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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0850)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the 33rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[English]

This morning, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), we have a study of the offer of services in French in Canadian embassies. We are happy to have with us this morning the assistant deputy minister of human resources from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ms. Susan Gregson. Welcome to our committee, Ms. Gregson.

I had a chance to talk to you before the committee and I know with your experience you'll enhance our inquiry of information about this subject. You are also accompanied by Monica Janecek, director of the corporate resourcing division.

Without any delay, I invite you to begin with your opening statement, and then the members can follow up.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Susan Gregson (Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, honourable members of Parliament, it is my pleasure to be here today to speak to you about how we are addressing the concerns raised and to describe the steps that we are taking to improve service in both official languages at our missions abroad.

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada is committed to promoting Canada's linguistic duality, communicating with and serving the public in Canada and abroad in both official languages and to creating and maintaining a work environment conducive to the effective use of English and French so that our staff feel comfortable using the language of their choice.

We recognize bilingualism as an important component in Canada's international relations and would like to take this opportunity to assure this committee that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade is devoting great efforts to promoting linguistic duality. As the face of Canada abroad, DFAIT takes these issues regarding service in French at some of our missions seriously.

[English]

Allow me to first take the opportunity to tell you about some of the positive practices we've had in place for many years to ensure provision of bilingual service.

We ensure that Canadians are served worldwide at any hour of the day, 24 hours a day and seven days a week, by providing visitors to our missions with contact information for the Consular Operations Centre, which is staffed by fully bilingual employees.

Our public servant heads of mission are bilingual, and we operate on the principle that no Canadian employee is assigned abroad without first meeting the required level of bilingualism or taking the necessary training.

Prior to being posted, all heads of mission receive awareness training on their official language responsibilities. This includes a specific section in their head of mission manual on their responsibilities as heads of mission in ensuring the delivery of services in both of our official languages. Once at the mission, the heads of mission take steps to raise awareness regarding the importance of linguistic duality by regularly communicating to all staff on the need to ensure that an active offer of bilingual services is made at all times. This responsibility is part of their annual performance management agreement.

[Translation]

All of our locally engaged staff are instructed to provide active offer of service in both official languages to all visitors to our missions. Every effort is made to recruit locally engaged staff who speak both English and French. However, in some countries it is a challenge to recruit locally engaged staff who are fluently bilingual in both official languages. Locally engaged staff who are not fluently bilingual are instructed to always refer visitors to a Canada-based employee or to a locally engaged employee who is able to provide bilingual service.

The department also regularly conducts audits which include a review of the provision of bilingual services at missions. Questions asked during an audit are, for example, explain the mission's capacity to serve the public in both official languages. They are asked whether they have an official languages coordinator, if training is available for Canada-based and locally engaged staff, whether reception services, signage and phone messages are offered in both languages. If an audit reveals deficiencies, the head of mission will rectify the situation.

•(0855)

[English]

Canada-based staff and locally engaged staff have access to online official language courses via Campusdirect at the Canada School of Public Service. These courses are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and many missions offer official language training to their locally engaged staff. I'd be happy to give you some examples of that later on.

The department also offers a specialized course to locally engaged staff receptionists, our front line of interaction with the public. This course is designed to sensitize them to Canada's linguistic duality. The program is called "Introduction to Canadian Society and Culture", and it includes a session on bilingualism in Canada and the requirement to make an active offer of service. All groups that come to Ottawa have the opportunity to spend two weeks in our National Capital Region's bilingual environment.

[Translation]

Last fall, the department held a leadership conference that brought together 350 senior officials from headquarters. Our heads of mission also joined by phone. On that occasion, we were pleased to welcome the Commissioner of Official Languages, who gave a speech on the critical role played by our department in the promotion of Canada's linguistic duality in the world. He effectively sensitized our executive cadre on the pivotal role they each have to fulfill that commitment. He will return to address our executive committee next month, on December 20.

Last February, DFAIT made numerous efforts to ensure that Canada showed an exemplary level of bilingualism in its activities at the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. For example, all promotional products related to the 2010 Reasons to Do Business program were in both official languages. We have already started to focus on ensuring linguistic duality during the Pan American and Parapan Games which will take place in the Toronto region in July and August of 2015. We will do our part to ensure that Canada demonstrates an exemplary level of bilingualism. Our staff, promotional products, signage, key messages and speeches will be bilingual.

[English]

I'd now like to address the issues regarding service in French at some of our missions that were raised during Mr. Graham Fraser's presentation to the standing committee on November 4, 2010, and I'd like to thank you for bringing those issues to our attention.

