, in the sense of being signed so quickly, in light of the fact that we were looking at the agreement in committee? What's the rush? You asked this question in your opening remarks as well, so I'd like you to address it: why the rush, why now, why Colombia?

Mrs. Sheila Katz (National Representative for the Americas, International Department, Canadian Labour Congress): We've been saying all along that these negotiations are more about political objectives in support of U.S. strategies than they are about Canadian affairs. Since Mr. Harper's visit to Colombia last summer, he's made every effort to try to convince the U.S. Congress to pass their agreement, which would have repercussions on Canadian producers.

We were trying to figure out exactly what the goals and objectives of this government are in pushing forward so quickly. We suspect it's to show the Democrats, for example, that Canada has the gumption to proceed, in order to encourage them to in turn pass their agreement in the United States.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: The press release that was issued by the government about the negotiations clearly outlined some of the side agreements. You alluded in your remarks to those with respect to the environment and labour standards and ILO standards, noting that they're already part of the treaty we have signed. There was one on the environment also. I'd like you to speak to it as well.

Can you share your thoughts on the press release that was sent out by the government on the side agreements on labour and on the environment, please, Mr. Garver?

Mr. Geoff Garver: I'm afraid I haven't seen the press release on the environment. I assume it was based on the Peru environmental cooperation agreement, which I did look at.

My view in general is that this is a step back from the ambitious mechanisms that were included in the NAFTA package to promote public participation and to engage civil society in these issues.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: The point is well made. My understanding is that it is a similar template to that for Peru, but I'll get you the press release, and hopefully you can provide us with written commentary on it. It would be greatly appreciated.

Again, to add to that question, can you comment on what provisions you would like to see in the agreement to address the issues of human rights and labour? If a free trade agreement were to be tailored to your concerns, what provisions would you like to see, especially in the side agreements?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: I'm not sure there's much they can put in that would satisfy. First of all, the way we read the labour rights side agreement, it seems that if someone is caught murdering a trade union activist, they get a fine of up to \$15 million. That doesn't warm our hearts.

The basic thing we'd like to see is a commitment from any government we're going to deal with that they respect human rights and human life. If they can't make that commitment in a preamble to a trade agreement, I don't know why we would sign an agreement with them or with anyone who doesn't have that respect. This government doesn't seem to respect any dissension or tolerate any—

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Sorry, just very quickly, if it were in the preamble, do you think it would be sufficient?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: No.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: So what kind of language or what kinds of assurances would you need from the government to satisfy your concern, if there were a free trade agreement with Colombia?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: Given our experience and the feedback we've been getting from workers on the ground, I don't think you can make a deal with this government that would have any respect from us. We don't think this government has any respect for the rule of law in their own country, and as we keep stressing, if they don't have any respect for the rule of law in their own country, how can they have any respect for a trade agreement?

• (1605)

Hon. Navdeep Bains: You mentioned that you feel the government hasn't shown any respect for the rule of law, so your argument would be that there need to be certain preconditions before we sign a free trade agreement with Colombia. What kinds of preconditions would you deem to be necessary or appropriate, given the environment in Colombia?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: I think it would be that we have a democratic government that respects the rights of its own citizens. Are we going to make a deal with Zimbabwe next? Who else are we going to make a trading agreement with?

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): I don't think we'll do that one this year.

Mr. Ken Georgetti: Is that right? Well, maybe you will.

Mr. Dean Allison: Maybe we won't.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: With all due respect to my colleague, please....

The Chair: Carry on, Mr. Bains.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: The argument the government is making is that we need to engage in the Americas, that we need to promote trade, that we need better market access. The argument can be made, and it's a legitimate one, in the sense that Canada is a trading nation and we need to look at markets. The question is, is Colombia the right market presently? If not, what kinds of conditions need to exist for Colombia to be a good market?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: I think Colombia has to demonstrate by its behaviour and its attitude that it respects the kind of democracy that we practice in this country. I think we should do trade deals only with nations that have the same respect for democracy and human rights that we have.

Our Prime Minister showed some leadership in China when he raised those concerns. When we asked him to raise it in Colombia, he said this was not the time for that. All the time is the time to raise the issues of respect for human life and human rights, and Colombia has not demonstrated a proper regard for these issues. Other jurisdictions in South America have shown the same disregard, and our country won't negotiate with them. Why are we negotiating with Colombia?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bains.

Monsieur Cardin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going to share my time with my colleague.

Good afternoon, madam, gentlemen. My motivation is a little low this afternoon, especially after what we heard over the weekend. It seems that the free trade agreement with Colombia will be concluded in the coming weeks or, at least, the coming months. We went there and met people, and we were supposed to table a report and make recommendations. Was all that work in vain? I am sorry that you came here to speak about a matter that has been practically decided. All that is left is that, at some stage, there will be an implementing act and then the decisions will follow.

There are some significant aspects. We met people who completely disagreed with this free trade agreement. People, mainly businesspeople... even though some were not in favour of the agreement, it was generally supported. But the majority expressed significant reservations, given the government's real position on the protection of human rights.

We knew that significant additions to the agreement were needed. I am on record as saying that it is time to change the nature of our agreements to include human and workers' rights, as well as environmental safeguards. This is not just a question of reaching subsidiary or parallel agreements. The word parallel says it all: two lines that never meet. We are told that there will be some, but what form will they take, exactly? We are told that it is like the agreement with Peru. That is the basis on which we are supposed to make our decisions.

My colleague has some concerns about agriculture, and about pork in particular. He has some questions on that. So I will let him ask them.

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to start by saying that I have just returned from four days in Medellin where I attended the meeting of the Organization of American States. I was able to observe the prevailing spirit in Colombia, and I am very optimistic about it.

Mr. Georgetti, can that country's approach to the environment and to the rules that protect workers change quickly, or are things at a standstill and changing very slowly?

