



House of Commons
CANADA

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

SDIR • NUMBER 031 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 20, 2009

—

Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, October 20, 2009

• (1240)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): Order.

[Translation]

This is the 31st meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[English]

We have with us today a series of witnesses from DFAIT to assist us in our ongoing study of human rights in Iran. Our three guests today include Jeffrey McLaren, acting director general for Middle East and northern Africa affairs, and director of gulf and Maghreb relations. There's a title for you. And we have David Angell, director general of the international organizations bureau; and Shawn Caza, deputy director of nuclear cooperation and compliance.

They are going to meet with us for our first hour and then we'll thank them. With the permission of the committee, I'd then like to move in camera to take care of a couple of things. We have some correspondence. We have at least one outstanding motion, and we have to think a little bit about future business. It is a good opportunity to do this, rather than having a separate meeting scheduled for that purpose.

Without further ado, I will turn things over to our witnesses. I understand that our clerk has already spoken to you about how this works. I will let you give your presentation.

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren (Director, Gulf and Maghreb Relations, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Thank you very much.

We welcome the opportunity to appear before the committee today to discuss the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

[Translation]

This is an issue of continued grave concern to the Department of Foreign Affairs, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to outline some of the many steps we have been taking to promote human rights in that country.

[English]

As requested by this committee, I will be speaking to the evolution of Canadian-Iranian relations; Canadian policy regarding

human rights in Iran, including in the post-elections context; Iran's nuclear program; and Iranian actions in the region.

[Translation]

Canadian relations with Iran have been governed by our Controlled Engagement Policy since 1996. We instituted this policy because of the Iranian government's opposition to the Middle East peace process, its support for terrorist organizations, its nuclear program and its human rights record. The policy placed strict limitations on contacts with Iran. For instance, Iran is not permitted to open consulates in Canada, there are no direct air links to Canada and export controls are applied to sensitive goods. All programs of cooperation with the Iranian government were also halted.

On May 17, 2005, Canada tightened its Controlled Engagement Policy as a result of Iran's failure to address the murder of Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi. Mrs. Kazemi was detained and later murdered in Evin prison in Iran by regime officials. Canada took the decision to limit contacts with the Iranian government to three issues: the case of Mrs. Kazemi and other consular cases, human rights, and Iran's nuclear program.

In 2008, we expanded the policy to include regional security issues, given our concerns about Iran's behaviour in Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Iraq and Afghanistan. Moving forward, Canada has made it clear to Iran that improvements in bilateral relations are dependent upon progress in these areas.

As demonstrated by our Controlled Engagement Policy, Canada has serious concerns regarding the state of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The government of Iran has continually violated the basic human rights of their own population through pervasive abuse and denial of fundamental freedoms. These violations include the execution of minors, the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities such as the Baha'i, suppression of women's rights, and restrictions on the media and freedom of expression.

As we all witnessed, the already poor state of human rights in Iran deteriorated sharply following the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on June 12, 2009. Allegations of fraud by members of the opposition spurred mass demonstrations, and Iranian authorities responded with violent crackdowns and further repression of fundamental human rights. Opposition members charge that more than 70 people have been killed. There have been numerous accusations of rape and torture of protesters while in government custody; further restrictions on freedoms of expression and association; and unjust detentions without charges of Iranians and foreign nationals alike, including, until this week, Canadian-Iranian *Newsweek* journalist Maziar Bahari.

•(1245)

[English]

The post-election situation is deeply troubling for Canada. Canada has maintained that the allegations of discrepancies in the June 12 presidential elections are serious and need to be answered. Prime Minister Harper issued two statements condemning the use of violence in the crackdown on protesters by Iranian security forces. The Minister of Foreign Affairs also issued statements condemning the use of violence by Iranian security forces, and has called upon Iran to fully respect all of its human rights obligations, both in law and practice. He has called on Iran to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the allegations surrounding the elections. Canada also joined the G-8 on July 8 in expressing its concerns regarding the elections.

Canada has been, and continues to be, a vocal proponent of improving the human rights situation in Iran. In addition to implementing and tightening our policy of controlled engagement, Canada has routinely publicly criticized the Government of Iran for its blatant disregard of basic human rights. Last month at the United Nations General Assembly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs along with the entire Canadian delegation boycotted the speech of President Ahmadinejad in response to his ongoing and inflammatory denial of the Holocaust, his antagonism and hostility towards the people of Israel, and his complete disdain for the human rights of the Iranian people.

Canada has been a leader in international fora. For the past six years, Canada has successfully spearheaded a cross-regional, multinational effort to adopt a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly highlighting the deprived state of human rights in Iran. This resolution holds the Iranian government to account for its systemic and persistent human rights violations; it sets out specific actions to be taken by Iran to rectify its human rights situation; it stimulates debate; and it forces Iran to account for its record. While the Iranian government has shown no improvement in its human rights situation over this period, the successful adoption of this resolution nonetheless sends a clear message that the international community is closely monitoring events in Iran and that the Iranian people are not alone in their struggle to realize their fundamental human rights. Human rights activists have repeatedly told us that this UN resolution is a valuable part of their campaign for greater freedom.

