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# **Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, December 11, 2007**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson**

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# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, December 11, 2007

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)):** *Bonjour, mes collègues.* Welcome.

This is meeting number 8 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, on Tuesday, December 11, 2007.

I remind the committee members that we are televised today, so I invite everyone to turn your BlackBerrys and your cellphones off. That's not just for the committee members but for all those in attendance here today.

Today we are continuing our study on Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Appearing for our first 90 minutes, we have the Honourable Maxime Bernier, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Honourable Bev Oda, Minister of International Cooperation.

We welcome you to our committee today. On behalf of the committee, I again thank the ministers for coming. I'm proud to report that in the 39th Parliament today marks the 16th and 17th time we have had ministers of the crown respond to our committee's invitation to appear.

They are supported today by witnesses from their departments, including from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Yves Brodeur, the assistant deputy minister, Afghanistan task force; and from the Canadian International Development Agency, Stephen Wallace, vice-president of the Afghanistan task force.

We will have time toward the end of our meeting this afternoon to go in camera and continue our consideration of our draft interim report on the subject matter of today's meeting.

I should also make reference perhaps that a number of those who are appearing as guests today earlier in the day attended the Peacebuilding in Afghanistan Conference put on by the University of Ottawa. I appreciated both Monsieur Brodeur's and Mr. Wallace's comments at that conference.

We look forward to the ministers, and they do have an opening statement. We would then go into the first round. I would remind committee members that because the ministers are here today, the first round will be 10 minutes.

Welcome. Madame Oda or Monsieur Bernier, please proceed.

[Translation]

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation):** Mr. Chair, members of the committee, it is a pleasure to be here

with Mr. Bernier to tell you about Canada's international assistance in Afghanistan.

[English]

Along with 60 other nations, Canada is committed to the Afghanistan Compact. Canada has committed to \$1.2 billion by 2011 towards the reconstruction of Afghanistan, one of the most impoverished nations in the world, recovering from decades of hardship. Canada is working closely with Afghans, other allied nations, and with non-governmental organizations to achieve the targets set forth in the compact.

While Canada's activities have a special focus on Kandahar, our development program reaches all corners of Afghanistan. In fact, 80% of our commitments are directed to national programs impacting all 34 provinces in the country.

Through the national solidarity program, 17,500 local development councils have been established. The success of these councils means that local Afghans are making decisions, taking ownership of projects, and working to complete over 12,700 projects throughout the country.

Infrastructure projects include 150 kilometres of canals and irrigation systems, 3,000 kilometres of roads that have been rehabilitated, and 50 bridges built. Despite the challenges we face, our efforts and those of our development partners are yielding measurable results in many sectors across the country and in Kandahar.

Education has been, in fact, a clear success story in Afghanistan. We mustn't forget that only six years ago only 700,000 children were enrolled in school and all were boys, as girls were denied access to formal education. Today some six million children are in school, roughly one-third of them girls. Today there are 40,000 students in higher education. This is a tenfold increase in six years.

In the area of health, 83% of Afghans now have access to basic health, up from 9% under the Taliban rule. Infant mortality has been reduced by 22%, and a UN campaign will vaccinate seven million children against polio. According to the World Health Organization, so far this year there have only been 12 polio cases reported in Afghanistan compared to 29 at the same time last year. Canada also supports a UNICEF-led measles and tetanus vaccination campaign targeting more than 200,000 children and 175,000 women of child-bearing age in the south.

Our contribution to the World Food Programme has helped deliver 6,500 metric tonnes of food aid to more than 400,000 hungry Kandaharees over the past year alone. With Canadian support, UNICEF is also providing essential non-food items like tents, blankets, and micro-nutrient tablets to tens of thousands of the most vulnerable Afghans.

Canada is working with the United Nations Mine Action Service to help Afghanistan clear land mine areas. Just last week I announced an additional \$80 million over four years for this program, which has already yielded great results. The Afghan government has destroyed all known stockpiles.

We've reduced land that was contaminated by almost 20%. We see a 34% reduction in the communities affected and a 55% reduction in the number of land mine victims. In addition to this, 8.3 million Afghans have received mine risk education programs.

Along with our international partners and the Afghan government, we are achieving significant improvements and real results. The Afghan per capita income has doubled since 2001. The role of Afghan women is growing—women who, under the Taliban, were denied access to education, mobility, and the ability to exercise their democratic rights. Today, women hold 25% of the seats in the National Assembly, over 5,000 have received literacy training, they represented 43% of the voters in the last election, and 66% of those accessing microfinancing programs have started their own businesses.

● (1535)

Our efforts are making a difference, but the job is not complete. As we know, the challenge remains, and it is evolving over time. That is why CIDA will be increasing its presence in the field to 35, to work with the over 1,300 other development workers in Afghanistan in 2008.

As our programming continues, we are mindful of the challenges we face to ensure aid effectiveness and accountability. That is why monitoring, reporting, and evaluation are employed at three levels: nationally, working with the international community and the Afghan government; at the program level; and at the project level.

Many challenges must be overcome before Afghanistan becomes a self-reliant economy and society. Our aim is to enable the citizens of Afghanistan to take full ownership of all aspects of the country's development and future. We stand firmly by their side as they strive to rebuild their country one village and one day at a time.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

I am now ready to answer questions from the committee and listen to your comments.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister Oda.

We'll now proceed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Minister Bernier.

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister Oda.

I am here with

[*Translation*]

Yves Brodeur, who is the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Afghanistan Task Force. It is a pleasure to be with you today to take part in this important discussion of one of the most important issues for our government.

[*English*]

Members of the committee, thank you for your interest in Canada's role in Afghanistan. It is a privilege for me to be here alongside the Minister of International Cooperation to explain the importance and multifaceted nature of our engagement there.

Canada is in Afghanistan, along with over sixty nations and international organizations, at the request of its democratically elected government. We are in Afghanistan as part of a UN-sanctioned mission to help build a stable, democratic, and self-sufficient society.

Canadian diplomats, development workers, military personnel, civilians, police, and corrections advisers are helping the Afghan government. Our shared goal is to build the institutions required to achieve stability, good governance, and lasting peace.

Afghans have suffered through decade after decade of war, leaving most of their country's infrastructure destroyed. The Afghan people are looking to the international community to help Afghanistan get back on its feet. Much has been accomplished in the past six years. It is important to explain to Canadians just how far Afghanistan has come since 2001 and the brutal, oppressive days of the Taliban's rule.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have had the opportunity and privilege to travel to Afghanistan so that I could see first-hand the difference we are making there, and the difference we are making for the Afghan people. The facts speak for themselves. Per capita income has doubled in the past three years. Over 80% of Afghans now have access to basic medical care, as opposed to just 9% in 2004. These are historical firsts in Afghanistan's legacy of war and conflict.