[English]

Mr. Ken Georgetti: I don't know, but I can tell you that they won't change without motivation. Signing agreements with them while they are behaving the way they are now will not change them at all. It only reinforces them in their way of acting. I think we have to show more leadership than that. If countries want to trade with us, fine. But we have to make sure that both countries have the same respect for law and benefit from the same rules of trade.

Our membership does not believe that the trading arrangements we've negotiated to date have benefited them. And most Canadians feel the same way. In fact, StatsCan records suggest that we were right, that most Canadians, especially the ones we represent, have actually lost ground in standard of living during the last 25 years. Many Canadians on the lower end of the pay scale have lost over 20% of their economic vitality in the post-free trade era. That's not much of a validation of the benefits of trade or the way we negotiate it.

• (1610)

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lussier: Mr. Georgetti, in your introduction, you mentioned that Canadian workers do not support this project that is now signed, sealed and delivered. How about Colombian workers? Do you have contacts with them?

[English]

Mrs. Sheila Katz: We have decades of contact with Colombian workers. I think Mr. Georgetti mentioned in his notes that we spoke this morning with the president of the largest central labour body, who is at the ILO at this very moment, along with a Canadian delegation in which the Canadian Labour Congress plays a part.

We have been working very closely with the Colombian trade unions. We issued a joint statement last June, just prior to the announcement. In this joint statement we bilaterally committed together to fight for fair trade between our countries, to oppose the kind of NAFTA-type agreement that would bring more devastation and more destruction to the Colombian economy basically because of the difference in the levels of economic development between these two countries.

The Colombian trade unions have been very active in putting forth arguments and protecting their society from the free trade agreement with the United States. We've been working also with the unions in the United States and Colombia together, to work for the benefit of Colombia and Colombian workers.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lussier: Mr. Pomerleau or Mr. Asnong, have you read the agreement between the United States and Colombia?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau (Executive Director, Canada Pork International): Yes.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: So you were able to see the agreement between the USA and Colombia, but not the one between Canada and Colombia.

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: Actually, no. But we are somewhat familiar with the details.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: The details about the trade in pork with the United States?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: No, the trade in pork with Colombia.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: You are talking about the trade in pork with Colombia, but with respect to the United States.

In your brief, you said that your exports had dropped from 3 million tonnes to 2.5 million. Do you attribute that to the agreement with the USA?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: Yes, directly. Colombian buyers do not hide the fact. They want a stable trade environment. The agreement with the United States gives them that, although the United States has not yet ratified it.

We see that with other countries too. The first country to sign a free trade agreement is the one that gets...

Mr. Marcel Lussier: They had no assurances from the Canadian government that it would apply the same rules as the Americans to pork exports.

Do you have any guarantees from the Government of Canada?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: We know exactly what the Government of Canada has negotiated with Colombia. We have the details. We have been given some here and some there.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: These are details about pork exports.

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: Yes, about pork exports.

Mr. Marcel Lussier: How do they compare with the agreement with the Americans?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: Colombian pork producers were strongly opposed to making any concessions at all to Canada. That was the climate in which the negotiations were held. We did not get what the Americans got, but our industry can live with it.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Pomerleau.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Georgetti and Ms. Katz, I'd like to come back to the issue of the labour cooperation agreement. The actual press release from the government this weekend says:

If obligations are not respected, the offending country may have to pay up to \$15 million in any one year into a cooperation fund.

So there's actually a cap, sort of a prepayment on murder, of \$15 million.

How many trade unionists have been killed in Colombia?

Mrs. Sheila Katz: It's 2,665 since 1986; 26 since the beginning of 2008.

Mr. Peter Julian: So that amounts to about \$5,900 for each labour activist who has been killed.

Mrs. Sheila Katz: That's if it were to be applied retroactively, but it will not be retroactive. It will only be from the time of the signing of the agreement.

• (1615)

Mr. Peter Julian: This is horrific, that the Conservatives would put such a low value on human life, that for \$5,000 you can somehow pay off deaths that occur, the ongoing slaughter of labour activists.

Do you feel that this is appropriate, that you can prepay \$15 million and then basically kill whatever labour activists you want?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: It's rhetoric, and it doesn't add to the dimensions. Surely our government can bargain better deals than that for us. If they can't, we can come to the table and show them how.

We do know how to negotiate agreements with employers and governments that respect what we need to have. Obviously we didn't put those conditions in this, at least in the side agreement, in terms of the press release we've seen. It seems much more of a gimmick than anything, because \$15 million to an economy of this size is not a very significant fine to change behaviour.

Fines are meant to change behaviour, and they have to be significant enough to force that behavioural change, but \$15 million to this country or Colombia is not much money in the scheme of things.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, and you don't have to pay a penny more. It's a prepayment.

Mrs. Sheila Katz: Furthermore, they would pay it to themselves. It would basically be an internal transfer on the Colombian books. They would pay the fine into a fund that would then be co-managed by themselves and the Canadian government to carry out cooperative activities—workshops, seminars, and studies—that would work toward improving the situation.

I would remind you that the Colombian trade unionist who spoke to you last Monday was begging for prevention rather than remedy after the fact. Let's save lives instead of paying fines for them after they're murdered.

Mr. Peter Julian: Just so I understand this, the Colombian government would pay \$15 million to itself and wouldn't have to take any action to control the armed paramilitaries that are closely linked to the government. They could essentially get away with murder on a prepayment plan.

I want to come back to the fact that the number of trade unionists being killed has gone up. There are increasing problems with people being forced off the land—often working with companies that have been cited. There are allegations that companies like Nestlé, Coca-Cola, Chiquita, and others have been directly connected to collusion with the military.

On the idea that this government is trying to push through this agreement, does it essentially reward bad behaviour?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: The agreement is about giving large Canadian-based transnationals the ability to do business in Colombia. It paves the way for them to do that. They're going into a regime where, if anyone seems to get in the way, they physically mow them down. They call them guerillas and attach names to them.