The case of the detained Canadian-Iranian *Newsweek* journalist, Maziar Bahari, has been a priority for Canada in our current dealings

with Iran. On Saturday, Minister of Foreign Affairs Lawrence Cannon issued the following statement:

It is with great relief that we welcome the release of Maziar Bahari from prison in Iran. The Government of Canada shares in the joy of Mr. Bahari's family, friends, colleagues and countrymen, and hopes that he will soon be able to join his wife for the birth of their first child.

I'm very pleased to inform the committee that this morning Mr. Bahari left Iran and has arrived in London, and is with his wife as we speak.

The Government of Canada has been steadfast in pressing for his release since he was first arrested. His situation was complicated by his dual nationality, which is not recognized by the Iranian authorities. Canada used all diplomatic and other channels available to gain access to Mr. Bahari, to press for his release, and to ensure his legal rights were respected. The Minister of Foreign Affairs met with his Iranian counterpart on August 25 in Istanbul to demand Mr. Bahari's immediate release and for Canadian consular access to him. Department of Foreign Affairs officials once again reiterated this message when we met with Iran's chargé d'affaires on September 22. On September 24, Minister Cannon released a joint statement with his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in which Canada and the U.S. asked Iran to positively resolve the cases of all Canadians and Americans in Iranian custody, including Mr. Bahari. Canada will continue to press for the release of all those who remain unjustly detained.

Finally, the Government of Canada condemns the terrorist attack in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan Province on October 18. We condemn all political violence and we hope that the perpetrators of this heinous act will be found and brought to justice.

Canada also has serious concerns about Iran's nuclear program. For six years, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency has reported that Iran is not living up to its commitments of transparency and cooperation, particularly regarding unresolved nuclear activities with possible military dimensions.

•(1250)

Canada was deeply troubled by the revelation three weeks ago that Iran has been building a covert Iranian enrichment facility for several years. This revelation is one more example of Iran's continued refusal to meet its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions and IAEA requirements, and we've called for the IAEA to investigate.

Iran's actions threaten regional stability and international peace and security. Canada hopes that continued talks between the P-5 plus one, the permanent five members of the Security Council and Germany, building on their meeting in Geneva on October 1, will address the continued dishonesty of Iran's nuclear program as a matter of priority to restore confidence that has been severely jeopardized by the Iranian regime.

As part of Canada's controlled engagement policy and our counter-proliferation efforts, we have stopped active trade promotion with Iran and Export Development Canada has ceased entering into new business with Iran. In addition, Canada has fully implemented its international obligations under the United Nations Security Council resolutions 1737, 1747, and 1803 by imposing sanctions against Iran.

These sanctions include an assets freeze against designated individuals and entities; an export ban on designated goods of proliferation concern; an import ban on arms and designated goods; a prohibition on the provision to any person in Iran of technical assistance, financial services, brokerage and other services related to designated goods; and a prohibition on property, financial assistance, and investment related to designated goods.

Finally, Iran is playing a troubling role in the wider Middle East. Its activities in the region, particularly its support for listed terrorist entities such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah, have long constituted serious obstacles to peace in the Middle East. Canada continues to underline the need for Iran to support international peace and stability efforts in the region. Iran's regional role is something that Canada is ready to discuss with Iran as part of our controlled engagement policy.

I will end my presentation there and turn it back over to you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, gentlemen, for appearing.

Although I'm not on this committee, I have a great deal of interest in this topic. I have four quick questions.

First, we talk about controlled engagement. Can you comment on why the Vice-President of Iran made a private visit to Canada earlier this year? What constitutes a private visit under controlled engagement?

Second, can you outline for us any comments with regard to the Iran Accountability Act, which was proposed by Irwin Cotler in June? We are a signatory to the 1948 Convention on Genocide, which was undertaken to deal with the prevention of genocide and punish those who incite it.

On the Bahá'ís, do you have any comments with regard to the current situation, the systematic removal of Bahá'ís from academic institutions, schools, the armed forces, etc.?

On Russia, it would seem to me that any multilateral approach in this region dealing with the Iranians cannot be successful unless the Russians are on board. Do you see them playing a helping role, whether on nuclear development or human rights?

That's a lot of questions, but I thought I'd get them on the table.

• (1255)

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: On the controlled engagement policy, Iran's vice-president applied for a visa to enter Canada. He qualified under the provisions of entry to Canada. He had no meetings with any member of the Canadian government. That was a specific policy

choice made, that if he was coming for a private visit, it would be a private visit. He qualified under our entry rules as any other citizen. There is nothing in the controlled engagement policy that talks about visas or preventing people who have legitimate access to Canada from entering.

I will come back to question number two in a moment.

On the Bahá'ís, this has long been a priority of the Canadian government, to try to protect this community. We have a very close working relationship with the Bahá'í community of Canada. I understand they came before your committee earlier this year. So we work very closely with them.