[*Translation*]

I've just come back from a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels. I had a chance to engage with my counterparts and the Alliance's Secretary General. I can tell you today, and assure you, that the countries assisting Afghanistan are united in the conviction that there can be no reconstruction without security. Without security, there can be no construction. Without security, there can be no economic growth. Without security, there can be no progress on human rights. And I can assure you that NATO's commitment to the mission in Afghanistan remains strong.

In the past months, I've also spoken with colleagues and government officials, NGO workers, and international policy experts.

I can tell you today that these people expressed varying shades of opinion as to what we are doing in Afghanistan and how we should do it. That is very healthy. But not one of them has questioned the critical importance or the legitimacy of this mission.

[English]

Military forces from 39 countries, including Canada, are involved in the UN-sanctioned, NATO-led mission at the request of the Afghan government. This includes all of NATO's 26 member states, in addition to 13 other countries.

Collectively, the nations of the International Security Assistance Force have deployed over 41,000 troops. Their objective is very simple—to help bring peace and security to the people of Afghanistan. This is in addition to thousands of civilians from allied countries, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations, all working on the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan.

The international community has reiterated its belief in this mission on many occasions. Last November all 192 countries, members of the UN General Assembly, agreed that the international community should continue its efforts in Afghanistan. Over 100 countries co-sponsored the resolution. This made it one of the most broadly co-sponsored resolutions at the United Nations. This is important.

It's an international community all together working for the same goal, working for the same achievements. We want the Afghan people to be able to live in a free country and to be able to have the possibility, as we have in Canada, to go to school, to have a legal system that respects the rule of law. It's a huge challenge, but it's a challenge that we're working on all together in the international community.

A few months before, the UN Security Council extended the authorization of the International Security Assistance Force mission for another year, until October, 2008. So Canada is helping the Afghan people bring peace, stability, and reconstruction to their country. We take our international responsibilities seriously. Like our international partners, we know how important this mission is to regional peace and stability.

The Afghanistan Compact is the joint plan developed in January 2006 by the Afghan national government and over 60 members of the international community. It guides our engagement. It is a road map that lays out detailed benchmarks in over 40 areas, including security, governance, human rights, and the rule of law. The international community is behind these goals. The Government of Canada is behind these goals.

The Afghan Compact talks about security, governance, and development as three pillars. Each pillar is equally essential, and the three are mutually reinforcing. Canada's approach entirely reflects this interdependence. In fact, we have actively sought out issues where we can best leverage our resources, for example, where our securities effort will help build capacity in governance or where our development projects will help ensure a more secure environment.

Our best example of Canada's multifaceted approach is Canada's provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar province. The 350-person team utilizes the expertise of diplomats, development experts,

corrections advisers, the police, and the military. Its mandate closely mirrors the priorities of the Afghan Compact and Afghanistan national development strategy, namely, security, governance, development.

• (1545)

The provincial reconstruction team supports key national Afghan programs such as the national solidarity program. As my colleague the Minister of International Cooperation will tell you, Canada helps to fund this. The provincial reconstruction team also carries out a broad range of programming, such as police training, strengthening local governance and justice capacity, and delivering material assistance.

Another important part of our engagement is the tremendous work being done by the Canadian Forces with respect to training the Afghan National Army. The Afghan National Army is well on track to reaching its goals. Canada has had great results with our operational mentoring and liaison teams. These Canadian military units work directly with the Afghan army, teaching them how to be a professional and effective force. This approach is clearly delivering results, because they are increasingly capable of mounting independent operations.

Rebuilding Afghanistan after decades of war is not an easy task, and not one that can be reduced to a simple equation. Along with our Afghan and international partners, we are working to ensure that the progress being made becomes irreversible.

In the coming months, Parliament will be asked to consider the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. While we are committed to having a vote on this issue in Parliament, our government does not believe that Canada should abandon the Afghan people after February 2009. Given what's at stake, both for Canadians and for the Afghan people, we also want the debate to be as non-partisan as possible.

• (1550)

[Translation]

That is why the Prime Minister has appointed an Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan to advise Parliament and Canadians on options for the mission after the current mandate ends in February, 2009.

Canada, along with our international partners, is fully committed to help the Afghan government provide security, education, greater economic opportunity and a better future for its people. Every day we see the difference we are making as Canadian soldiers and civilians work with Afghans to help them build a better society.

We welcome the Committee's interest and I look forward, along with Minister of International Cooperation, to discussing with you in greater detail Canada's engagement in Afghanistan.

Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister Bernier and Minister Oda, for being here.

As you know, we are working on a study of Afghanistan. There are a number of motions before this committee to invite you on other issues, but we appreciate your comments on the Afghanistan file that we're studying today.

The first question will be from the official opposition.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patry, you have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be splitting my time with my colleagues.

Good afternoon, Ms. Oda, Mr. Bernier, Mr. Wallace and Mr. Brodeur.

Ms. Oda, two days ago, a conference organized by the University of Ottawa was held on the subject of "Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead", with some very high calibre speakers. The witnesses heard this morning at that conference said that foreign aid for reconstruction is beset by corruption. In a project originally worth \$10 million, about \$9 million disappears along the way, and the project costs about \$1 million. What is alarming is that the donor countries are not doing any monitoring.

Are CIDA's projects in Afghanistan subject to approval by Afghanistan's central government, the Karzai government? How does CIDA measure the results of those projects, and in particular its performance?

I will then have a question for Mr. Bernier.

[*English*]

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Thank you very much for your question.

I certainly can. As I said in my opening presentation, for the projects and the support given to Afghanistan and to the people, through either NGOs or large multilateral organizations, we have monitoring systems and we have reporting requirements. In fact, we have a very comprehensive accountability and oversight regime in Afghanistan.

First of all, we worked with the Afghan government on creating a joint coordination and monitoring board. There are seven representatives on that board who are with the Afghanistan government, and there are 21 representatives from the international community. It meets four times a year, it reports twice a year, and Canada has a representation on that board.

In addition to that, when we are working with large multilateral organizations like the International Red Cross, UNICEF, other agencies of the United Nations, and the World Food Bank, they have their own accountability mechanisms and reporting mechanisms. For example, the World Food Programme provides monthly reports and they have monitoring, and we also have CIDA and our associates monitoring the distribution of food.