But they're going to use the Colombian authority to push any dissent out of the way, whether it's environmental or labour dissension, so Canadian businesses can maximize their profits in a jurisdiction that doesn't respect rules.

As my colleague said, our concern about all these trading agreements on the environmental and labour side is that they'll go to competitive bidding, and the bidding is always downward, not upward.

I notice when it comes to executive salaries and other things, they always bid their salaries up, not down. But when it comes to the salaries of workers or the environment, Canadian corporations or multinationals will go to the jurisdiction that will give them the best deal. On the environment and labour, the best deal is down, not up. That's what's going to happen in Colombia. The workers in Colombia will get less, and as a result of them getting less, the workers in Canada will lose their jobs, just like those 2,500 GM workers just lost their jobs because GM will be able to source their factories not only in Mexico, Vietnam, and China, but in Colombian now too.

That's why our members don't trust these trade agreements. As a result of them, we're going to work harder for less money and be less well-off. That's not what Canada should get out of trading arrangements with other countries.

Mr. Peter Julian: The business community is divided on this issue, but the labour movement has considered this, and the CLC had a motion on this. My understanding is it passed unanimously.

Mr. Ken Georgetti: Yes, it passed at our convention two weeks ago, where 2,000 delegates sat there for a week discussing issues like this.

Mr. Peter Julian: Why is this government pushing ahead with this deal recklessly, despite the human cost?

For Mr. Garver, given the problems with a much tougher deal under NAFTA, and given the fact that there's absolutely no obligation to meet any environmental standards whatsoever in the text of the agreement—if so, I think the Conservatives would have tried to champion it—do you put thumbs down on this deal?

• (1620)

Mr. Geoff Garver: What this trust relationship says, now that I've had a chance to look at it, is that there are mechanisms to make sure that countries enforce their environmental laws and have high levels of environmental protection. But the fact is, those mechanisms are much weaker than what's in the NAFTA deal, and those are already pretty weak.

What can you do if you're concerned about your country or another country not enforcing its environmental laws? At the CEC you can file a complaint and get an independent, objective report, a detailed factual investigation. What can you get under the Peru model, which I assume is the same as the one here? You can file a question with a bureaucrat, with the national coordinator. There is no independent review and no rigorous analysis. I've seen those kinds of answers. I'm sure you all have too. They're not very rigorous.

At the national level, what can you do? Under NAFTA, if Canada thinks Mexico is getting a trade advantage by having a pattern of not enforcing its laws, it can have a binding arbitration process initiated and monitor enforcement sanctions. What can happen under these agreements? You can have consultations, and everybody's supposed to get along.

Compare that to what an investor can do under these agreements. An investor, under NAFTA and under these agreements, can file a complaint against the Canadian government. If a Colombian investor comes and makes an investment in Canada, and they think they've been treated unfairly, they can sue the Canadian government for multi-million-dollar damages. Those have been awarded, by the way; Canadian taxpayers have paid those damages. They get to choose one of the judges in that case and they get to have a full evidentiary hearing. It makes this independent citizen submission process, which is already better than what you have approved, look pretty weak.

It's just not balanced, in my view.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian. That's eight and a half minutes.

Mr. Keddy.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, witnesses. You can see by the rhetoric of our opposition members that there's still a little bit of debate to have here.

There are a couple of key questions here.

Mr. Georgetti, with respect to what you've said about this agreement, is there a free trade agreement anywhere that your organization supports?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: No, and they're not trade agreements. Just as my friend Geoff illustrated, they're investment agreements. Investors have all sorts of rights to sue.

There was the example of MMT. We banned MMT in gasoline in Canada. Investors sued and won, I think, \$100 million from the Canadian government.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Thank you for that. That really wasn't my question.

Mr. Ken Georgetti: Well, your question was about a trade agreement, and none of them yet have been good trade agreements for us.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Chair—

A voice: You asked the question, Gerald.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: I did, and I got my answer, and I am happy with that because that was the answer I fully expected to get.

I appreciate, Mr. Georgetti, your honesty on that.

This is a complicated issue. We have the State of Colombia, which by anybody's standards 10 years ago was a failed state: they had rampant violence; they had a huge civil war; they had serious environmental concerns; they had serious labour abuses; and corruption was almost endemic. When you look at where they are today, quite frankly, whether anyone likes it or not, they have moved light years from where they were. It's not any one political party in this. It's organizations like the World Bank saying that the State of Colombia has moved in the right direction, that they are a reformed society.

Is it acceptable in any way, shape, or form to have 27 or 37—or whatever the number is—assassinated union leaders? Absolutely not. Of course, it's not acceptable. But is that far preferable to the 600 who were killed in 2002? It's outrageous what was going on compared to the direction this country has moved in.

I want to comment about the pork producers, because what we see is that free trade with binding agreements does bring about institutional change. It does allow jobs and opportunity in countries where jobs and opportunity are desperately needed. And the country that signs that first agreement has the best opportunity to trade with that nation on a consistent, equal partnership basis. Right now, although it may not be important to every member at this table, we do have a crisis in the pork industry and we do need every market we can get.

What do you see for your industry in pork alone? I'm not talking about any other part of the agriculture sector, because this is a good agreement on agriculture. But in the pork sector, what opportunities do you see there?

• (1625)

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: Are you talking about Colombia?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Yes.

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: We expect that we could at least double our sales within the next two to three years. There's also the fact that it will be buying more and more higher-value products. So we will be exporting. Instead of a commodity trade, it would be more of a value added than for jobs that are here in Canada.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: The other thing, Mr. Chairman, is that I take exception to the comment that somehow \$15 million is the fine for somebody murdering a union leader. That is not at all what that \$15 million is there for. The \$15 million in the labour agreement is a fine for someone who breaks the rules. It's not a fine for someone.... There is no value to a human life. To mislead that is absolutely unacceptable at this committee.