We communicated immediately with the missions identified and asked them to look into the situation. We have discovered, and it's been brought to my attention, that at one mission, in London, a document was returned to a client in the wrong official language. In another, during the absence of the consul and vice-consul for meetings and consular emergencies, an active offer of service may not have been offered by locally engaged staff. This was in Kampala. Elsewhere, visitors might not have been served in French in Bogotá and Santo Domingo.

Again, thank you for bringing those cases to our attention.

[Translation]

We have responded by directing these missions to implement corrective measures immediately to ensure that this does not happen again. As a preventive measure, all missions will be asked to provide employees who deal with the public with a glossary of basic French terms and phrases. Management will be asked to regularly remind all employees, especially replacements for reception, about the tools at their disposal and the importance of locating a French-speaking employee should a visitor require service in French. And we will increase the signage that indicates that we offer bilingual services.

To reinforce these measures, we will ask managers to conduct a regular verification of active offer of service and to meet with all staff to discuss the importance of providing an active offer of bilingual service at all times. They will review procedures with staff to ensure that all employees understand the steps to be followed. Supervisors will be responsible for monitoring the situation regularly and for reinforcing the procedures during staff meetings.

•(0900)

[English]

I'd also like to take this opportunity to address the recent report card that the department received from the Commissioner of Official Languages. As you know, our department was one of the 16 institutions that received a report card this year.

We're taking this feedback very seriously indeed. We've been reviewing the results and will continue to work in close collaboration with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages to take the necessary remedial action.

Noted areas of strength were the overall management of the official languages program; awareness sessions for all staff at all levels; an integrated system for monitoring, including official language performance at missions; and promotion of linguistic duality by celebrating

[Translation]

the Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

We are also a member of the Implementation Committee of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's 2006-2011 Strategic Plan to foster immigration to francophone minority communities.

Through the Speakers Program, DFAIT officials made several outreach efforts to be in contact with the official language minority communities in order to promote our mandate, priorities, programs and services.

To address the areas requiring improvement, we are finalizing a three-year Results-Based Action Plan 2010-2013, related to the official language minority communities, that is to say Part VII of the Official Languages Act. We have also struck a senior-level committee to look at issues related to francophone employees, such as promotion, language of work and so on.

My colleague Roxanne Dubé is here with me today. She is our official languages champion and co-chair of the committee I just referred to.

We have also established a network of official languages coordinators representing headquarters, regions and all our missions abroad and we hold quarterly meetings which are chaired by the official languages champion, Roxanne Dubé.

In closing, I would like to say that we are well aware that there is still work to be done. We would like to assure the committee that we will pursue initiatives already underway and continue to evaluate how we can improve and raise awareness at our missions abroad.

We are prepared to answer your questions. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gregson. I want to take this opportunity to welcome Ms. Dubé.

We'll begin the first round with Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning and welcome. First I would like to make sure we agree on certain matters. Consular services must be offered everywhere in both official languages. Is that not true? For example, even where there are consular services in England, which is an anglophone country, French-speaking Canadians could happen by. The government has an obligation to offer services in both official languages wherever there is an embassy, does it not?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes, I can assure you of that. In evenings and on weekends, we have contact numbers directly with Canada. Through this arrangement, we have services in both official languages, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Whoever is head of mission has an obligation to represent Canada's linguistic duality. Do you agree with me on that point as well?

• (0905)

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes, that's correct.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Can you tell me when was the last time the language skills of the heads of mission were assessed?

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: All of our public servant heads of mission are required to be bilingual before they are posted abroad—

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I want to know when the language skills of the heads of mission were last assessed.

Ms. Susan Gregson: That's an individual matter.

[English]

Before heads of mission are sent abroad, and that's part of my responsibility as head of human resources, we make sure that they've got valid official language results, valid second language results.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: What are they?

Ms. Susan Gregson: They are C, B, and C.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Okay.

[Translation]

No one has been appointed to the position of head of mission without meeting that requirement. I understood the distinction you made.

Ms. Susan Gregson: Officials always have the required language skills.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: They all have them, without exception.

Ms. Susan Gregson: Without exception, as far as I know.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Why did you add the words "as far as I know"?

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: In the time that I've been in this job, we make sure that our heads of mission are bilingual before they go out. If their second language evaluation has expired, it's up to them to get it up to date before they're allowed to proceed overseas.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Is that information public?

[English]

Ms. Monica Janecek (Director, Corporate Resourcing Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): We could bring back to the committee an analysis—perhaps not individual marks for CBC, but an overall percentage.

It's absolutely true that they're tested before they go on a posting. The most recent example would be that someone who went on a posting this summer was tested before they were sent. Those second language evaluation results are valid for five years, but we could bring back a percentage if you really wanted to know exactly how many had valid results. We could do that.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes, I would like to know that.