Every one of our programs has strict requirements. At the program level, we have monitoring and reporting requirements. Then for every project that is undertaken, we also have reporting requirements that are monitored.

So I can say that there is very comprehensive reporting and accountability.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Patry:** Thank you, Ms. Oda.

Mr. Bernier, one of the speakers at that conference clearly stated this morning that one of the most serious problems in Afghanistan is the fact that the government is very corrupt. Impunity knows no bounds and human rights are completely non-existent.

It is a country in which the people have no justice. Can Mr. Bernier tell us what he has done or intends to do, with his colleagues, the international ministers, to ensure that the fundamental rights of the Afghan people are recognized?

Mr. Bernier, fine words do not seem to be enough, for the Afghan government. It has to take action, and it will not act unless international pressure is brought to bear.

[*English*]

My second question is for you, Mr. Minister.

You mentioned in your remarks this afternoon that 26 NATO state members, along with 13 other countries, are there with the ISAF mission, the International Security Assistance Force. But you forgot to say that there are 52 more restrictions from these countries. In Kandahar and Helmand provinces, NATO forces don't make any progress—and I mean military progress for the moment. This morning, some specialists started to talk about the possibility of NATO failure over there.

Is it not the time for NATO and the UN to make much greater military efforts in these provinces, since these provinces are the key, essential element to the success of the mission?

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Thank you for your question.

The fight against corruption in the public service is an important element, and Canada is making enormous efforts to help the Afghan government make its institutions more responsible. That is why we supported the reform of the police and the reform of the public service. This is crucial. It is also essential to promote good governance, as I said earlier in my introductory notes, and to fight corruption, to consolidate the legitimacy of the Afghan government. That government must be present throughout the country, and in order for it to do that, the existing corruption has to be eliminated. We want the government to have the utmost credibility among the people; that is why we and the international community, together, are fighting to reduce and eliminate corruption in the various components of the Afghan public service.

Canada has also insisted that the Afghanistan Compact include an important clause on the creation of a fair and transparent mechanism for reviewing government appointments. As you know, corruption is a human thing, and we want to be sure that the people whom the Afghan government appoints to various positions, to senior positions, such as chief of police, lawyers in the department of Justice, directors of security in the districts and provincial governors, for example, are above any suspicion of corruption. The mechanism for appointments to senior posts was recently established by order of the Afghan government, in September 2006, and we are currently working with our international and Afghan partners to ensure that the order is carried out.

On the other part of your question, which dealt with the position taken by Canada and NATO, and especially the alliance, I have just come back from a meeting in Brussels with my counterparts. As well, as you know, at the Annual General Meeting in New York, I had the honour of delivering the address for our country, Canada, standing in for our Prime Minister, Mr. Harper. A large part of the speech dealt with the situation in Afghanistan, because that is one of the most important issues for our government.

We also requested support for creating a high-level UN envoy position so that the forces there can be properly coordinated. I can tell you that at NATO, at the Brussels meeting, there were discussions with colleagues about the possibility of a UN special envoy coordinating the efforts of both NATO and the UN, and of other international organizations. The international community should be making a decision in the next few weeks or months on Canada's request, which has been approved, or I should say supported, by the international community. Canada encourages the efforts currently being made to increase coordination in the international community. That is why the special envoy was important to us.

We want to work with the Secretary General and the leading states to ensure that the UN continues to play an important role. We need an international alliance, and as I said earlier, the international community has extended the mandate of the NATO forces for another year. We are doing everything we can to ensure that there are the necessary forces, that there are the soldiers who are needed on site to ensure that there is security and development in Afghanistan. The allies' support is still very strong, and that is why, if you read the news release issued at the end of our meeting in Brussels, you will see that the first subject dealt with, and discussed in the news release, was Afghanistan. There are 41,000 soldiers there, from 26 countries, as I said earlier, and in addition to NATO there are other partner countries. With the number of soldiers and civilians on site, we are ensuring that our efforts are being coordinated properly.

I would like to point out that this is a challenge, a major challenge. We are aware of this, the international community is aware of it, but it is a challenge that is worth meeting and one that we have taken on together. I am very proud of this.

• (1600)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

You have about 20 seconds, if you want to make a comment.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Then I'll just read the questions and the minister can give written replies.

These are with regard to our Mexican situation. Has the Government of Canada formally asked the Government of Mexico if Cheryl Everall and Kimberly Kim remain persons of interest to either federal or Quintana Roo state authorities?

**The Chair:** Mr. Boshcoff.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** It's my time.

**The Chair:** No, it isn't. Your time is up.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** And that's why we don't want to debate my time using—

**The Chair:** No, the point is the study today.... We'd have to call relevance on that.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** I made—and I mean it with all due respect, Mr. Chair—a specific request that if I was able to come here I could ask the minister these questions.

**The Chair:** You asked the chair that or the table or...?

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** Yes.

**The Chair:** You asked the chair?

**An hon. member:** He can't ask any questions.

**The Chair:** Not today. We're studying Afghanistan today, not Mexico or Guatemala or any other country.

This is just to remind the committee that there are lots of different motions before this committee on bringing the ministers on various topics, but today's topic is dealing with Afghanistan. It's the major study that we're undertaking at this point.

Madame St-Hilaire for 10 minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Oda, Mr. Bernier, gentlemen, thank you for being here this afternoon.

I will start with Mr. Bernier, and then continue with Ms. Oda. I will be splitting my time with Mr. Bachand, if we may, of course.

Mr. Bernier, you will understand my surprise, to put it mildly, to hear you suggest that we have a debate that is as non-partisan as possible on the Afghanistan question. I would remind you that in your own throne speech, you talked about extending the mission to 2001. You undoubtedly know that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has been examining the Afghanistan question for over a year. I don't think that committee can be described as partisan.

As well, when we examine the four options, I note that your Prime Minister has already aligned the work of the committee of unelected—I take that back. You have already aligned your own position. I must say that this is paradoxical. We want the Government of Canada to impose democracy in Afghanistan, but we are not capable of respecting parliamentarians, the people's representatives, right here.

I can tell you that this makes me somewhat uneasy. Perhaps you could respond to my unease.

• (1605)

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Thank you for your question.

I would point out that we are in Afghanistan in response to a United Nations resolution and at the request of a democratically elected government, the Afghan government. There is neither a Canadian invasion nor an invasion by the international community in Afghanistan. That is why we all signed an agreement, a compact, in January 2006. We are therefore in Afghanistan at the request of the properly elected government.