The way the agreement is supposed to work is that the \$15 million, or \$5 million, or \$2,000, or whatever the fine ends up being, goes into a capacity-building fund, to actually do a better job at settling labour disputes, and to educate Colombians, when and if and where they need to be educated, in trade agreements and trade regulations.

There are other things in that trade agreement that I didn't hear anybody talk about. We're talking about Central and South America and third world countries here. And there are many applications—you can't have child labour; you're allowed to have a unionized workforce. No one is saying Colombia is perfect, but I'm hearing that Colombia is far, far from that. It's an exaggeration.

We were down there. We have 1,000 Canadian companies working in Colombia. The first to benefit from this trade deal will be manufacturing. The next group to benefit will be the Colombians, not Canadians; it will be Colombians who benefit. This is an opportunity to continue with a state that is headed in the right direction and to pull them out of that quagmire of civil war and retribution that they're in.

I really take some serious exceptions to see it as anything else. We've seen it time and time again. When you bring in free trade, you build an economy. You supply people with jobs. You give them hope and opportunity. You build respect for human rights, democratic institutions, and the rule of law.

I've heard several speeches from the other side, and I think it's time we evened out the speech-making, quite frankly.

I think the intent here is to strengthen human rights, the rule of law, the respect for democracy, and respect for the judicial process. There's no other intent that I'm aware of.

The Chair: Thank you. That's a good finish. Well done.

We're going to move on, and we're going to hear from Ms. Murray.

• (1630)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you.

I have three questions for Mr. Garver.

Thank you for your presentation.

I was reading the press release. In there the government claims that this agreement will ensure that progress on environmental protection goes hand in hand with economic progress. I'm going to take that as a statement of principle the government has with respect to this Colombia free trade agreement, that we actually make more progress on environmental protection.

We heard from you, very clearly, that the NAFTA mechanisms are not working very well, and that there has been a reduction in government commitment, funding, timeliness, and public involvement under the NAFTA agreement. We also heard that the Peru situation has even less effectiveness, with no independent mechanism whatsoever. Clearly it's an unlevel playing field.

I would like you to tell me a bit about the environment assessment process. We know that Canadian investors are involved in mines and pipelines, which can be great from the perspective of jobs. But having been an environment minister, I know that if you don't have a very effective EA process to make sure you understand and mitigate environmental impacts, those very activities can be quite damaging.

That's my first question. Tell us a bit about the EA process under NAFTA and how you think it might be improved or worsened under something parallel to the Peru FTA.

Mr. Geoff Garver: I agree that environmental impact assessments, which have become more and more a hallmark of environmental laws in many countries of the world in the last 30 years, are extremely important. They are important for informing decision-makers early on as to what the environmental stakes are, leading towards the most environmentally sound decisions.

The way these agreements work out is that each country commits to having high levels of protection and to doing these kinds of assessments. Again, my concern is that these provisions are only as sound as the mechanisms that are in place to enforce them.

If there are problems with how something like an environmental assessment process is working in Colombia, for example, that they're really not doing a good job, I just don't find the kinds of provisions I'm seeing in these more recent agreements would really ensure that they are going to be enforceable.

We know you can put those kinds of provisions in there, meaningful provisions that are going to provide meaningful remedies, because we see that with the investor dispute resolution process. It is possible to put in more meaningful, independent....

It's really a question of accountability. How accountable are these countries going to be to their environmental assessment processes?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I have a second question.

If we appear to be eroding our protection of the environment—between NAFTA, the agreement with Peru, and potentially this one—could you comment on whether you think environmental challenges collectively are diminishing from where we perceived them to be when NAFTA was signed? Could you also comment on the cumulative environmental impacts of expanding free trade without doing something different from what we're doing in the Peru agreement to protect the environment?

Mr. Geoff Garver: My view on that is that as a global community, and this includes the North American community, we have fallen far short of what's needed to look at environmental impacts in the aggregate.

I mentioned this made-in-Canada tool—ecological footprinting—that's grown up in the last 10 years. This is trying to look at the number of resources that our finite earth gives us to produce what we need to produce and to absorb the waste that we put back into the environment.

We all know that's finite, but what we may not have known is that we crossed a threshold about 20 years ago, based on the best science in terms of ecological footprint and in terms of the overall burden that our economy puts onto the environment. I'm disappointed that the opportunities for more globalized and more liberalized trade are not being used to take a closer look at these aggregate impacts and ecological footprints.

We in the wealthy north have huge environmental and ecological footprints. There should be more, I think, in these agreements that pushes towards that kind of honest, rigorous science.

• (1635)

Ms. Joyce Murray: I don't have time for my third question.

Thank you.

The Chair: Monsieur Cardin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Pomerleau.

What is the total value of Canada's pork exports to all countries?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: Annually?

Mr. Serge Cardin: Yes, annually.

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: Annually, Canadian exports total about a million tonnes, valued at about \$2.8 billion.

Mr. Serge Cardin: And we export \$3 million to Colombia.

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: We export 3 thousand tonnes, valued at approximately \$3 million.

Mr. Serge Cardin: That is tiny, relatively speaking.

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: Yes, but our industry has also developed because of small markets. With 60 or so small markets like that, it adds up to a considerable amount. Canada exports to more than 130 countries.

Mr. Serge Cardin: Now that I have those figures, I have another question. As you say, having a lot of small clients adds up. I know, I was once an accountant. But it does let us look at things differently when we are looking to come to terms with one potential client.

Do you put the political and social contexts and labour rights into the mix? On the one hand, there is a particular context, on the other there are annual sales of \$3 million. Are you prepared to delve into a context that not everyone agrees with and where certain social questions arise? Is that a factor for you, or do you just want to increase your bottom line?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: It is a factor to a certain extent. We are people, after all. But we are not aware of all the problems when we are negotiating with a particular country. We rely on Canadian negotiators to come to a balanced agreement that the country will be satisfied with.