[Translation]

The department's action plan provides for an annual report to be submitted to the Public Service Commission of Canada on the language skills of heads of mission.

Ms. Monica Janecek: Is that the Treasury Board report or the report—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The Official Languages Program Action Plan 2009-2011, your plan, provides for an annual report to be submitted to the Public Service Commission of Canada on the language skills of the heads of mission. Is my information correct?

Ms. Monica Janecek: Our report to the Public Service Commission concerns non-imperative appointments. Perhaps that's what you're referring to.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I don't know your plan; I haven't seen it. May we have a copy of it?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes, of course.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: All right. Another one is coming up, isn't it?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes, in March 2011.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'm jumping from one thing to another, but how do you align your current plan, the one for 2009-2011, with your responsibility under Part VII of the Official Languages Act?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Would you like some examples?

[English]

Well, for example, at missions abroad we participate in

[Translation]

the Journées de la Francophonie.

[English]

I'll just give you some examples from my own background. That might be helpful.

As I explained to the chair earlier, I've had seven postings abroad, most recently as head of mission in Shanghai, China. Every year we would organize activities around a week of *la Francophonie* with other heads of mission from francophone countries. There were often cultural events. We would have cultural events that were performed by Canadian performers. We would make sure that we cooperated with the other heads of mission so that we would draw the public's attention to the fact that Canada is a bilingual country and that we are a participant in the Francophonie events.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You do that once a year.

Ms. Susan Gregson: Well, that's just one example.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have one minute left, Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You have an Office of the Inspector General in the department.

• (0910)

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In 2007, the Commissioner of Official Languages recommended that, in September 2008, you adopt a practice, the practice of reporting on official languages in each of the audits conducted by the Inspector General. Did he do that?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: May we have a copy of his observations for 2008, 2009 and 2010, or those that have been done?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Copies of the reports—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes.

Ms. Susan Gregson: —or copies of the bilingualism inspections?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I want to know the Inspector General's comments on official languages.

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Incidentally, your deputy minister will be testifying on the commissioner's report. We want to prepare.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

We'll continue with Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, mesdames. I strongly suggest that you pick up your pencils, even though there will be minutes of the meeting. I'm going to be very polite. I'm extremely skeptical about what you said, Ms. Gregson. If we were in the locker room between two periods, I wouldn't believe you at all and I would tell you. Do you understand?

I'm going to give you some examples of places where there are no services in French where they are requested at the embassies. One-third of citizen files in the constituency of Gatineau concern all kinds

of immigration issues in general, that is all of its aspects. Few cases involve passports, but a lot of cases are about visas for refugees.

On September 29, a Dominican citizen requested an interview in French, as the interview was supposed to be conducted solely in English, with Creole interpretation. She requested an interview in French. The embassy officer told the lady that was impossible, that this was the last opportunity for her to have the interview and that, if she refused, her case would be rejected.

If that isn't a major violation of that person's rights, it's a slap right in the face. It's utterly unacceptable. The person doesn't want to reveal her name. I understand her. In all the cases I'm going to cite for you here, I understand the people. They're afraid of your department. They're afraid of the embassies because they can deny them entry to the country of loved ones. Is that understandable?

So don't give me any of the nonsense you read me earlier; I don't believe it.

This person believes that a language conflict could be the reason why her request was denied. That's what happens when people don't understand each other; they're not very certain about the language. That happened on September 29, 2010. We were all alive that day. Incidentally, that was in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic.

I'm going to cite you another example, which occurred at the Canadian embassy in Bogota. From September 2007 to March 2008, they handled an important file there for which there was a lot of correspondence. Our information was sent in French, but they answered us in English only. They don't have a translation agency for people. They didn't answer us in French. We have to translate the correspondence for our people. We're in Canada, not in the 51st American state.

In July 2010, again in Bogota, Colombia, a Colombian requested communications in French and received an answer in English only, and the visa application was denied. Would that be because he did not speak good English?

In Kampala, Uganda, in March 2009—I'm not going back to time immemorial—an e-mail communication was sent. We were told that it was impossible to obtain communications in French, that that was done in English only. It's all well and good to tell us it's a former British colony, I don't care. I'm in Quebec and I want to be served in French. The francophone federalists here also have a right to be served in French if they so wish. Do you understand me? That happened at the embassy.

I have another example that concerns London, England. In April 2009, I had the opportunity to chat with Tony Blair on my Palestinian mission to Jerusalem, the purpose of which was to go and observe the situation of the Palestinians. We spoke in French. He's British. And yet the Canadians there—regardless of how they define themselves; that's their choice—were unable to answer us in French. And yet the British Prime Minister spoke French to me. It's quite extraordinary. It was really ugly.