With regard to the advisory group of experts appointed by the Prime Minister, that is an independent group. As you know, the chair of the group is John Manley, who cannot be considered to be a Conservative. We do hope that the work of the group and the debate that will follow in Parliament will be high calibre and that it will be as non-partisan as possible, because the mission is one of great importance.

Earlier, you were talking about the options available to the task force. Our government has been very clear and very transparent. The four options are quite simple. First, there is continuing to train Afghan police and soldiers so that Canada can start to withdraw its troops. That is an option we are considering. We are going to wait for the task force's recommendations at the end of January, and the debate will be held. As you know, we have a minority government, and we will have to listen to the opposition. We have listened on a number of bills. We will therefore be listening to members of Parliament to reach a consensus on the situation.

There is a second option, which is to focus our efforts on reconstruction and ask another country to take over in the Kandahar region.

We have also asked the task force to examine another option, focusing efforts on reconstruction and security, but in a region of the country other than Kandahar.

The last option is to withdraw all Canadian forces with the exception of a small force to provide protection for humanitarian workers and diplomats.

We have a group of experts available to us who were recently in Afghanistan. They met with people and they are holding consultations with various interested groups. They are very independent and they are managing their own agenda. We expect to receive a report within the time allowed, by the end of January.

You have been on this committee for a fairly long time; you have useful experience. I am therefore also eager to hear you, when the report is tabled in the House, on the future options available to Canada.

**Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire:** So I understand that you will listen to the recommendations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Relations, but I also want to raise the fact that in your options, Mr. Bernier, there is no reference to development or to diplomacy. I say this with all due respect.

I will conclude this topic by questioning Ms. Oda.

Ms. Oda, in your presentation, you said a number of things, in particular concerning accountability. I would like to go back to what my colleague Mr. Patry said about accountability.

Your CIDA officials came here and talked to us a little about grants versus contributions. One of the things they said was that today there are more grants than contributions, and that ultimately this means that you don't have to hold anyone accountable for the money you give out.

I would like to know how you can really talk to this committee about transparency and effectiveness when, ultimately, you are losing control over the grants you make. Would it not be appropriate to allocate a specific amount for evaluations?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Minister Oda.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

Thank you for the question, because it enables me to expand further on actually how CIDA makes its decisions and distributes and uses its resources to support different organizations.

We have to remember, first of all, that we are working with the Afghan government and with 60 international partners. In order to do that, there are also many levels on which we're doing our work in Afghanistan.

When you're working with multilateral organizations at the request of the Afghan government—we have some organizations who have been asked to take on special projects, etc., or to take over an area—we make our contribution to that organization. Because these organizations are internationally very experienced organizations, such as the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the International Red Cross—we work with them—they also understand the requirements of all their contributors to report back on the utilization of their funds and the contributions, so they're always willing to work with us on reporting back. I could not have given you the facts and the numbers that I reported in my presentation if there wasn't that cooperation on reporting back to the donor countries and to the donor organizations.



When we're working on other projects with other organizations, whether they're Canadian NGOs or international NGOs, we always ensure that the reporting back and the accountability is to our satisfaction. We always make sure we meet at least the minimum requirements of the Government of Canada. But I'll tell you, in the short time that I have been the minister, in my conversations and meetings with other countries and representatives of other countries, they have established very high requirements on accountability and reporting as well. Just as recently as this morning, I met with the French ambassador, who told me that France was reviewing its accountability requirements, etc., on the work they're doing in Afghanistan.

Consequently, as I say, we have monitoring and reporting requirements. We've also just recently completed discussions with the Government of Afghanistan—that was completed just before my visit—on strengthening their requirements and coming up with our agreements when we're working with them, as far as the requirements of how they will report on the utilization of the funds are concerned.

• (1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister Oda.

We're pleased to have Mr. Bachand with us today from the defence committee.

Do you have a question, Monsieur Bachand?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** I have just come back from a meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Washington. The ministerial meetings may have been a nice façade, but I can tell you that the parliamentarians from 26 countries who attended that meeting were asking themselves some very big questions. One issue relates to the reports submitted by NATO and other groups, stating that 56% of the territory of Afghanistan is currently controlled by the Taliban. So the façade begins to crumble.

NATO is currently reviewing its strategic framework. Previously, NATO's strategic framework was not complicated: we went in with our tanks and our planes, we engaged the army in front of us, we won, and then we rebuilt. Things don't happen that way anymore. NATO's strategic framework has to be revised, and the question of security will become secondary because now it is development and diplomacy efforts that will make a difference in the theatres of operations.

Your colleague is leaving this week for Edinburgh. That is called the Afghanistan Regional Command South. It is the nations that are in the south. Ordinarily, this would fall somewhat under the Minister of Foreign Affairs, because defence is an aspect of Foreign Affairs.

Will your minister stand up for this position? Will the new strategic framework place more emphasis on reconstruction and diplomacy, and less on military activities? At present, security amounts to hunting down and killing the Taliban, and no rebuilding and protecting the people working on reconstruction, and diplomats.

I would ask that the Minister answer in less than 30 seconds.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Could we just get to the bottom question, and that will give him an opportunity to answer that.

Very quickly, Mr. Minister, if that's possible on that question.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Yes, thank you.

I am going to take this opportunity to reply to what Ms. St-Hilaire said when I was talking earlier about Mr. Manley's task force. She told me that the terms of reference had not changed. That is true, because the development and reconstruction mandate is the one ... Canada has committed to 2011 under the compact and other countries. Mr. Manley's terms of reference relate solely to the military mission that will end in February 2009, that will be debated in the House.

On the question of the meeting to be held on Thursday or Friday, I will be attending with Peter MacKay. We leave this evening. It is an important meeting concerning southern Afghanistan, and we will be there with the English and others.

Earlier you spoke about the Senlis Council. I want to make one point about that report. I would like to quote UNICEF Canada's President, Mr. Fisher:

• (1615)

[*English*]

Saying that more than half the country is controlled by Taliban is dismissed by everybody I've talked to so there's a general feeling that (the Senlis Council) have really not done a great service to Afghanistan by over-dramatizing the situation.

That is the end of the quotation.

[*Translation*]

Even President Karzai has stated doubts about that position.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We'll go to the government side, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Obhrai and Mr. Goldring will split their time.

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC):** Yes, we will split our time.

Thank you very much, Minister Oda and Minister Bernier, for coming.

As the chairman said, there were a lot of motions asking you to appear, every motion that the opposition put forward. So I'm very glad you're here to talk about one of the most important foreign policy issues facing Canada.