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Asnong?

Mr. Edouard Asnong: I understand and I am very sensitive to all those things. You cannot but be sensitive. But if we only wanted to sign free trade agreements with countries that we approved of 100%, we would never sign any. Where is the proper balance? In business, where is the line? It is not easy to draw.

Mr. Serge Cardin: That is why I asked how significant \$3 million out of \$2.8 billion are for your industry. In a situation like that, you can afford to consider other factors.

Mr. Edouard Asnong: If you draw a line and decide not to negotiate with Colombia, is it still acceptable to do business with the United States, who have signed an agreement?

Mr. Serge Cardin: You see that it is not yet ratified, which is probably an incentive for the Canadian government to speed up the process in order to negotiate something else.

Do I have any more time left, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have a minute.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Georgetti, we asked you if you had previously supported free trade agreements. Clearly, for various reasons not mentioned in each agreement, the ones that you have not necessarily supported, workers' jobs must be protected under those agreements.

Overall, human rights must be protected first of all and the right to join a union second of all. Despite what was said earlier, since Mr. Uribe has been in power, the rate of union membership has dropped sharply. I see union membership as a right. There at least, we have a specific reason. In other cases, other reasons were in play. We want to improve these agreements, but unfortunately, we have no support from the government.

Do you want to answer the question you were asked earlier?

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Georgetti: Upon reflection here, I think I would. There was one trade agreement we did like and that was called the Auto Pact, when we got to manufacture one car for every car that was sold in Canada. But you have to understand that the experience of our membership—if you look back 25 years from today, when we started signing these free trade agreements—is that we haven't gained any ground on our standard of living. The 25 years before that, when we had properly managed trade, the Canadian standard of living went up every year. So when you ask our people on the ground if they see a benefit from these so-called trading agreements—and I don't believe they have much to do with trade, they have more to do with protecting investors and protecting the rights of multinational corporations over citizens' rights—most Canadians would say they haven't benefited from it.

You're watching the same thing in the United States. When Barack Obama and Mrs. Clinton talk about renegotiating those trade agreements, their popularity in the United States goes up because Americans are dubious, not at the notion of trade, because we all support trade, but at the notion of how these trade deals were negotiated and by whom. I say that the people who negotiated these agreements have more interest in protecting large multinational corporations than they do the citizens they're supposed to represent. They're bad negotiators, is what they are, and we should put people in there who know how to negotiate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you have a comment, Mr. Miller?

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to first thank the witnesses for being here.

First of all, Mr. Georgetti, I just want to say I'm very surprised, of course, that you haven't heard of all the support that's out there for free trade agreements in general. There's certainly a lot of support for our companies and for agriculture here in Canada. Your organization may not have a lot of farmers in it or people who work in agriculture, although I'm sure there probably are people who work in agribusiness of some kind, or at least a spinoff from it, but I can tell you that when this committee was in Colombia, it was unbelievable where some of the support for a free trade agreement came from.

I believe it was on the first day we were there that we drove out of Bogota, and in Sincelejo we met with a number of representatives, with the UN and what have you. What really stuck with me is that we met with a group of eight or nine displaced people, all of them women, except for one man who was with them.

I can remember that one of our members here, Ms. Murray, asked a direct question of them: "Would a free trade agreement with Canada affect displaced people in a negative way or a positive way?" Their exact comments were: "Yes, it would benefit us; absolutely it would." I wrote the words down at the time. I don't have them in front of me, but I have them in my office.

Those displaced people, if there is anybody who, short of being killed, has gone through hell.... The husbands of most of the women we talked to had been killed by, basically, the drug industry—drug lords and what have you. It was, "Either leave the land or we'll kill you", and that's what happened. So those women got out.

My point is that somebody who has gone through that kind of strife in their life—

• (1645)

Mr. Peter Julian: Is there a question?

Mr. Larry Miller: Peter, I never interrupted you, so be quiet, please.

Coming from people who have gone through that kind of strife, Mr. Georgetti, this basically surprised me. I didn't know what kind of answer Ms. Murray was going to get to her question. And there was lots more than that down there.

Along the lines of what Mr. Keddy was saying, we've seen dozens of Canadian companies that we happened to meet—and of course,

with limited time you can't meet with them all—but we never once heard down there from—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

This is a question period. We have witnesses who have come here, and the member has been speaking for four minutes.

Mr. Larry Miller: There is a question coming. It's my time; I didn't interrupt you.

Is it my time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Mr. Miller has the floor, Mr. Julian. We've been quite respectful of your diatribes over the years, so we'll let him go ahead.

Mr. Larry Miller: Now I've lost my train of thought, but it was along the idea of—

Some hon. members: Start over.

Mr. Larry Miller: Yes, I could, too.

Anyway, we met with a lot of these—

The Chair: We'll have to turn back the clock here. We'll give you another five minutes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Larry Miller: Anyway, what we didn't hear down there is... There were accusations and comments that Canadian companies were doing such-and-such, but we never heard of any actual situations. Nobody could name a company; it was only allegations. So I think maybe you should do your homework a little more, and I think, if you want to, you will find those.

Mr. Asnong, I know that people, especially in the pork industry, have been going through some strife, and thankfully it's rebounding a bit. We heard that this FTA would really benefit the pork industry. Have you any idea, sir, what kinds of dollars that might mean to your industry—or Mr. Pomerleau?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: It's likely to double the volume, up to close to \$10 million a year in the next three to four years.

Mr. Larry Miller: And what would the figure be on that, then? You said "double" it. What's the figure?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: For me it will go from 2,500 tonnes to 5,000 tonnes.

Mr. Larry Miller: That's good.

Have you heard any comments or dissension from any companies related to the pork industry here that might say this isn't a good deal?

Mr. Edouard Asnong: No, our companies are all exporters, and they long to have access.