Their situation in Iran is probably as bad as any identifiable group in Iran. Even Iranians who are of the reformist bent and who believe their country needs to correct its policies have a blind spot towards the Bahá'í. This goes back to their origins as emerging out of the Islamic faith and following a new prophet, which runs counter to the provisions of Islam. That has made them a specific target in Iran. They are called apostates and they are viewed as threatening Islamic society.

All of this, as we all know, is just nonsense. They are very loyal citizens to whatever country they live in. They are excellent citizens when it comes to education and working in the community. They are model citizens both in Iran and in Canada. So that's something we've kept driving home with them.

In the education system they're being blocked from going to universities, which is a tragedy for Bahá'ís, as they see education as being one of the core principles they must abide by.

In our human rights resolutions before the UN General Assembly over the last six years we have always put forward the case for Iran to respect the rights of its Bahá'í citizens. And going forward into the future, the Canadian government will continue to raise the issues of the Bahá'í and to seek that they be allowed the same rights and privileges as all other Iranian citizens.

Concerning the role of Russia, Russia has been a very active partner in the P-5 plus one. They have supported UN Security Council imposition of sanctions on three different occasions. Given their veto on the Security Council, it is essential that the broader international community work with Russia. They have been cooperative to date. There have been differences among Russia and some of the other members about how far to go, but our assessment is that Russia shares the same concerns we do about Iran's long-term nuclear ambitions and the fact that Russia has no desire to see Iran develop a nuclear weapons capability.

Going forward, there will continue to be a lot of negotiations. We're not at the table for most of those negotiations, but our understanding is that there is a great deal of cooperation among the members of the P-5 plus one.

May I just ask you to repeat the question about the Iran Accountability Act?

• (1300)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Since we are a signatories to the 1948 genocide convention, and the act itself is to hold not only Iran accountable, but also Canada in terms of blocking what we were actually talking about, can you make any comments with regard to how you would see that act coming into force?

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: Unfortunately, I am not a specialist on that, and I would require a bit more of a view from our legal side. I will endeavour to get back to you with an answer on that.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: If you could, I'd appreciate that, and maybe in the next round I'll ask you about the freezing of assets of the Iranian leadership and business people in Canada.

Also, I am really perplexed about the vice-president's visit, because when you have a private visit and you meet members of the diaspora in Canada.... Seventy-five percent of the people in my riding who come from Iran get rejected by the embassy in Tehran, yet the vice-president of Iran gets a visa to come here, and he clearly was here on a political mission. Every report that's come forward has indicated that it was private. Not meeting with Canadian officials is fine, but the fact is that he was able to spread whatever he wanted while he was here. In terms of having a controlled engagement, it seems a bit odd that we would issue such a visa.

And by the way, I did write to the minister. I got a letter back, but I wasn't happy with it.

The Chair: Mr. Angell, we're actually out of time here. If you can be very brief in your response, though, please go ahead.

Mr. David Angell (Director General, International Organizations Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Thank you, Chair.

To expand a little bit on the question with regard to the Baha'i, I would just observe, in addition to Mr. McLaren's comments about Canada having flagged this issue in successive human rights resolutions, that we've also flagged it before the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The minister issued a statement with regard to the detention of the seven members of the Baha'i leadership, but in that statement the minister also called for the Iranian authorities to cease the harassment of members of the Baha'i faith. This was a statement by the minister of last May.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Thi Lac, vous avez la parole.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Good afternoon, gentlemen. Thank you for being here today. I apologize for being late.

My first question is for Mr. Caza.

One of the proposals in the draft report that our steering committee is currently working on is that we use Canadian democracy to urge Iran to discontinue its nuclear program. Knowing that Iran has since suggested meetings between foreign and Iranian nuclear experts, I would like to hear your expert opinion.

Do you think that Canada should take the position put forward in the draft report, or should it join those countries that favour an open-minded approach to these meetings?

[English]

Mr. Shawn Caza (Deputy Director, Nuclear Cooperation and Compliance, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): I'm sorry; I misunderstood the first part, about which report you were speaking of.

The Chair: Mr. Caza, it's actually a reference to the draft report we're working on. You wouldn't be familiar with it.

Actually, this provides me with the opportunity to remind members of the committee that strictly speaking, the report, while it's a draft, isn't supposed to be mentioned publicly. Its contents, at any rate, we aren't supposed to mention publicly.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: I will reword my question to focus solely on the second point. Do you not believe that Canada should join the ranks of those countries that are open to a meeting between Iranian and foreign nuclear experts?

[English]

Mr. Shawn Caza: I think we've always been supportive of dialogue with Iran on this. As Mr. McLaren said, one of the areas we are still in discussion with the Iranians on, under the controlled or limited engagement policy, is the nuclear file. We don't have any direct talks with Iran right now on the nuclear issue because we have deferred to our allies, who have under way a process—I'm sure you're familiar with it—known as the P-5 plus one. As Mr. McLaren said, that's the permanent five members of the Security Council plus Germany.

Currently there's an even more focused dialogue among Russia, France, the United States, and Iran, with the IAEA's help, to try to broker a possible resolution right now to the question of enrichment and the fuel requirements that Iran has.

We support this process of our allies fully. We hope it leads to increased dialogue. But it's clear that the Iranians need to first come forward to the IAEA with a little more information clarifying all the outstanding questions the agency has and that all the member states have regarding their program.