Before I start, we have talked about this interim report that is going to be tabled. I want to make it very clear that the interim report was pushed through by the opposition, so it was, from our point of view, not a real report; it's a report that is only half a job done. But because they wanted to put it, they used their majority to force us to put this report. I want to caution everybody that this report is not going to have a proper study done. Madame St-Hilaire talked about that, about an independent commission and everything, but I can say

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai:** It's my turn to speak, so just stay quiet.

In regard to that report, although it is going to be tabled, we have a lot of questions on whether it has really done a thorough job.

That said, I will go right to the question.

The issue of PRTs is an important one, because we all talk about the development of the PRTs and the PRTs in Kandahar. Could you shed some light on how these PRTs are working in Kandahar and the achievement? As you know, development is also an important part of the overall strategy for Afghanistan.

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Thank you for your question. It's an important one, because as you know also, Canada will have the lead in the south of the country in February 2008 concerning the military mission, but the reconstruction is an important part of our goal with other countries.

[*Translation*]

What is our government doing in the south, in Kandahar, more precisely? We are working with a number of departments. I have Bev Oda, with me. We are also working with the Minister of Defence, the RCMP, the Correctional Service and Justice Canada. The government is therefore taking an integrated approach. We are taking the same kind of approach when it comes to the provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar.

I have had the opportunity to meet people in that team on the ground. They are highly motivated and extremely professional people. They work under very difficult conditions. Together, they make up a multidisciplinary team that ensures that we can be more effective on the ground. The group also includes diplomats and experts in police training.

We make sure that we are working with everyone on the ground and with Afghans to carry out very specific infrastructure projects, such as building dams, irrigation canals, bridges and roads. Ms. Oda will be able to tell you more about the projects that have been carried out in the Kandahar region.

No project can be carried out without security. Security is the basic element. The Canadian Forces oversee these people to be sure that the area is secure and that development projects can be carried out. I am very proud of the work being done by all Canadian government officials and by the very reputable international organizations, to change the day to day lives of the Afghan people, little by little.

• (1620)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We'll go to Mr. Goldring.

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

Thank you very much, Ministers, for appearing here today.

Minister Bernier, we know the importance of the training of the Afghan army. I think we've seen this in other places, such as Haiti, the importance of the full training on security aspects in order to be able to move into other areas of development. Of course, the army would be a prerequisite for the training and moving along, but it's the police departments and the policing system itself. I think we have seen it by example in other countries, where the police are not only trained to represent the civilian population but also paid, so that they don't have a temptation or, we should say, the desperation that, if they're not paid, they're certainly expert at finding a source of income, and it generally would be at the expense of the population. So the two of them are very important and interrelated.

Maybe you could expand on the training of the police, and the pay and compensation aspect of it.

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Thank you.

Yes, you're absolutely right, the training of the police is an important aspect of security for the Afghan people, and Canada has adopted a comprehensive approach to Afghan police reform. To be more precise, this includes supporting the Ministry of Interior, providing strategic police advice; providing equipment and uniforms; building police infrastructure; contributing to the payment of police salaries, as you suggested; and deploying Canadian civilian police to train and mentor the Afghan National Police.

We're working with them to be sure that the Afghan people will be able to benefit from a professional and efficient police force. It's part of our goal to improve the rule of law. But the rule of law is not only the judiciary system; it starts with the police and with being sure they have security, so that the police can have proof needed to bring people in front of the court if they need to.

I'm very proud of the work we're doing there. We currently have 46 civilian and military police trainers and mentors supporting the Afghan National Police on the ground right now, to try to help them in reform. It's important work, and it's in line with the Afghanistan Compact, because in the Afghan Compact, we have the security part, the development, and the governance. We're making sure that we will deliver on the Afghan Compact, which all of the international community signed on to. That's why the work we're doing with our people and with the Afghan people is important for their country.

I will conclude by saying that we have six police operational mentor and liaison teams working in Kandahar province to monitor all the police substations and to be sure they are well equipped and the personnel have the right training. It's work for which we sometimes forget to give credit to the people who are doing this training, so I just want to take the opportunity to thank our Canadian diplomats and the people who are doing the training, for what they are doing right now, because with that work we'll be able to succeed in our plan for a better Afghanistan in the near future.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Mr. Goldring, you still have another minute.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Are you satisfied, Mr. Minister, with the progress being made on numbers that you're bringing into the training in the policing program? Is the entire process of the training progressing as we would hope it would be? Are there any particular difficulties in the training process that perhaps have to be addressed in other ways?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Police training is a tangible contribution that is genuinely changing things on the ground. This country is making a fairly substantial financial contribution, the \$29.8 million that has been allocated for paying police salaries between 2002 and 2008. Canada's total commitment for police training amounts to about \$39.8 million.

The work on the ground is effective. A few years ago, the police had no uniforms and no equipment. A few months later, they had proper training and uniforms. I am very pleased about this. The situation has changed completely.

Every day brings a new challenge, and the people on site have a responsibility to deliver the goods for Canada. And they are doing an excellent job of it.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We'll proceed to the New Democratic Party, and Mr. Dewar.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guests today for taking the time to come to committee.

I have so many questions to ask. I'm going to start actually with a follow-up to questions I was asking officials from both of your respective departments when we had them here on the estimates.

One of the questions I asked—and I guess I'll start with you, Mr. Bernier—was of your DM, Mr. Edwards. I asked him the question because I was very curious about his comments, and I have them here. He didn't mention the 3D. I know, looking at documents from last spring, that the 3D approach had been referenced. I asked the question, "Are the 3Ds dead?", and the response was, "Well, we don't use that terminology all that much."

The reason I ask the question is that when I look at an approach—I guess it's a whole government approach now—I want to look at what are the actual resources to back it up. So when we look at the personnel in Kandahar, we have the CIDA president saying we have about 22 personnel. We have nine in Kandahar overseeing projects

and expect a staff of about 35 by April 2008, compared to 10 in 2006, and Mr. Edwards said there are somewhere around six, which includes a senior adviser in Kandahar. Now this is compared to roughly 2,500 troops on the ground. What I'm hearing from you, and what I certainly heard at the conference today, is that there seems to be an imbalance. The imbalance is the following.

We have glossy overviews of what's happening, as we had just presented by you, that everyone's working together, and we have these little pristine projects going ahead, with the diplomats working next to the soldiers, and everyone's just whistling while they work, I guess. The reality, what we're hearing from people, is not the case at all. I submit to you, Minister, that one of the problems is the balance.