As well, the fact that we are first in many countries sets the field for the other countries around them. Many times when we export to another country they become re-exporters to their neighbours. So it's maybe a small market for now, but it could double. Eventually it could be huge—all the region—and we cannot afford to let our competitors play on their own there.

Mr. Larry Miller: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: We're moving along very well today with all this cooperation and cordiality.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you can begin the third round.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to give one minute to Ms. Murray. She has some good questions.

The Chair: Good for you.

Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal. I just wanted to complete my third question.

If we were to actually implement the principle expressed in the press release—namely, ensuring that there's progress on environmental protection that goes hand in hand with economic progress—what process would you recommend take place prior to tabling another free trade agreement in order to get to environmental protection that is stronger and that has progressed from the days of NAFTA?

Mr. Geoff Garver: What I haven't seen in any of the debates surrounding recent free trade agreements, whether they're in Canada or the United States, is a rigorous look at the experience under NAFTA and the environmental side agreement. What's working? What's not working? Has there been progress towards upward harmonization of environmental rules?

Remember, this is all about having an even playing field. Everybody is playing by the same environmental rules. If not, somebody is going to have an economic advantage.

I just think there needs to be more study. And it needs to be integrated better, and in a much more public way, on the discussion of what future free trade agreements should be doing.

• (1650)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To Mr. Georgetti, you mentioned that this government brought in an Accountability Act even though they failed, in every single instance, when it came to showing the accountability to Canadians. On the other hand, when I look at...

We're a free trade nation. We need to have a balance between workers' voices and rights and free enterprise. Do you agree that this agreement we are going to form, or the one the government has already declared, balances the rights of workers and free enterprise?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: No, I don't think it does. The comment from Mr. Miller highlights that. Just because you get to go to Bogota, Colombia, on a junket to see a set-up from the government on what's

happening.... It's not the real world. If you want to talk about what the real world is, you should go and talk to the Colombians themselves, without a set-up.

These agreements that have been signed, all of them that have been signed by these right-wing governments, are giving more rights to individual corporations that don't have the ability to be sympathetic to human rights or other rights. They have the ability to make money. Some of them are good at it and some of them aren't. The ones that are good at it don't pay attention to anything else.

I was in Shenzhen, China, and I met a 15-year-old boy who lost his hand because of a question that was asked by the manager, who was taught by the free enterprise system, what's cheaper, fixing the boy's hand or amputating it? Amputation was cheaper. That's the question that gets answered.

We negotiate with these corporations every day. We know you have to put limits on them. You have to put safety on the bargaining table. Even though they know it's not good to hurt people, if you don't put it on the bargaining table, they don't do it, because they're not capable of it. The problem with these agreements is that some of these people believe corporations can be socially responsible. They can't. They don't have the structure to do that. We have to temper them through a union structure or through a government structure.

The problem with these agreements is that some governments believe they can abdicate all of their rights and give them to corporations to do it for them, and they don't.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: You mentioned that we implement these agreements with the governments. When we look at the Colombian government, we see that 81 of their congress members are either under investigation or under arrest. What are your thoughts? Can the people in the political arena deliver what they promise or what they signed? I asked a similar question in the House.

Mr. Ken Georgetti: I keep asking the same question: how can we make a deal with people who don't respect human life? That's the point we want to keep making. To negotiate in good faith, you need people of good faith. When the behaviour of a government is such that human life, human rights, and environmental rights are not part of the equation, I'm dubious about whether or not any deal would be binding on their consciences. I don't believe it would. If we thought so, we would be much more sympathetic to a dialogue with them, because we agree about the need to improve human rights. Advancing trade can improve human rights, but only if the people on the other side are people of good will and honesty.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: The Canadian companies that have gone into Colombia have not made a single complaint. The ILO has not reported any human rights violations. The companies from Canada are setting up standards. We are world leaders in creating conditions to respect human rights in that particular country. Do you believe there are any violations by any of the companies doing business with Canadian companies?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: I have no idea. We have no idea whether that's true or not. Who are they? How do they operate? Under what name do they operate? There are a lot of companies that operate by different names in different jurisdictions. We don't know.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to our witnesses.

I appreciate the information we've been able to gather over the last several months from our witnesses and from the opportunity to visit Colombia. We went to some schoolrooms. Mr. Julian and I had a chance to pass out some pins and to see the effectiveness of CIDA. The Canadian International Development Agency has played a strong role in assisting the Colombian government in setting up protection for children's rights.

Since 2005, government has put up \$10.5 million to support Colombia's search for peace through global peace and security funds, including \$7 million this fiscal year. Some \$5.4 million of that has been directed towards security and stability programs such as the monitoring of demobilization of paramilitaries. Approximately \$2.6 million has been used to support transitional justice, and \$2.5 million has assisted the promotion and protection of the rights of victims of the conflict. Do you think that's a good use of Canadian taxpayers' money?

• (1655)

Mr. Ken Georgetti: Absolutely. We think CIDA does an exceptionally good job for Canada around the world. We work very closely with CIDA on programs like that. It's a great step, but it's not the end. It's just a start in that country. If you got the facts when you were there, I'm sure you know that there's a lot of work still to be done on the rights of human beings.

Mr. Ron Cannan: I agree, there's a lot more to be done, and I think it's encouraging to see the progress that's been made.