As I said, we stand willing to support the activity of our allies, whether that leads to increased dialogue or whether, given possible other choices by the Iranians, it leads to other activities.

• (1305)

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: You mentioned supporting the efforts of our allies, but I want to know specifically whether you would be willing not only to support those countries that favour this approach, but also to join a coalition with them.

[English]

Mr. Shawn Caza: Certainly when it comes to the discussions of the P-5 plus one and the current Pentagonal talks, as they're called, we've made it clear to our friends in there that we're willing to participate, but they're the ones who are setting the parameters. We can't exactly force ourselves into these talks.

They all know we stand ready, as does the IAEA and the director general himself. We're ready in any dialogue or discussion that's going to be had. But we don't want to work counter to what not only our friends and allies but the IAEA and the United Nations Security Council have seen as the best way forward to resolving this issue.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāï Thi Lac: That answers my question. Thank you very much.

Mr. Angell, is there a difference between the position that Canada considers to be the one held by Israeli leaders and that of the Israeli people?

Mr. David Angell: Mr. Chair, are we talking about the people and leaders of Israel or Iran?

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāï Thi Lac: I meant the people and leaders of Iran. My apologies.

Mr. David Angell: Right. Pursuant to our policy and UN resolutions, we have a commitment that is guided by the actions of Iran's leaders. Our request that human rights be respected is directed to the country's leaders. In essence, we are asking the government to support the rights of its own people. There has not been any such commitment in terms of the Iranian people.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāï Thi Lac: How serious of a threat would you say Iran poses to Israel's security? To what degree is that threat heightened by anti-Israeli comments by Iran's leaders?

[English]

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: It's very clear that the Israeli leadership takes the threat of Iran very seriously, as does the Government of Canada.

When the President of Iran makes his outrageous statements denying the Holocaust and other anti-Israel comments, Canada stands up and we condemn those comments. Just last month, the Minister of Foreign Affairs boycotted the speech of President Ahmadinejad to the United Nations General Assembly as a response to the fact that we find his comments and his behaviour contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and also contrary to diplomatic decency.

The threat they pose to their own people and all these reasons, we've made it very clear, are unacceptable to Canada. We support Israel, we are very attentive, and we share many of the same concerns Israel has about the threat posed by Iran.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Thi Lac. Your time ran out.

We'll go to Mr. Marston, please.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Thank you, gentlemen, for coming today.

I want to say publicly how impressed I am with the services provided by this department on behalf of Canada. It's very easy for

us to be critical from time to time. I just would like to do that, because when you look at the files across the world that this department handles, and then you come specifically to Iran itself, it's such a complex issue.

I have a number of questions.

First, sometimes I look at Ahmadinejad as somewhat like the magician who keeps the hand moving up here while he picks your pocket over there. You almost hope that sometimes this rhetoric, this notoriously evil rhetoric, is masking something. In my sense of it, it might be the fact that they're abusing their own people, to a degree, and keeping the focus outside their country. I wouldn't mind a comment on that, because when you look at their elections, it's the supreme leader who picks everybody who runs. I'm not so sure that we have a black cat or a white cat, as Tommy Douglas used to say.

Second, I had a visit to Israel. That was just over a month ago that I was there. We had a couple of folks with us who had been in the IDF, and they were talking about 30 days as some kind of a limit before there might be some form of pre-emptive action by Israel. I'd like your comments on that.

Third, you brought us very good news about the release of that individual today. Thank you for doing that. One of my first questions would have been whether you had any updates for us.

Fourth is about the influence Iran actually has. How would you compare that to others, such as Syria or Jordan, in relation to Hezbollah and Hamas? Is it just the influence of dollars, or is it more comprehensive than that?

● (1310)

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: Thank you.

I've heard Mr. Ahmadinejad called many things, and magician is not one, but there's a certain element of that.

In the early stages I think much of the western world looked at him as some kind of buffoon and not as someone to be taken seriously and as someone who was in way over his head. He's a much smarter man than the public persona he provides to the west. We cannot dismiss his threats, but sometimes he's trying to whip up domestic support, and saying nasty things about Israel unfortunately is one way to bolster his credibility in the streets of Iran and in some parts of the Arab world. We need to take his comments seriously, but also sometimes the perspective is that it's aimed more at the domestic audience. He knows when he says things like that the western world is going to get angry, and then he can look to his people as if he's standing up to the west. That's part of the domestic play on that.

As for Israel, I'm in no position to make any comments on what Israel's defence strategy will be. We are not aware of any 30-day approach. Israel has publicly stated it is not looking for an attack on Iran; it wants the diplomatic process to work its way out. We have no reason to believe that Israel does not want to see a diplomatic solution.