I want to know, if 3D is not dead—maybe replaced would be preferable to you—that the whole government approach and what I'm reading in your comments and your DM's comments, and anything else I can find from the government, which sometimes is challenging, is that you still have a concern about the balance of the mission in Kandahar. Do you have a concern, Minister, about the balance of the mission in Kandahar, yes or no?

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** That is a very good question, refer to the international community. We want to be sure to deliver the goods there, and to do that, you are absolutely right, we have to take a coordinated, comprehensive approach.

To start with, there can be no development or economic progress without security. So when you say that we have 2,500 troops there, some of them are working with the people who are responsible for development, with diplomats, to ensure their security and security on the ground. So by working for security overall, some soldiers are specifically assigned. As well, if we look at the Provincial Reconstruction Team, there are people from the armed forces who are there to do development.

You asked whether our mission is properly balanced and whether, as a government, we should be doing more development. Ms. Oda said a moment ago, and she will correct me if I am mistaken: from when the intervention began to 2011, Canada will be investing over \$1.2 billion. Those are large sums of money for reconstruction.

As I was saying, we work together, but that is the reality on the ground. We want to have a balanced mission, in which it is not just the Department of National Defence providing the leadership. The evidence of this is that I have here with me Mr. Brodeur, the coordinator of the mission in Afghanistan, who works for the Department of Foreign Affairs. Our department, and all my other colleagues, are making sure that we have a comprehensive and balanced vision of the mission in Afghanistan.

But we have to understand that there can be no development mission if there is no security. Our Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar has personnel from the Canadian Forces, from CIDA and from my department. So that is a very specific example of coordination.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I'm sorry to interrupt, Minister. I have just a little bit of time.

When we had witnesses before our committee, they were very clear that they are concerned that the balance isn't right, and moreover—and we heard a bit of this today at the conference—that some of the development we're doing and the way we're doing it is in fact bringing not more security, but less.

I'm hoping you hear that. I will pass it on to you.

My question goes back to the amount of resources. If in fact we have what I've just laid out as resources in Kandahar, I would suggest it's very difficult to have this kind of model when you have those few resources.

And I'm not talking about the military. We have, according to the government, since 2001 spent \$3.1 billion on the military. We have about a ten-to-one ratio of military spending versus aid. Perhaps you'll get this in our committee report, but I think we haven't struck the balance. I'm very concerned that we've shifted from what was at least the rhetoric—but that's something—of a 3D approach to this whole-of-government approach.

My question is, Minister, are you using what is called the MNE 5 approach? Perhaps your officials can help us with that. Is that something you're using or looking at?

No?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** No, it's the same approach. It's a 3D approach; it's a whole government approach, and I think the Honourable Bev Oda will be able to explain a little bit more the development of that part.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I would appreciate that, because according to officials the other day, we don't use the term “3D” anymore; now it's the “whole government”. I'm trying to get an idea of where this government is going and its philosophy on the mission in Afghanistan, because clarity is not really happening, from my perspective.

**The Chair:** Minister Oda.

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Let me respectfully suggest that this government's objective is to not only work with our partners, work with the Government of Afghanistan, but to make a difference and to show real results. Whatever we call the approach, what is most important is to ensure that we have a good assessment of the situation—it's a very complex, challenging situation—and that we're very focused on the outcomes we want to achieve.

We've seen the evolution over the period of time. We've seen the local development councils being very effective in development and also in ensuring security within their communities. When the local community council decides it wants to have a school for their children, they'll protect that school. And we've found that working with our partners—

• (1635)

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Minister, one thing you should know is what the ambassador said, in fact, when I asked him. It's from the blues here: those work. But what he also said was that it was Afghans who were providing the security, and not the military.

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Well, that's what we want to achieve.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** That's what I'm saying; that the balance we see in the PRTs and what we're hearing is that we seem to be putting too

much emphasis on the military and defence and not enough on the other components. I guess I'd just like you to look at that a bit more.

I have one minute?

**The Chair:** You have a little over a minute.

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Mr. Chair, could I complete my response?

**The Chair:** Just let him finish his question.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** If I may, there is one last point. I only have a little bit of time here.

Regarding the police—this is very important—you'll know that Mr. Rubin presented today at the conference. One of the things he pointed out in a recent publication in *Foreign Affairs* is that one of the challenges in Afghanistan is police. One of the foreign mujahedeen commanders, Din Muhammad Jurat, has become a general in the Ministry of Interior and is widely believed—including by his former mujahedeen colleagues—to be a major figure in organized crime, and responsible for the murder of a cabinet minister in 2005.

He works with US Protection and Investigations, a Texas-based firm, and provides international agencies and construction projects with security guards, many of whom are former fighters with Jurat's militia and current employees of the Ministry of Interior.

My concern is, if we're relying on ministers of the interior, and we know there is corruption within the Karzai government, are we confident—and perhaps this is to Minister Bernier—that the relations we have and the training we're doing are with the right people? If these incidents are happening, then clearly we have a concern about who our partners are—at least I would, if that were the case.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

We'll give Minister Oda the opportunity on the first portion, and then Mr. Bernier, if he wants to respond as well.

**Hon. Bev Oda:** I want to have an opportunity to complete my response, sir.

As I say, this is a very complex and challenging project that we are committed to. How, when you say “balance”, do you measure balance? Balance is ensuring that we can move, the progress being made, the improvements that are being seen by the Afghan people, in such a fashion that our objective will be reached. And that is a strong, self-sustaining country where the people will now take ownership while ensuring that their children continue to be educated, that the health care systems will be sustained, that they will maintain and demand continuance of the democratic government, and that their human rights are going to be established.

In order to do that, when we ask how we are moving these things ahead, we're being very flexible; we're trying to be as adaptive as possible, working with our partners.

When you're just going to take numbers and say “balance”, how do you measure balance? I wouldn't necessarily say to get hung up on that; I would ask how you measure the progress.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

Minister Bernier, very quickly.

[Translation]

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Yes, I will be very brief.

The topic of my colleague's question relates to rebalancing the mission. We can call it 3D or the comprehensive governmental approach. What is important, in fact, is what the government does. All departments of the government work together closely to achieve the same goal, to keep to the agreement we signed in January 2006.

That being said, I would simply like to point out that this debate is healthy and important. I am pleased that the question is being asked, because we will have a report from the Manley group, as I was saying earlier. We will then be asking parliamentarians whether they want to do only development, and less security. All those questions will be debated in the House, in Parliament.

I note that some members of the committee have firm positions, and so I assume that the debate in the House will be very interesting. We will see then what the House decides regarding the future of the military mission in Afghanistan.

• (1640)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister Bernier.

We'll go into the second round, and I remind each member that the second round is a five-minute round.