One supplemental question. You had asked during your opening comments about our not hearing who's supporting this as far as the large corporations are concerned. I'd like to read into the record an unsolicited e-mail by a British Columbian. Basically the subject line reads: "Free Trade with Colombia will benefit the workers, employees and unions in Colombia". It reads:

Dear Mr. Cannan:

This letter is in support of the Free Trade Deal being negotiated between Canada and Colombia. I am fully in support of the implementation of this deal as soon as possible. It has the prospect of generating many benefits for the citizens of both countries. I have travelled extensively throughout Colombia from each of the major cities through rural areas and tiny, remote towns in the Andes and along both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. I have had opportunities to talk with people from all walks of life there: farmers, street vendors, army and police staff as well as successful businessmen. With this extensive experience I firmly believe that a free trade deal will provide enormous benefits to the workers, to the cooperatives I

have visited, to the business communities in Colombia as well as Canada. It will further extend the incredible positive changes that have been happening which I have seen occurring since I first entered the country in 2001. I have returned to Colombia every year since then for several months at a time and so speak from first-hand experience not through second-hand information. These benefits are not just economic they include better rights and opportunities for the workers and more markets for some of the small businesses and cooperatives I have seen. Keeping this trade door shut will further support those segments of society that are responsible for the harsh and dangerous situation that exist. There is no doubt that there is violence, kidnapping, extortion and corruption. These aspects have been greatly reduced in the last 8 years. By opening up trade it opens up a great window of opportunity that helps the existing democratically elected government to continue its very successful programme of positive change. If there are voices in Canada against this deal I firmly believe they are voices from organizations that truly do not know the situation on the streets, the villages and the officer towers throughout Colombia from Santa Marta through Medellin and Bogota and down to Pasto in the south. They have not seen and experienced the actual conditions and situations of the people who have lost homes and farms to the displacement from the FARC guerillas or to the power of the mafia and their control of the various drug cartels. Those who would oppose this deal have not seen the desire and energy of people who want to work in a fair and just manner and now have more jobs from the investments that are returning to Colombia as it becomes a safer more open society trying to help itself. Canada can help this progress to continue and in the process enhance its own trading options.

I ask that you please put this free trade through the house for passage as soon as possible. It has the potential to further enhance the positive changes that are occurring there. It has the possibility of opening up more details between Canadian and Colombian companies.

Sincerely,

Darren Grams

Williams Lake, B.C.

I'd be happy to circulate that if anybody's interested.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to share that. It was unsolicited. I know there are some people who have some genuine concerns—so do I—that the situation is far from perfect. But I believe that providing hope for individuals, such as the ones we've seen there, and others....

The gentleman who came from Vancouver Island—he was in the forest industry—and moved there five years ago is bringing sensitive integration of environmentally sensitive logging to the country, working with the Colombians and educating them to the fact that there are environmental and social issues. Canadian companies are helping to make Colombia a more prosperous and safer country to come.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cannan.

We're going to continue with this round. I'll try to get one more in.

Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Mr. Chair, again.

My question goes to the president of Canada Pork International.

Could you please tell us how many additional jobs it will create for Canadians if we go ahead with this free trade agreement?

Mr. Edouard Asnong: With this one?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Yes.

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: Well, I may need a good accountant.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Well, estimate it.

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: That's a difficult one to answer because it doesn't work that way. You see, when you slaughter one pig, you need to dispose of all the parts. We need markets for the parts that are difficult to sell somewhere else, so it's a very tough question to answer. But we could mention that it means something like an additional 100,000 pigs being raised in Canada.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Georgetti, do you have any numbers as to how many Canadians will lose jobs if we sign this agreement?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: Again, we have no idea, but based on our experience, there will be some. There will be some dislocation as a result of it.

The second question we always ask is, what are the mitigations for the dislocation? As I said, if you ask Canadians what they think about the free trade agreement so far, most of them are poorer or working harder as a result, so they have no faith in that system. You don't have to go to Colombia or get unsolicited letters; simply ask Canadians whether they think they're better off or worse off, or ask Stats Canada. The statistics are there and they're clear. We have not gained any economic benefits for most Canadians. Some people have gotten richer, but most Canadians have gotten poorer in the last 25 years, which is the post-free-trade era. If it works, we're not very good validators.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: So you are of the view, then, that if we sign this agreement, it's only going to benefit the elitist of society, whether in Colombia or in Canada.

Mr. Ken Georgetti: Those are the facts so far. Those aren't speculations; those are facts.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Is there a particular market it would negatively affect, particularly the workforce that it will negatively affect?

Mr. Ken Georgetti: I'm sure it would have an effect on our forest industry. Colombia has a big potential there. It will have an effect on manufacturing, if manufacturers are allowed to locate there without proper regulation. For example, in China they can build a coal-fired generating plant twice as fast as it would take us to go through our regulatory process here. I don't know what the regulations will be in Colombia, but I suspect they're the same. It will have a huge effect on our ability to compete in blue colour jobs, for sure.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Back to Canada Pork International. Is there another market? You're saying if we sign a trade deal with Colombia it's going to help the pork industry, particularly in your field. Is there another market we can explore in which we can have fair trade where there are no human rights violations and workers' rights are better protected? Are there any other countries you can focus on besides Colombia?

Mr. Edouard Asnong: Jacques will answer that one. But to the question you asked before, it doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to create jobs by increasing our exports to Colombia. That's open market. You lose markets and you gain markets, but we have to fight to obtain as much market access as we do. If we slowly start losing markets we're going to lose a lot of jobs, because our manufacturers would not be as efficient as they were.

Go ahead, Jacques.

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: We're already exporting to more than 130 countries in the world, but there are still significant markets that

we haven't tapped yet, and one of them is India. But it will be a very complex issue to negotiate a better agreement with that country.

• (1705)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

How much time is left?

The Chair: Eighteen seconds.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

Thank you, again.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal.

We've been good today.

The last one on this round is Mr. Allison.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To the pork producers, you talked about the difficulty in accessing markets around the world, etc. I realize you're here representing the pork industry today, but could you talk to us about other agriculture industries in terms of how we would benefit them with this deal?

Mr. Jacques Pomerleau: We can't comment on that.

Mr. Dean Allison: Okay, you can't comment.

Strictly in terms of what this deal will do for the pork industry then, we've talked in terms of possibly doubling the sales in the next three to five years. Is that what you're suggesting?

Mr. Edouard Asnong: Yes, and also keeping what we have. That's the first point, keeping what we have. Then there's a potential to increase.

Mr. Dean Allison: Okay.