In Teheran, Iran, in August 2007, there was an extremely difficult case involving some sensitive issues; you can't imagine—perhaps you have an idea because you work at the Department of Foreign Affairs. Those people came and cried in our offices. They weren't even able to obtain the information they wanted, in French, from their embassy in Teheran in an extremely sensitive situation.

Mr. Kenney was made aware of that because there was correspondence in place and we didn't want those people to be short-circuited. That's the feeling I get about this. There's no scientific basis for what I'm saying here. Because services weren't provided in French, I get the impression they short-circuited the work or even the possibility for these people to get what we think they were entitled to. There was a lapse of time. We understand all that.

● (0915)

Whatever the case may be, I believe none of what you told me earlier.

I went to Ramallah, Palestine. Mr. Bilodeau received us. We're not talking about an embassy in this case because Palestine isn't yet a country. It's a consulate or something like that. Mr. Bilodeau speaks very good English and French. His father was an ambassador. In view of the fact that he had to go to Palestine, to the Middle East, he had to spend a year in Ottawa learning Arabic, which he doesn't complain about. I don't speak any Arabic. He was our interpreter for a while there.

If that gentleman had to learn Arabic because he had to go and work in an Arab country—which I entirely understand—how is it that people at our embassies who represent Quebecers and Canadians answer, "Sorry, we don't offer the service in French?" My employee, in my constituency, deals with those nice people. You'll understand the paradox.

I don't know whether I'm stirring up emotions, but one thing is for sure: today, people will want to know what you have to say in response to this situation and what you're going to do to correct it.

I read the 2007 annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages and his 2008 recommendations with regard to your department. These people are supposed to have their CBC language levels. However, there are places where the heads of mission can't even be bothered to get them.

I'm waiting for an answer. What do you have to tell me on that subject?

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, perhaps you'll have to wait for the next round.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Then it will be in the next round, madam.

The Chair: Your time is up.

We'll now move on to Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Thank you.

Good morning.

The ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Trade represent Canadians and promote Canada internationally. How do you explain

why the 2009-2010 Departmental Performance Report, which is 58 pages long, makes no mention of official languages?

Do you really think you are meeting your obligations under the Official Languages Act if they are not integrated into your program activities?

Ms. Monica Janecek: What report are you referring to?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: I'm talking about the Departmental Performance Report 2009-2010, which is 58 pages long.

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes. Let me look into that and get back to the committee. That's a very good question.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Gravelle: What specific instructions have you received from the Clerk of the Privy Council with regard to official languages?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Pardon me?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: What specific instructions have you received from the Clerk of the Privy Council with regard to official languages?

Ms. Susan Gregson: To my knowledge—

Ms. Roxanne Dubé (Director General, Corporate Secretariat, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): As you know, Mr. Wouters is very concerned about the official languages issue. He regularly communicates with the deputy ministers about enhancing use of the official languages.

Recently, on September 9, a news release was forwarded to all deputy ministers in the context of Linguistic Duality Day. In that document, they and departmental staff were invited to take part in an informal discussion. The clerk attended the event for half a day.

The Privy Council's instructions are very clear. The departments are expected to comply with their obligations under the act.

● (0920)

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Do you belong to the council of assistant deputy ministers?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: When was the last time the council discussed official languages?

Ms. Susan Gregson: I don't know. I'm a new assistant deputy minister. I'll ask the question and give you the answer later.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: What specific commitment regarding official languages has the council kept?

Ms. Susan Gregson: I'm going to forward the answer to you in that case as well.

Ms. Roxanne Dubé: I am director general of the department's Corporate Secretariat. So I attend the meetings of the Executive Council, as we say at our department, as secretary. On the one hand, I can assure you that the meetings take place in both official languages. You don't need to wonder a lot about that since three current deputy ministers are perfectly bilingual. On the other hand, all documents for review and discussion in the Executive Council are presented in both official languages.

In addition, as Ms. Gregson noted earlier, we read the report prepared by Mr. Fraser. Perhaps you'll remember that we had not been evaluated for five years. We didn't expect a mark like that. Immediately after the report was published, Deputy Minister Rosenberg contacted Mr. Fraser by telephone and invited him to present the report card results on December 20. We will devote an entire Executive Council session to that.

So I believe you don't need to be troubled. Departmental leaders are very much aware of this issue and want to correct the situation.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: The action plan of the 2009-2010 Official Languages Program expires in 2011. What will replace it? What aspects of the new plan will directly affect Canada's overseas missions?

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: The plan will be updated and replaced. It will focus on our services and all our requirements under the act, including service at missions abroad.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: When?

[Translation]

Ms. Monica Janeczek: That will be in April 2011.