The influence that Iran has with Hezbollah compared to others... Iran is probably Hezbollah's most important international ally. Hezbollah was created with the support of the Iranian government back in the 1980s. They are the main supplier of funding and other resources for the Hezbollah organization. I'm straying a little beyond my area of expertise, but it is our assessment that Hezbollah is not simply a tool of Iran; it has its own domestic agenda, its own domestic resources. But Iran is certainly its key partner. Syria is also very important for Hezbollah. It's hard to say which is more. I know more about Iran than I do Syria, so I tend to look at Iran as being key. Jordan is not a partner for Hezbollah; Jordan is a good partner for us. There are no connections that we're aware of between the Jordanian government and Hezbollah. Frankly, we'd be very surprised if there ever was such a connection.

The Chair: Mr. Marston.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Thirty years ago I was in Saudi Arabia for six months. During that time I had many conversations with folks I worked with, and of course the United States was the great Satan. Often we focus on Iraq and Iran, but when you look at the people who were the 9/11 hijackers, a good number of them were Saudis. I presume—and I don't know this to be fact—that they were Shia, and you have the Shia group in Iran. I understand 70% of the population is young and not from the same religious faith as those in power.

What do you think are the chances of an overthrow of this particular government?

• (1315)

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: In Iran?

I have just a couple of points. First, about 90% of Iranians come from the Shia faith.

It's hard to identify. At this time we don't foresee an overthrow or a revolution coming in Iran. The protest coming out of this last election has made a very significant change in the attitude of the Iranian people. There is always a veneer of democracy inside Iran where they would tell their people there's a democratic system on top of the Islamic republic. What we're finding is that many Iranians have thought this last election was taken from them. It has eliminated a lot of the credibility toward the system from the people in the streets. At this point it's too early for us to say how deep and how extensive that is, but it's very clear the Iranian people are looking at their government differently now than they were on June 11.

Mr. Wayne Marston: I was just wondering if the Shia connection from Iran to Saudi Arabia might have had something to do with the 9/11 attackers and whether or not Iran was actually a threat to Saudi Arabia as well.

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: On 9/11, the attackers were all Sunni Muslims, many of them from Saudi Arabia, all associated with the al-Qaeda organization. The al-Qaeda organization is an enemy of Iran because of the Sunni-Shia split. We saw a lot of this in Iraq in the violence in the post-invasion period when al-Qaeda-related Sunni

groups spent as much time killing and slaughtering Shia citizens of Iraq as they did American forces and others. So there is no love lost between al-Qaeda and Iran, and we don't really see a partnership on that element.

As for Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia has concerns about Iran, and its relations are difficult, but as neighbours, they need to work it out. They are not in favour of any kind of a military strike against Iran. They see that as causing more problems. There are difficulties back and forth. I wouldn't say they're enemies, but there are difficulties in the relationship.

The Chair: That's all the time for that round.

We're on to Mr. Sweet now.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Certainly Mr. McLaren's answer, at least just previous to his comment on Saudi Arabia and Iran, demonstrates a complexity of trying to keep all of the extremist groups separated in a different enemy camp so that we know what's going on. I'm being facetious, only a bit.

Seventy people killed—or at least the opposition in Iran is suggesting that. There could be more than that. Certainly many have been jailed. Has the UN Human Rights Council commented on this situation?

Mr. David Angell: Thank you. I'm just inquiring as to the status of resolutions in the Human Rights Council. Certainly Canada has expressed its concern through the Human Rights Council, but I'm not aware of a resolution as such being adopted at this point.

• (1320)

Mr. David Sweet: I guess I wasn't aware of one either. So there's no sense in my asking you about what you're feeling and the effectiveness. I can't imagine that something of this magnitude would go without any kind of comment up until now.

Nevertheless, my colleague Mr. Wilfert talked about Russia. Could you also give us some insight into how you perceive China is engaging with Iran right now? Are we having some positive dialogue with them regarding the issue? Are they having some direct dialogue with Iran? Are they a help or a hindrance in this case?

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: China is part of the P-5 plus one group that's looking at the unified approach to dealing with the question of Iran's nuclear program. It has a very strong commercial bilateral relationship with Iran and is looking increasingly as an investor in the country. That being said, it too has concerns about a nuclear Iran and has been working with the other members of the P-5 to keep a united international movement and pressure on. They're not the most eager member of the P-5 for sanctions, but to this point they have been going along, working with the other members, and we continue to see them as being a necessary positive force going forward. We need to work harder to convince them of the immediate nature of the issue.

China's assessment is that the problem isn't as imminent as some of the other members of the P-5 plus one believe. But in total, they're part of the system. They're working well with the group, and they are supportive and have voted for the three sanctions resolutions that the UN Security Council has passed to date.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Angell, do you have a comment on this?

Mr. David Angell: Thank you.

I should have mentioned that even in the absence of any resolutions being adopted at the Human Rights Council, Iran will be subject to universal periodic review in February of 2010, so there will be a structured opportunity for the members of the Human Rights Council to look very closely at Iran's conduct.

Mr. David Sweet: Thankfully, we already were subject to one.

I wanted to ask you this. One of the issues—and we've dealt with this right in my constituency office—that is serious, I think, for new Canadians is the fact that when you travel to Iran, if you were an Iranian citizen, they don't recognize this new citizenship.

Is there more we can do? Are we getting the word out adequately of the danger of travelling to these countries and possibly not being able to exit because of the very nature of the way they look at citizenship?