Mr. Garver, in terms of talking about the sidebar agreements in environment and the like, I appreciate the fact that we're here discussing it. Some parties feel it's not strong enough and others feel it's a good start. Would you not agree that in terms of trying to at least work in this direction, we're moving in the right direction by raising these issues as sidebar deals with free trade agreements versus not having any agreements at all? If you don't have any free trade agreements, how else would this be addressed?

Mr. Geoff Garver: I think free trade agreements do offer an opportunity to make sure there are improved environmental protections that go hand in hand with more liberalized trade.

In terms of making progress, unfortunately, I see this trade agreement—if it's like the Peru one, given what I've seen there in terms of the environment—as a step backward. If you look at what Europe does in regard to its economic integration, there are European-wide rules. Now that took an evolution. It took a lot of time to get there—50 years.

We are not headed in that direction with this kind of agreement, in my view. I just don't see the stepping stones there. And if you look at NAFTA as the beginning point, it really looks like a step backward to me. We're moving away from those kinds of "fair playing field oriented" rules.

I think it's important to put these agreements into the big picture. What's the overall vision of where this is headed? Are all these little agreements going to be pieced together in some big, integrated America? If that's the case, what kind of environmental regime are we talking about? We need to be working toward a meaningful level of environmental harmonization. I just don't see that in this case.

Mr. Dean Allison: Do you have any other questions?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: No, I'm good.

Mr. Dean Allison: That's all I have.

The Chair: Because we have a bell about to ring for a vote at 12 minutes after...

Mr. Peter Julian: Put it to a vote.

The Chair: There are others ahead of you, Mr. Julian. I know you always want to speak, but there are three ahead of you if we have another round.

Mr. Bains had asked earlier that we take a couple of minutes at the end to deal with procedural matters. So I think I'll end this section now and thank our witnesses, again, for coming. Sorry about the delay in getting some of you here, but I'm glad we were able to get your testimony on the record. Thank you very much for attending.

Mr. Bains, do you want to raise another point?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: I just want to shake the hands of the witnesses. I'll do that later.

Mr. Chair, with respect to the discussion that took place last week on EFTA, there was an understanding at that time by the committee members that we would give priority to the Columbia free trade agreement study in committee. Then we would try to arrange meetings on EFTA to do the clause-by-clause. Based on that, there was a determination made that if we needed extra meetings, so be it; we would meet to discuss the EFTA clause by clause.

My understanding—and maybe I can get clarification—was that we would meet today to discuss when that time would be set, because obviously schedules are difficult to manage. So under that premise, I'm a bit surprised that a meeting was set. Also, in light of the fact that the Colombia free trade agreement was signed and negotiated over the weekend, that now puts an emphasis on the importance of completing our study. In light of the fact that we took a trip to Bogota, we owe it to the taxpayers, and obviously to the witnesses who have come before committee as well.

I just wanted to speak to committee business and say that priority should be given to the Colombia study in committee. Subsequent to that, if time permits, we can look at that clause by clause.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other comments on that?

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, I agree with Mr. Bains. Essentially, we haven't approved having an extra meeting. Given the events of the weekend, we have to stay focused on Canada-Colombia. That would be the agenda, essentially, from what I understand of Mr. Bains' comments, for today. Wednesday we would continue our work on Canada-Colombia and would continue that next week as well.

The Chair: Monsieur Cardin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Chair, remember what I said last week. I said that nothing would shock me more than if this agreement were concluded before we finished our report and made our recommendations to the government. I feel that the priority is the report on Colombia and our recommendations to the governments. That is the position I support.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, which position would that be?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: The priority is to finish the report on Colombia. That is what I heard, wasn't it?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Keddy.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I know the opposition would like to delay this and find a reason to not move forward with it. That was obvious last week. But in all honesty, it's always been a dual process. There have been two parallel processes all along. The negotiating team on Colombia were working parallel to our study on Colombia.

Our study on Colombia is to determine whether or not we're going to agree with the final outcome. Our study was never to determine the final outcome. We're not the trade negotiators for the Government of Canada. We're the international trade committee, and there is a different role there.

Our study on Colombia was to find out if we supported a free trade agreement with Colombia. So trying to hold EFTA hostage here is really, I think, disrespectful to the process. It's one agreement that has real reasons to move forward. EFTA has nothing to do with the agreement on Colombia, and it's not fair at all to link them.

Mr. Chairman, I think we should move ahead with our discussions on EFTA. We should bring them to a conclusion. If we're going to hold up Colombia and use that as hostage—and that's what the opposition is doing here—then that's doing this process a disservice.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Chair, I suggest we vote on this in terms of deciding what the agenda should be going forward. If you want to, we can continue debate, but in light of the bells ringing, my recommendation would be to come to some sort of conclusion.

The Chair: Well, I think it's a little late in the day to be changing meetings that are scheduled for tomorrow. We had 48 hours' notice. We sent the notice out on Thursday. There is a meeting at 11 o'clock tomorrow. You're welcome to attend. The subject is EFTA. We'll hear your comments then. That was the order of the meeting.

It looks now like Wednesday will be cancelled because of this business in the House, the apology. But we have given notice and—

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Can I just ask how the time was determined, Chair? Who determined the time?

The Chair: I determined the time.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Based on what? We decided we'd meet on Monday to discuss the time and discuss how many meetings we needed—

The Chair: Well, we needed 48 hours' notice, and if we were going to meet on Tuesday—

Hon. Navdeep Bains: If you unilaterally set meetings with 48-hour notices.... This is the first time we've met after that notice to discuss that. Unless you want us to call you privately in between and say, "Look, I don't agree with that. I think this is the best format for it"....

An hon. member: You said Tuesday.

• (1715)

The Chair: Well, the notice was given on Thursday.

In any event, we'd better get to the vote. We can continue this discussion tomorrow. The meeting's been called.

This meeting is adjourned.

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