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes, that will be in April 2011.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: How do the deputy ministers have to report to the Clerk of the Privy Council on official languages?

Ms. Roxanne Dubé: I'm convinced, but I can't tell you this with any certainty, that that's part of their performance agreement with the Privy Council. We can check. You no doubt know what I'm talking about. Every deputy minister has a performance agreement with the Clerk of the Privy Council. We can check, but I'm absolutely convinced that must be addressed in that agreement.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: A little earlier you said that 16 departments had been evaluated. Can you tell us where you ranked out of the 16?

Ms. Monica Janeczek: I believe we were fourth last. So that's not enough. Our evaluation was better than those of only two or three other departments. That was the first time we were evaluated by the commissioner. Ms. Dubé and I previously met with the employees of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and we have a better understanding of our mark. At the outset, we were given overall marks for each element, and it was explained to us what we were lacking. We're already working on improving those points.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: When you made your report, you told us about your strengths. What are your weaknesses?

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: The areas requiring improvement are as follows: we need to develop mechanisms to promote a better understanding of the service to the public—that's under part IV—and to evaluate the needs for official languages minorities communities. That's under part VII.

We also need to develop a results-based action plan for official languages minority communities under part VII. We need to develop tools and procedures to be able to gauge the impact of major decisions—that is, adding, eliminating, or changing policies or programs on official minority language communities. That's under

part VII. For example, when the PromArt program was eliminated in the past, we did not do that, and it's something we need to address.

Under part VII we also need to develop a multi-year action plan to engage with official language communities in order to determine the methods of consultation and to address their needs.

An active offer was made only 56% of the time in person and 69% of the time by telephone at offices contacted by officials of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. According to the 2008 public service employee survey, only 57% of our francophone employees felt free to write in the language of their choice, and only 67%—

● (0925)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Did you say "57%"?

Mme Susan Gregson: It's 57%.

[English]

Only 67% felt free to interact with their supervisors in their language of choice.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Gravelle.

We'll continue with Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks as well to Ms. Gregson and all the witnesses.

Today I'll be asking a few questions. As you said, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade was evaluated for the first time and received an overall mark of E. The overall mark was calculated based on the sum of individual evaluations, which represented more than 50% of the final mark.

I'll be brief. DFAIT received the following marks for each of the components: D for Official Languages Program management; C for service to the public; E for language of work; A for participation of English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians; E for development of official language minority communities and promotion of linguistic duality.

My first question concerns the third and fourth categories. In this evaluation, Ms. Gregson, your department received an A, which counted for 10% of the overall mark, and an E for language of work. I imagine you examined the second volume of the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages. With regard to the participation of English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians and language of work, how can we—

[English]

How do we bridge that gap between the participation of English- and French-speaking Canadians and make improvements in the language of work? There are other points I would want to go into, but have you thought about that?

Ms. Susan Gregson: We have, and it is obviously an issue that causes great concern in the department. We recognize there are areas in which we need to make improvements. I think we've also got some areas of strength.

Mr. Greg Rickford: What specific steps might you take to address that gap between those two interesting assessments, just for example?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Okay, go ahead.

Ms. Roxanne Dubé: That's an excellent question, and I think it's at the heart of the preoccupations of the department on a day-to-day basis: how can we better fulfill the spirit of the law so that whether you are francophone or anglophone, you can feel truly comfortable working in the language of your choice?

Ms. Gregson was asked earlier about some of the weaknesses pointed out in the commissioner's report, and she pointed those out.

I think it's important to know that with respect to the language of work, it was mentioned in the report of the commissioner that 85% of our francophone employees felt that the materials and the tools provided for their work, including software, were available in the language of their choice; some 81% of them felt free to use the official language of their choice during meetings in their work unit; and 80% said that the training offered by their work unit in the official language of their choice was there for them to take.

Let's be frank: we live in a global environment. What can you do in an environment in which English is becoming more and more the dominant language? That's why we deliberately approached the Commissioner of Official Languages back in November and asked if he would come to address all of the EX members of our department in our leadership meeting and talk specifically about the language of work.

He did so beautifully. He made it very clear that in order to perform in many foreign languages abroad, your best foot forward is to be prominent in both your official languages to begin with, and he was quite convincing that way.

We also approached eight heads of mission, francophones and anglophones—thoroughly seasoned ones, from different parts of the world—and asked if they would care to tape a little video talking about the importance of official languages in the work that they do. They did so, and we put those vignettes on the home page of the department for all of the employees to see and listen to.

The goal there was to sensitize particularly the young recruits in the department, who hear a lot about foreign languages, about how important it is to perform in both your official languages when you're abroad to better advance the interests of Canada and better speak back to the community of Canada and represent them well when you meet with them.