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: The Department of Foreign Affairs, on its website, has travel advisories for all countries in the world.

The Iranian travel advisory includes—this is my recollection, and it's been a while since I've looked at it—reference to the fact that Iran does not recognize dual citizenship and that a Canadian-Iranian citizen being arrested will not, in the eyes of the Iranian government, be considered a Canadian citizen. So that's on our travel website, which we advise all Canadians to review before they travel to other countries. I'll just double-check to make sure it's still there. I know it's been there in the past.

Mr. David Sweet: Can a person who was born in Iran and becomes a Canadian citizen actually travel to Iran on a Canadian passport?

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: I'm not entirely sure, but I believe not. They will be seen on arrival. The Canadian passport has the place of birth and it will say somewhere in Iran, and the Iranians will request that an Iranian travel document be provided. That's my understanding.

Mr. David Sweet: Even if they did not want to sustain dual citizenship, the fact is that Iran will go against international convention and force these people to only enter as Iranians.

• (1325)

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations does not have sections in it for dual citizenship, and that's part of the problem we've been facing with Canadian-Iranians—with Mr. Bahari, with Ms. Kazemi—because there is no requirement under international conventions for states to recognize dual citizenship.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sweet.

We are back now to Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you very much. I'll just be very brief, because my colleague also wants to ask a few questions.

First of all, I want to thank the department for the work it has been doing with the Bahá'ís. It's a group we've been dealing with as well on our committee. We want to be very proactive on that file, because it is appalling the way they've been treated. Hopefully if there are also those who want to immigrate to Canada for reasons of persecution, they would also be expediting those particular cases. I think that would be greatly appreciated as well.

I think we are very much concerned about what's happening there in Iran. We've obviously, of late, been watching the news and are concerned about what's happening with the Baluchi population, not just in Iran but also in Pakistan, because it also covers a large chunk of Pakistan.

I don't know if you have been dealing with anybody from the Baluchi community and diaspora, or whether you are engaged with any NGOs internationally to deal with that issue, because the Baluchis as well have been denied their language rights, their cultural rights, and have also been persecuted by the Iranian regime. I was wondering if you could comment on the status of the Baluchi.

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: I myself have not dealt with any Baluchi ethnic organizations in Canada, but in all our contacts with the Iranians on human rights issues, and in the resolutions we have put forward before the UN Security Council, we have called for respect for minority rights—cultural and linguistic rights. So that's part of our ongoing series of issues of concern with Iran. We are aware of the problems the Baluchis face, and that the Arabs and the Bahá'ís are facing. There are many different groups in Iran who are having difficulties with their minority, ethnic, or religious status.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, I'll try this again.

The 1948 genocide convention has responsibility to prevent genocide and to punish those who incite genocide. On this issue of incitement, Mr. Cotler put forth a bill on June 9, the Iran Accountability Act. I'd be interested in your comments on it—in writing, given the limited time.

The other issue I would like to put on the table is the freezing of assets, one of the ways to get government's attention, and obviously that of the Iranian leadership. What are we doing on the issue of freezing assets, both of the government and of prominent business people who put money through this country?

Finally, on the Jundullah, the Soldiers of God, are there any comments you'd like to make on how you see that playing out, given the sensitivity of the Sunni insurgency in the southeast?

I would like certainly the first two responses in writing, if I could.

Thank you.

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: Okay.

On the freezing of assets, I understand that's what the act before Parliament will be addressing. So that's for policy-makers to provide us with policy to enforce.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Wouldn't that be a natural, though? Wouldn't you think that would be the most natural thing that government would do immediately?

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: That, sir, is for you to decide and for me to carry out.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Good answer.

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: There are asset freezes that have been put forward under the UN Security Council for the designated individuals.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Yes, for designated individuals only.

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: Yes.

On the issue of incitement to genocide, Canada delivers on its obligations to both prevent and punish genocide by criminalizing the crime of genocide under domestic law, thus enabling domestic prosecution in Canadian courts where there is both jurisdiction and evidence to support such action. Canada is also a supporter of the International Criminal Court, which deters and punishes perpetrators of genocide.

Canada supported the appointment of a special advisor on the prevention of genocide, with the mandate to make appropriate recommendations for prevention to the UN Security Council through the UN Secretary General.

For further detail on Canada's position with regard to incitement to genocide, I would refer the committee to the responses the government provided to House of Commons questions numbers 361 and 363. I have copies of those here today. They're quite extensive responses that would probably take the next 45 minutes for me to read into the record.

• (1330)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, we'd like to get a copy of that.

The Chair: Sure. That uses up the time.

I'll just mention with regard to all the documents, including the responses you would make, that they should be sent to the clerk of the committee, who will then distribute them to all committee members. Thank you very much.

Madame Thi Lac.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: My next question is for Mr. McLaren. What is Canada's position on the presidential election that took place in Iran in June and the civil unrest that followed?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: The allegations of fraud in the June 12 presidential elections are very serious, and we have encouraged the Iranian authorities to conduct a full and transparent investigation to ensure that the votes of all Iranians were counted. At the same time, Canada has made it clear that we will not interfere in the internal affairs of Iran.