*Madame Boucher, vous avez cinq minutes.*

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women):** Good morning, everyone.

I will be splitting my time with my colleague, Mr. Kramp.

Ms. Oda, some people have recently said that the status of women in Afghanistan has not progressed, despite the promises made after the fall of the Taliban. If I am not mistaken, the NDP says that we should withdraw our troops from Afghanistan. Although it talks and questions our humanitarian efforts, it does not seem to have a concrete plan.

Ms. Oda, how are Afghan women benefiting directly from Canadian aid? What evidence is there to show Canadians that they actually do have access to the money that is intended for them?

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Boucher.

Madam Minister.

**Hon. Bev Oda:** *Merci.*

I'm very happy to have the opportunity to report to the committee on the progress we've made and the difference we've made in the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan. As I said in my presentation, one of the key successes is enabling them access to formal education, where they represent two-thirds of the children attending schools. The education and literacy has improved. There's mobility now. As I said, I was in Afghanistan, and you recognize the fact that you see Afghan women, young women and girls, going to school, in the streets, going shopping, walking down the streets, and

then you recognize that this is a significant change in the lives of those women.

The other part I can report on is the improvement of the health care they're receiving. In fact, we have seen a four times increase in the access of women to childbirth attendants. Consequently, with improved medical care and access to medical care, we've been able to reduce the infant mortality by 22%.

The Afghan women, I would suggest, are like all women around the world. They're very entrepreneurial, very industrious, etc. We have contributed \$56 million to date to the microfinancing facilities, the MISFA facility. The majority of people accessing that facility, as I say, are women. They are now earning an income for their families. They are establishing businesses. On top of that they're repaying those loans at a 90% rate.

We are also supporting their agricultural efforts with our programs that support livelihood—livestock, seeds, and fertilizer. We see improvements there. Many of the women, of course, are the caregivers in their families, so that they're able to not only participate on an increased level but actually to contribute significantly.

One of the things I'd like to speak to is to recognize that when they have the opportunity, they participate in elections. They participate as voters. To me, that shows they are concerned about their futures, when 43% of the 6.5 million Afghans who voted in the last election were women. They had been denied that previously under the Taliban. Not only that, but 25% are parliamentarians right now. As I said, that's a very successful indication.

The women I've met and the women I've seen are very active. They're learning in some very small projects, very simple embroidery projects. We all shared an opportunity to look at the outcome of the silk scarves that they're making. When you go there, you'll see how entrepreneurial they are.

I think one of the things is to basically understand that there's a recognition of the basic rights of women, their basic human rights—protection against violence, ability to have free mobility, access to education, access to democratic process, access to literacy, access to facilities that are taking better care of their health and consequently the health of their families as well. There's a saying that if you want to ensure that the people are educated, you educate the women, and the women will ensure that everyone gets educated. Of course, the same goes for health care. The same also goes for respecting basic rights. I think we've made a significant difference, along with our partners.

• (1645)

I will point out that we're planning to have 35 CIDA staff in Afghanistan, but we're working along with over 1,300 other development workers through our partnerships, NGOs, and multi-lateral partners.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Mr. Chan.

**Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, because of the shortage of time, I'll state my two questions to the ministers, and then I'll share my time with my colleague so that he can put questions that he may have as well.

Ministers, welcome to the committee.

We've been hearing witnesses, and there are two questions that come to my mind that are very important. One is along the lines of the approaches that we are taking as a government on the Afghanistan issue. I believe the 3D approach would work; however, we have to be very practical, very smart in manipulating the 3D efforts that we make. Witnesses have told us that there's no military solution to this issue. The one D that I think we're missing right now is the diplomatic one, which is the political process.

Can you update us on any political process that you are conducting right now in Afghanistan? We're told that the political process that we need is to first initiate some dialogue amongst all the stakeholders, the different religious sects, the different ethnic groups, and even military groups within Afghanistan. We need to get them into a dialogue, and after the dialogue has started, we need to get them into negotiations for a political settlement. I'd like the ministers to tell us what kind of process and what kind of success we have had, and if there is any approach along that line at all.

The second question I want to ask is on the effort. Every witness who has come to this committee has been telling us that both the military and development efforts that we're putting in as a whole, either by the UN or NATO, are not nearly enough to deal with the problem at hand. I would therefore ask the ministers if they believe there are some countries that are willing to double or triple their military efforts or development efforts on this Afghanistan problem, and where they would come from.

With that, I would like to share my time with my colleague.

**The Chair:** Very quickly, because we have to leave time for them to answer the questions in your five minutes.

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I'll be very brief.

Ministers, you have both pointed out that Canada has put a lot of effort into building and developing a legal system in Afghanistan. We know the government in Afghanistan was elected by over 40% of the population, or perhaps a little bit more than that. We know Afghanistan supports the rule of law. We also know that a diplomat has found himself in some difficulty in terms of poppy eradication in that country.

Minister, considering these tests that you have put before in almost every other nation, but including in Afghanistan, if a Canadian were sentenced to death in Afghanistan, does the minister believe Canada would in fact intervene to request clemency in those kinds of circumstances?

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. McTeague.

Minister Bernier.

[Translation]

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Thank you.

On the question of Canada's position regarding negotiations for a lasting peace process in Afghanistan, and negotiations with the Taliban, I would point out that we support the national reconstruction process. That process is based on recognition of all groups in Afghan

society, and this is very important; all social actors, under the legitimate authority of the Afghan government.

It is up to the government of Afghanistan to decide how and with whom it intends to establish a lasting peace in Afghanistan. It is a sovereign, democratically elected government, and it is responsible for its actions. We hope, as President Karzai said a few months ago, that the people with whom the government might have discussions will respect the legitimacy of the government's authority, and thus of the Afghan constitution and the rule of law. If negotiations were undertaken by the government of Afghanistan with people who respect the Constitution of Afghanistan and who renounce violence, it would be better for the international community.

The international community has to make sure that the agreement it signed with the government of Afghanistan is honoured. We have until 2011 to ensure that the country is safer and more secure and is in the process of sustainable economic development. We are working to train the police and the Afghan army. We want Afghans to be able to take over. Ideally, in the near future, and I will not set a date, they should be able to take over and have a government for which assistance from the international community would no longer be needed. I dream of seeing this become reality, but I am also aware of the challenges that await us. Together, we will meet those challenges.

As I said earlier, in terms of governance and the work of the United Nations with our partners, we will make sure that the agreement we signed can be carried out and that the objectives we have adopted will be achieved, because under the 2006 agreement, there are a number of objectives that have to be achieved. This is work for the long haul, but each time we meet, we ensure that the results set out in the 2006 agreement are being achieved, so that ultimately that government will be legitimate and will be able to take over on all aspects.