We also—and this is my last point, because I don't want to take too much of your time—made sure that in our senior management meetings we would almost force a situation whereby both official languages would be the language of work. Not only do we ask for an English and a French version of documents, but we ask for an integrated version to be used as the document for discussion around the table.

We alternate in certain meetings. One week it's French and one week it's English, so that people can be sensitized to look at French, to read French, and to speak French. Those are a few examples.

• (0930)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you. I appreciate that there are probably more examples, but there's a bit of a time crunch.

This opens to my second question, and hopefully I can get it in. In 2004, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages published a report entitled “Doorway to the World: Linguistic Duality in Canada's International Relations”.

[*Translation*]

Beyond official bilingualism, that study concerns linguistic duality as a national policy and as a Canadian value essential to Canada's foreign policy.

This exhaustive study goes beyond official bilingualism to look at the place of linguistic duality, as a domestic policy and fundamental Canadian value, in Canada's foreign policy.

There were 28 recommendations concerning DFAIT, Canadian Heritage and the Privy Council Office with regard to its role in the appointment of heads of mission and the Governor in Council.

[*English*]

What has DFAIT done to respond to these recommendations, to the extent that you're familiar with its applications? Could you give us some examples of how you did this?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Rickford. I'm going to have to interrupt you and ask you to keep your answer for another round.

We'll start with Mr. Bélanger for the second round.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It's your turn, isn't it?

The Chair: Then it's your turn, Ms. Zarac.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I just have one question, with your permission.

Ms. Gregson, are you familiar with the expression, "It's just fit for the cat"?

Ms. Susan Gregson: No.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I just read your 2009-2011 plan. These are only general remarks. There's no detail, and nothing is measured. This is just wishful thinking, or just fit for the cat, in my opinion.

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Ms. Gregson, you said you are performing all your legal official language responsibilities. However, do you have a clear understanding of your responsibilities? The committee has previously heard that certain individuals don't exactly understand their responsibilities under the Official Languages Act. In your case, do you really understand all your responsibilities?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes, I would say yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Perfect, thank you.

Ms. Dubé, you mentioned that your department had not been evaluated for five years. However, Ms. Gregson said that regular audits are conducted. I would like to know when and how many times you conduct those audits. You also said that, if there were deficiencies, the head of mission rectified them. Do you receive a report on audits that are conducted at the missions?

Ms. Monica Janecek: The people responsible for the Official Languages Program in my directorate receive reports. The department also has a network of coordinators in all the missions overseas. Every three months, we are in contact with each other at our meetings with Ms. Dubé. They tell us about their problems.

• (0935)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Is there a written report?

Ms. Monica Janecek: Every year, we prepare a report for the Treasury Board, like all the departments. In our report—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Could the committee have that report?

Ms. Monica Janecek: Yes, that's no problem.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: What mark would you give yourself? The one the commissioner assigned to your department isn't very high. Do you usually get a better mark?

Ms. Monica Janecek: The Treasury Board doesn't give marks, but we give—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: What mark would you give yourself for your results?

Ms. Monica Janecek: For the Treasury Board report, I believe that—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I'm talking about a mark for the audits conducted at the missions.

Ms. Monica Janecek: We don't give marks as such.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You'll nevertheless provide us with the report?

Ms. Monica Janecek: Yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: That's good, thank you.

You're aware of the fact that two kinds of employees work at the missions. There are Canadian employees who must meet bilingualism criteria. However, some employees are hired locally. Why don't you evaluate those employees? Aren't they also subject to the Official Languages Act?

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: Actually, they're not. They're excluded from the Official Languages Act. We try to ensure that we recruit people who are able to speak both English and French—

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Are those people hired to occupy bilingual positions?

Ms. Susan Gregson: No, the positions of locally engaged staff are not bilingual.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So they aren't bilingual positions.

Ms. Susan Gregson: That's correct.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So bilingualism isn't required. These employees don't come into contact with Canadians who go to the embassy to request a service.

Ms. Susan Gregson: Locally engaged employees who are in contact with Canadians who request services must provide service in English or in French. If they can't speak the other official language, they have to go and find someone who is able to provide that service in French.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So they understand enough French. They have to be able to communicate.

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes. Maybe I can give you some examples from my personal experience, because they might be of interest to the committee.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Yes, please.

Ms. Susan Gregson: It happens quite often that Canadians who come to the mission will give us feedback on whatever kind of service they receive. From time to time I might receive a complaint, either written or oral, from a Canadian who says that he or she didn't receive service in French. As head of mission, it's my responsibility, first of all, to apologize to the member of the public, then to assure him or her that I am going to take corrective action in that regard, and then to go forth and do it. I speak with the staff and remind them of their obligations to actively offer service in both official languages, and I remind them that if they are unable to communicate with the Canadian, they must make sure that they go and find someone who is able to come and provide that service.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Okay.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarac.