The post-election situation has been very troubling for us. We have consistently voiced our concerns and called upon Iranian authorities to fully respect its human rights obligations. The ongoing detention, intimidation, and hostile treatment of opposition figures, academics, journalists, and some locally engaged diplomatic staff and foreign nationals are unacceptable. We have consistently called upon the Iranian authorities to release all political prisoners and journalists who have been unjustly detained. Prime Minister Harper has issued two statements condemning the violence and the crackdown on protesters by Iranian security forces. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has also issued statements condemning the use of violence by Iranian security forces and has called upon Iran to fully respect its human rights obligations.

We have relayed our concerns to the Iranian chargé d'affaires, Iran's top diplomat in Ottawa, on several occasions. In addition to our statements, we also supported a project with the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center to investigate and report on human rights abuses committed against civil society, media, and citizens after the election. We put forward about \$60,000 from our Glyn Berry program. The project is documenting the arrests, detentions, torture, and killings of human rights lawyers and activists, leaders of opposition groups, journalists, students, and others. The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center is also analyzing whether the Iranian authorities' censure of the media violated Iran's obligations under international law.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: We have spent a lot of time discussing the Israeli situation with respect to Iran. Can you give us any information about how Jewish people are treated in Iran?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: Iran recognizes three minority religions. Judaism is one, Christianity is the second, and Zoroastrianism is the third. These are officially recognized religions in the Iranian constitution, and each of these religious communities has a specific member of the Iranian Majlis to represent it.

The Jewish population of Iran is the largest in the Middle East outside of Israel. The community is allowed to function. It is allowed to carry out its religious services. Its members are allowed to hold jobs in the community in ways that the Bahá'ís, for instance, are not.

That being said, they are a minority in a population that does not always treat its minorities well. There have been incidents in the past when the Jewish community has faced a number of charges and arrests for allegedly spying for Israel. Some of its members have been put in jail for that. This happened, I believe, in the early part of this millennium.

So the community faces challenges. It has some problems, but its status is official and recognized by the government in a way that the Bahá'í community is not.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: I asked you about their treatment, and I want to delve a bit further. To some degree, does Iran's Jewish population suffer from persecution; are their rights violated? We know what the president can say about Israel. But what I want to know is whether the majority of Iran's Jewish population, despite being officially recognized, is subject to persecution, in Canada's opinion.

[*English*]

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: The president, in his comments, is always very careful to characterize Israel. He doesn't talk about Jews or the Jewish people. And the Iranian government, in countering the accusations of anti-Semitism and being anti-Israel, points to the fact that its Jewish community is treated well.

Now, the Jewish community of Iran faces the same kinds of human rights abuses that all Iranians face. And on that element, their human rights are being violated. They face some additional pressures from the community, more than from the government, from the fact of their minority status.

Is it as easy to be Jewish in Iran as it is to be Muslim? No. The community is under pressure from emigration, in that many of the community leave. But they are allowed to operate their synagogues and to carry out their duties and religious activities. It's not easy to be Jewish in Iran. There is a certain level of discrimination, or difficult times, but they are not facing the same kinds of pressures the Bahá'í community is facing.

The Chair: That uses up the time for this round.

I noticed that Mr. Angell was trying to get a comment in. Please do.

Mr. David Angell: Thank you, Chairman.

Very briefly, I just want to make the observation that in the Secretary General's report of September 23 on the human rights situation in Iran, the issue of the rights of minorities is addressed. There is an observation that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights "continues to receive reports of human rights abuses against minorities", although "it is impossible to verify all the information". The Secretary General has singled out a number of specific minority groups for reference, including the Baluchi community and the Bahá'í community, at some length. But in the section on the rights of minorities, other than the factual observation Mr. McLaren made about the Jewish community being one of the recognized religious minorities, there's no particular reference to the Jewish community in the Secretary General's report.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

The last comment goes to Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I apologize for being late, but I was at another committee meeting.

[*English*]

I just want to let you know that if I ask questions that have already been addressed, I apologize in advance.

It's a pleasure to see you here. I take particular interest in the human rights situation in Iran as a woman, and I don't know if that's been addressed yet, but I would like to inquire as to what actions Canada has taken with regard to the human rights of women in Iran.

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: The resolutions that we have put forward before the United Nations General Assembly have consistently talked about the rights of women, and we've advocated for those rights through that resolution. We do not have active programs working with civil society in Iran, so we have not worked with women's groups and labour groups or others because we don't have resources for that. But we've consistently talked about the rights of women in our discussions with Iran, saying that we expect better performance in a number of areas, and the rights of women is always one of them. In other statements the minister has made about the human rights situation in Iran, women's rights have always been part of the core group of issues we deal with.

• (1340)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Very good, I appreciate those comments.

I know that we do what we can, not only as a Canadian people but also as global neighbours, to ensure that we address and condemn where necessary the abuse of human rights. So I'm glad to hear you're addressing those rights in Iran with regard to women.