• (1650)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The one question that perhaps you didn't respond to so much was the specific one by Mr. McTeague, the legal—

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Can you repeat it?

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Do you want me to repeat the question?

**The Chair:** Yes, just very quickly.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** In a circumstance where you recognize the democracy of a country and the rule of law of the country, can you tell us how you would then treat a situation where a Canadian or someone else who might be in a similar circumstance faced the death penalty, how you would then make a request for clemency?

If the country fits the tests you established—this could be Afghanistan as much as any other country, or it could be Saudi Arabia in the Kohail case—but specific to Afghanistan, given the support that we are giving to the legal system, how would you make a request for clemency? On which basis would you judge that? What guidelines would you use, given that you've already established them in the case of the United States?

[Translation]

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Thank you for clarifying your question.

The government's position on the question you are asking is very firm in the specific case of the United States, sir. The United States adheres to the rule of law. There was a fair and equitable trial. It is a democratic country.

What is most important to remember is that I cannot take a position in advance on various hypothetical cases. They will be assessed on a case by case basis.

It is my duty, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, to promote the national standards of various countries or the international standards in which respect for the right to life is expressed. Our position is clear: in Canada, there is no death penalty, we do not want to reopen the debate and we promote that position on the international scene.

When it comes to hypothetical cases that might come up in Afghanistan, we will assess each case when it is presented to us.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Kramp, and then we'll go to the Bloc.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to welcome our ministers today.

I'll first ask a question to Minister Bernier, and then to Minister Oda if I have time.

Minister Bernier, the Trenton air force base is located right beside my riding. It serves as a site of repatriation that most of us are all only too familiar with. As well, it is the air transport hub for Canada.

I routinely and regularly am in contact with large numbers of our men and women who have come back from Afghanistan. I've talked to well over a hundred personally now, and I've been in the habit of asking every one of them the identical question. To every one of them, I say, "Are you making a difference? Do you feel you're helping the people in Afghanistan?" The response I've gotten back has been, without one exception, yes. Sometimes it's qualified as challenging or difficult, but it's always yes. Now, I state, Minister, that this response is from the people who are making, in many cases, the ultimate sacrifice. These are people who are on the ground there, who are dealing with this in a first-hand manner.

We recognize that a number of these people serve in the Kandahar area, in the most dangerous provinces, and our presence there is very important. Do you and our department concur with their decision, particularly in those danger zones, that our involvement there is making a concrete difference?

• (1655)

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Thank you for your question.

The answer will be a simple yes. If you compare the situation right now to the one of a couple of years ago, you can see the difference. But yes, we still have some challenges. We still have to continue our training with the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army, and that's a challenge I'm proud our country has decided to take on.

Specifically about Kandahar, yes, the situation in Kandahar, in the south, is a dangerous one, but I'm proud of what we're doing there.

[Translation]

As you know, Kandahar is located in the heart of the old stronghold of the repressive Taliban regime that controlled a large part of Afghanistan there. It is a province that is in need of extensive support, and where there are groups of insurgents, of Taliban, whose activities are somewhat more intense than in other provinces. Why? It's quite simple. The Taliban are well aware of the historical and strategic importance of Kandahar. That is why a large portion of their efforts focus on the south, in Kandahar.

Lastly, our presence indicates a very important position, both for us and for the government of Afghanistan. It is a key factor in the mission of the international reconstruction forces in Afghanistan. As you know, Canada took over the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar in 2005. The work done by the Provincial Reconstruction Team is enormously appreciated. However, it is still dangerous work.

As I was saying earlier, having been on site and met with the people who work in the Provincial Reconstruction Team, I am in a position to say that we can be very proud of the efforts they are making to improve the lives of the Afghan people. It has a positive effect on the Afghans, who are living in difficult circumstances.

A number of infrastructure and development projects are underway in Kandahar. Ms. Oda may be able to tell you a little more about that.

[English]

**Hon. Bev Oda:** I would just like to take a couple of minutes.

**The Chair:** Very quickly. I promised the Bloc another question.

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Certainly. It's just to show the difference that we have been making in the short period of time, since some of these things that I mentioned are very challenging.

In the area of education, I just reported on the improvement in enrolment. Now we're actually working on projects with EQUIP and the Aga Khan Foundation, and we're actually looking at curriculum-based textbooks that will be developed and distributed. We're also looking at increasing teacher education. So you can see that just in the area of education, we've moved the progress forward. We're now establishing the basic fundamentals for starting to build an education system.

So we are making a difference, yes.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I think we're pretty well out of time, but I do want to give the Bloc one very short one.

I don't know, Mr. Dewar. I don't think we're going to be able to. We have to go to our committee report as well.

Madam St-Hilaire.

[Translation]

**Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be brief because I know that my colleague has another question to ask.

Ms. Oda, since you have been in your office, you must certainly have noticed how great the need is just about everywhere. I have also heard that you could easily be a persuasive woman.

With the budget approaching, how do you intend, in concrete terms, to persuade your Minister of Finance to ensure that Canada achieves its objective, which, I would remind you, is 0.7% of GDP in public development assistance? I would like to know in concrete terms. Don't talk to me about the 8% increase, because you know very well that you have to do a lot more than that to achieve that objective.

[*English*]

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Thank you for your question, and let me assure you that there is no need to have persuasive arguments be put forward to any member of our government when it comes to international aid. Our government has already committed to doubling its international assistance program. We've committed to doubling our aid to Africa. By this coming year, we will do that. We have made significant contributions and commitments to the work that we're doing in Afghanistan.

So thank you very much for the opportunity, because if I needed to, I would take this opportunity to put some arguments forward to my associate. But there is no need certainly—I know that and my colleague also knows that—to have to put forward special arguments

to any minister of this government to continue its support, effective support, particularly on our efforts in Afghanistan. We're very confident. We know we're increasing our presence there. We know we've increased our commitment there. And we will, by 2011, complete the commitment to spending \$1.2 billion.

So thank you again, but let me assure you, this government is committed.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We want to thank these ministers for coming today. We appreciate the time. Initially the ministers were booked for one hour, and we appreciate the extra half an hour that you consented to. We look forward to your coming back, and certainly on behalf of our committee, to the ministers, we would wish you all a very Merry Christmas too.

Thank you to the associates who came with them.

We will suspend for about five minutes. It will allow us to go in camera, and then we will consider the draft report.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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