We'll now go to Ms. Guay.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would just like to make a few comments before handing over to my colleague so that he can get an answer to his questions.

Earlier we talked about Bogota. First, mesdames, I would like to tell you that I find it unfortunate that the deputy minister is not appearing here today instead of you. Let me tell you that we might have been more vehement with him. You're being sent to the front to answer questions, but it's the deputy ministers who are in fact responsible.

That said, my own constituency office is having problems with Bogota. The service we have with Columbia is so terrible that it is jeopardizing certain extremely important cases, such as family reunifications, cases for which all the applications are legitimate and all documents have been put together. The fact that there is no service in French often causes a problem. Consequently, that sometimes delays case processing by one year or even two. It's quite a complicated situation.

I find it surprising that, although we're talking about free trade with Columbia, we're unable to reach immigration agreements with that country simply because we don't have services in the language of our choice. That creates a major dilemma.

Extremely important things have to be done. I can't wait to meet with the deputy ministers concerned. I don't want to hound you—I know you have a job to do—but an E is unacceptable, especially for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. You absolutely have to take that into consideration; that's fundamentally important.

Now I'm going to let my colleague finish answering his questions and also let you answer them.

● (0940)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Ms. Gregson, earlier you said that, as head of mission, your job is to call people to order. You heard the examples I cited, and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

I'd like to have copies of the annual reports on service delivery that are prepared by the Inspector General. Who is the Inspector General of your organization?

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: Her name is Angela Bogdan.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I'm going to take note of her name and go and see her personally to tell her more about this subject. The situation has to be resolved.

I'm listening to what you have to tell me following my comments.

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: First of all, I want to thank you for bringing those cases to our attention, because it's when we get this kind of feedback that we can take corrective action.

In response to the questions you raised during Mr. Fraser's appearance in November, we obviously brought this to the attention of our head of mission in Bogotá, and she told us the mission had already undertaken some corrective actions. First of all, the main receptionist is fluent in both French and English. Replacements who are not fluent in French have been instructed to refer callers and visitors to a French-speaking colleague immediately. A glossary of French terms and phrases has been provided to all the employees working at the reception, including those who might be acting as replacements during the break. That's often something that comes up, that we have people who are trained—

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Pardon me for interrupting you, Ms. Gregson, but my time is nearly up.

The problem is the service provided to citizens when they call there. I'm not talking about the office receptionist to whom you say good morning when you enter. When staff from my Gatineau office call Bogota, it's to speak with people who have decisions and choices to make. I'm not talking here about the person who receives visitors, saying: "Bonjour, hi, how do you do?"

Ms. Susan Gregson: I'm going to submit this information to our colleagues at Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

[English]

All our LES staff, our locally engaged consular staff, are already bilingual in French and English. Our local staff serving the

immigration program should have the same kinds of direction that other staff receive, so this is something we will follow up.

The immigration and visa section in Bogotá serves a predominantly Colombian clientele, a Spanish-speaking clientele. There are formal procedures in place to ensure that any of the callers or visitors who want to be served in French are transferred to a French-speaking employee immediately. There are several locally engaged staff who are fluent in French, as well as the Canada-based officers.

Again, we'll bring this back to the attention of our colleague.

[Translation]

I'm talking here about our head of mission in Bogota. I'm sure she will be very concerned about this problem and will want to draw our employees' attention to the importance of providing Canadians with service in both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

We'll now give the floor to Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for being here this morning, mesdames.

Ms. Gregson, you've had quite an exceptional journey with everything you've done in your career. In your work at other departments and government organizations, have you ever been called upon to take corrective action with respect to French or the implementation of the Official Languages Act, or have you ever been faced with problems of this kind? To a certain degree, you've always occupied management positions.

Ms. Susan Gregson: Of course. As a head of mission and diplomat overseas, I have always been responsible for promoting Canada's two official languages in my work. You're asking me whether I've previously had occasion to speak before a committee on this subject when I was employed at other department. I would say this is the first time. However, obviously, I've always been aware of my responsibilities throughout my career.

● (0945)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: As you know, mine is the most francophone constituency in Canada. So we obviously don't hear a lot about these problems at my office. I get few requests about relations. Mr. Nadeau is talking about certain situations he is facing. However, people in my riding travel a lot, and the problems mainly concern security issues. When people are overseas and turn to embassies and missions, they often do so in urgent circumstances. I believe that aspect is extremely important. Even here, amongst ourselves, whether we're anglophone or francophone, when we're in an emergency, it's never easy to speak and to make oneself understood. So imagine yourself opposite these people. This is an extremely important aspect of your mission with respect to services to travelling Canadians.