I really appreciated what Mr. Silva mentioned about the Bahá'ís. I was recently in Israel with a francophone mission from Parliament Hill and met with some Bahá'í people and was really outraged at some of the situations I heard about. So I'm very pleased to hear Mr. Silva address those. I concur with his concerns about the Bahá'í people, as I do with Mrs. Thi Lac's concerns about Israel. I'm pleased to hear her address those concerns, because they were very prevalent on our mission, during which we were able to speak with Palestinians as well as Israeli government officials.

But what I'd like to know in all of this discussion about Iran's threat to Israel is how real do you think that threat is, and what do you perceive as a potential timeline if that threat is in fact real?

Mr. Jeffrey McLaren: We do believe there is a threat posed to Israel and other countries in the Middle East by Iran and its pursuit of a nuclear capability. The exact timing of when that point is I think is a matter experts disagree about. But it is a severe enough matter that all countries are trying to come up with a way to end any chance of Iran having a nuclear weapons capability. They are working through the IAEA, the UN Security Council, the P-5-plus-one process, and others, to get Iran to come around to abide by its responsibilities under the IAEA and under UN Security Council resolutions, which demand an end to enrichment until Iran can satisfy our concerns about its past program.

Do you have anything further to add?

Mr. Shawn Caza: Sure. I could speak a little bit on timelines.

I think it's very difficult to come up with any timeline that's very accurate, which is why, as Mr. McLaren says, there's a lot of disagreement. In effect, people use a timeline depending on the exact question they ask.

Ultimately, for Iran to pose a nuclear threat to Israel or to any other country, it would probably have to do three things. One is to make a political decision to develop a nuclear weapon, and we have no indication that they have made such a decision. That is something else to which we're not likely to get any insight; it's something they would hold as one of their most closely guarded state secrets.

The second thing they would have to do is take the nuclear material they have and change it into a form that's usable in a weapon. Right now they have material that they have enriched to a fairly low level. It could be used to make fuel for a reactor. They would have to enrich this up to a very high level, which is something they would do in one of the facilities that are currently safeguarded by the IAEA. In doing this, they would either first be observed doing it, or they would have to kick out the IAEA inspectors, which would set off significant alarm bells and we think would lead immediately to action at the Security Council.

They would also require some amount of time to do this. There's a large volume of material to be re-enriched. It's taken them over a year to create the amount they have, which is theoretically enough to make a weapon if made into the right form. We estimate that it would take them about half a year or so to reconfigure their plant to do this and another half-year or so to do the enrichment, so you're talking about at least a year of activity after they have made a decision that will cause them to be seen or reveal their intentions.

Finally, they would have to actually weaponize this material. We don't have any indication that they've mastered all the proper knowledge to make a weapon. A nuclear bomb is easy to make in theory, but quite difficult in practice. It's an extremely precise instrument, in effect, that you're creating. They would have to take this material, once they've gone through the stage requiring at least the year that I've spoken of, and physically manipulate it. Again many months would be required if they have done all the theoretical work beforehand and have that hidden.

How far along they are in some of this research is the sort of information we're trying to tease out in conjunction with the IAEA. If Iran answers all the questions and meets all the obligations in its relationship with the IAEA that a country like Canada has to meet, it would have to provide information sufficient either to reveal that it has carried out some of these experiments and studies, and thus implicate itself, or provide information sufficient to reveal that it hasn't gone down this way, and we would feel a little more at ease. It's because of our security concerns that we want to know more information about Iran's position, but it's also incumbent upon them to come clean with the agency for their own alleged purpose of only being interested in civilian aspects of nuclear power.

• (1345)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: We're all hopeful for that, but we do understand the challenges in that regard, particularly when we're talking about secret missions and those kinds of things.

The Chair: I'm sorry, we're actually out of time for your round of questioning.

I noticed that Mr. Angell was trying to get a comment in as well. Perhaps I can let you make your comment, Mr. Angell, and that will complete this set of questions.

Mr. David Angell: Thank you, Chairman.

If I might return to the issue of human rights of women, I'll make the observation that in addition to the language relating to the human rights of women contained in the resolution that we have put forward for the past six years, Canada has also called upon Iran to implement the international human rights conventions it has ratified. Some of those do contain provisions relating to the human rights of women.

We've also called for Iran to cooperate with the UN's special procedures in the human rights area; some of those relate very specifically to issues relating to women. An example is the work of the special rapporteur on violence against women. I'll also observe that in the Secretary General's report to which I made reference earlier, there are some observations regarding the human rights of women. That report is a consequence of the resolution that Canada has put forward over the past number of years. That resolution tasks the Secretary General to produce the report, and that report in turn has been an extremely useful set of observations with regard to the status of human rights in Iran.

The Chair: Thank you very much to all of our witnesses. You've been very generous with your time. We've gone over the time that we had originally agreed upon. You've been very charitable about giving us the extra time we needed.

This completes this part of the meeting, and you are therefore dismissed, but I'm going to ask our members to stay for a moment while we go in camera. We'll suspend momentarily while we go in camera. The usual things have to happen. We have to close the doors and ask people who are not attached to an MP or to a whip's office to vacate the room, and then we'll proceed. Thanks.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>