This is the first time your department has been evaluated and you've received an E. Obviously, we would always like to get better marks than what we actually get. However, I don't believe this is just fit for the cat, to repeat what Mr. Bélanger said earlier. I don't doubt what you do, what you write in your reports or your intentions. I believe in you, and I believe you're no doubt capable of earning a better mark than the one you got. I hope we'll have the opportunity to see each other again and to discuss this once more. You're going to write a new report, and I'm sure you'll take into account what you heard today, since that's how we move forward in life.

I would like to ask you a question about locally engaged staff. We know this is often a problem. What real efforts is the department making to ensure these people have a minimum level of bilingualism? You were given the example of Bogota, where 90%, or at least a large majority of services are offered in Spanish. Do you really put the emphasis on French and English, on English and Spanish, or what?

[English]

Ms. Susan Gregson: Perhaps I could give another example from my own personal experience.

First of all, all local employees have the opportunity to study both official languages through the program I mentioned in my opening remarks. Second, most missions will offer language classes to employees who do not speak the other official language.

I'll again draw on my own experience. In Shanghai we had engaged the services of the spouse of one of our Canada-based staff, a francophone, to come in and give classes. These were formal classes. Employees were encouraged to register for them, and they were very happy and enthusiastic to do so. It was very encouraging to see their level of enthusiasm. They wished to be able to provide better services to the public.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: That leads me to my next question. Do you systematically offer courses for people to learn the official languages?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes, we have a program.

Do you want to explain it, Ms. Janecek?

Ms. Monica Janecek: Yes.

We have access to on-line courses.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Providing access is one thing, but do you urge people to respond?

Ms. Monica Janecek: Yes, yes. The missions have to provide active offer. These people may not be perfectly bilingual, but they clearly have to provide active offer. Through our network of coordinators, we remind people that they are on-line courses and that managers have to allow locally engaged staff time for that purpose. As Ms. Gregson mentioned, there's even a course on Canada. It's intended for locally engaged staff and includes a part on Canada's linguistic duality.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gravelle, it's your turn.

• (0950)

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to ask you two questions. Unfortunately, I then have to leave, but my colleague will listen to your answers.

Since 2007, what measures have been taken to improve access to security services in both official languages in the context of Canada's missions? I'd also like to know whether it's possible to get a complete list of the official languages champions.

Ms. Susan Gregson: Of course, we can submit that list to you.

The Chair: We're going to listen for you, Mr. Gravelle.

Ms. Monica Janecek: Your question concerned security guards, didn't it? That's always a challenge for us because most of the time it's not the embassy that hires those people. In some cases, it's local government employees. That's the case in China, for example. It's very hard to insist that those employees speak English or French. We try to hire people who speak our official languages, but that's not always possible. In Rome, however, our embassy has managed to get the security agency to agree that security guards will speak Italian, French and English.

[English]

It's one of the best practices, and one that we encourage other missions to follow.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Will it be possible to get those documents? I believe there's a large quantity of them.

Ms. Monica Janecek: Yes. I've taken some notes.

The Chair: That ends our meeting.

Yes, Mr. Galipeau?

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Is this the end of this part of the meeting?

The Chair: Yes. We had planned a one-hour meeting with witnesses. We have business to attend to in camera.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Would you allow me to ask a question?

The Chair: If committee members agree, you may do so.

Is that all right? All right.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Ms. Gregson, thank you.

Earlier you talked about the CBC levels that are required of heads of mission. We asked you to tell us to what extent our heads of mission complied with that requirement. Do you want to explain to committee members what "CBC" means?

Ms. Monica Janecek: In order, that represents the requirements for comprehension, writing and oral interaction. In the public service, the Public Service Commission of Canada administers tests. Level E represents an exemption. That means that the person speaks the language in question fluently. Level C, which directly precedes it, means that the person is able to conduct a meeting and make a point. Level B is the minimum. In the case of all bilingual positions in the public service, people who engage in supervision or who provide a service to the public must have at least level B.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Ms. Gregson, you have previously been a head of mission?

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: So you have the CBC levels?

Ms. Susan Gregson: I have EEC.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Which is even better than CBC.

Ms. Susan Gregson: Yes.

The Chair: If Ms. Gregson got a level C for oral interaction, I wonder what it takes to get an exemption.

You should redo the test, Ms. Gregson. I'm sure you'd be granted an exemption for oral interaction. You would definitely pass the test in committee, I can tell you that.

We'll now suspend our proceedings for a few minutes before continuing the meeting in camera. Thank you for coming to meet with us.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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