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Tuesday, October 19, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

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

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• (1305)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Julie Pelletier): Distinguished members of the subcommittee,

[English]

I see a quorum. We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

Let me start by introducing myself. My name is Julie Pelletier. I've been a clerk since 2007, and I have been working at the international and interparliamentary affairs directorate for three years. I am very pleased to be replacing my colleague, Julie Lalonde Prud'homme, as the clerk of this subcommittee.

[Translation]

I am now ready to receive nominations for the position of chair.

Mr. Silva, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): I would like to nominate Mr. Scott Reid.

[English]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Silva that Mr. Reid be elected chair of the subcommittee.

[Translation]

Are there any other motions?

Is it the pleasure of the subcommittee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Reid duly elected chair of the subcommittee.

[English]

Before inviting Mr. Reid to take the chair, we will now proceed to the election of vice-chairs. I'm now prepared to receive motions for first vice-chair.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Madam Clerk, my suggestion is Mr. Silva for vice-chair.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Mr. Sweet moves that Mr. Silva be elected first vice-chair of the subcommittee.

Are there any other motions?

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Silva duly elected first vice-chair of the subcommittee.

[Translation]

I am now ready to receive nominations for the position of second vice-chair.

Mr. Marston moves that...

[English]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): I'm hearing only French, so I don't know what you said.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Marston that—

Mr. Wayne Marston: I nominate Madame Deschamps.

The Clerk: —Madame Deschamps be elected first vice-chair of the subcommittee.

Mr. Wayne Marston: It would be second vice-chair, would it not? You just said "first".

The Clerk: Oh, "second". You are correct. I'm sorry.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Madame Deschamps duly elected second vice-chair of the subcommittee.

[Translation]

I now invite Mr. Reid to take the chair.

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): And there was much rejoicing.

Go ahead, Mr. Silva, please.

Mr. Mario Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, congratulations.

Unfortunately, we have lost a lot of time here in the committee because of these procedures. Every year we have to elect a new chair and establish a new committee. We have to wait for the foreign affairs committee. Valuable time has been lost. I'm hoping we can use whatever time is remaining to do some business and also to look at the planning for future meetings. I ask, if it's okay with members, that we continue with the meeting in order to establish what our priorities are going to be for the future.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Marston.

Mr. Wayne Marston: I don't want to be a fly in the ointment here, but I had a couple of proposals that I didn't bring with me because I understood it was only going to be the election of the chair. That's what the agenda said. There's a study I'd like to propose to the committee. Could I do it without giving it to you in advance, then?

Has the clerk received my proposals for a study on North Korean refugees in China?

•(1310)

The Chair: She's indicating "no". She hasn't seen it.

Mr. Wayne Marston: We understood it was going to be only this business.

The Chair: May I make a suggestion to the members of the committee?

First of all, are we in camera or are we in public right now?

A voice: We are in public.

The Chair: We're in public right now.

Here's what I suggest, and then we'll see if it's agreeable to members of the committee.

I was going to suggest a few things. One is to review the rules, the bylaws, that we passed.

Second, I suggest we establish our schedule of meetings. By that I mean what days of the week and what hours of the day we'll meet.

My third suggestion is that we go through the correspondence that either the subcommittee clerk has received since our last meeting or that I have received and thought appropriate to pass on to the subcommittee clerk, but that we not make any decisions about specific items of future business.

Is that reasonable to the group?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Chair, could we also include putting on the table the issues we'd like to discuss in the next little while? We don't have to have a vote or decision on it, but this will at least let the members know some of the topics that members are interested in dealing with, so that when we have the next meeting everything will be on the table.

The Chair: I don't see anything wrong with that, if it's just being done where we're all on a level playing field. So if you're just proposing that someone would make a verbal suggestion.... Mr. Marston could do that as well.

Let's start with the schedule. Last year we met at this time and also on Thursdays at this hour, from one to two, two hours a week. This

is an unusual time. It does have some disadvantages; it has some advantages. The chief advantages are that we can usually meet over in the Centre Block, meaning we can get to Question Period easily. Things may have changed, but last year, anyway, for those who were members of the committee then, it worked with their schedules. There were no conflicts. So unless there is an objection, I'm suggesting that we continue those hours: Tuesday, one to two, and Thursday, one to two.

Does that seem reasonable to folks?

Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Would there be some interest in entertaining changing the Thursday meeting to Wednesday at one o'clock?

The Chair: Let's find out.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: So it would be Tuesday and Wednesday, one to two.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): I have a problem because on Wednesday at one o'clock is the women's caucus that I attend.

The Chair: Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): In fact, I have the same objections. I would prefer that we keep the formula you are currently proposing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Marston, and then Mr. Silva.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Our caucus meetings tend to run sometimes up till one o'clock. It's going to be tight for us. But if we're in Centre Block, I suppose that wouldn't be too bad.

The Chair: Well, we wouldn't be at Centre Block, as a practical matter. Wednesday you wanted to because of the fact that...

You said twelve to one or one to two?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: One to two.

The Chair: One to two. It might be possible; the trouble is the two rooms we normally go back and forth between are occupied between the Liberal and the Conservative caucuses. I don't know if they can make the change over that quickly because they're secured by the RCMP. So that might be problematic from that point of view.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: There are other rooms.

The Chair: Yes. We can inquire. But I think there might be an issue with those rooms.

Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva: I'd like to raise three points. One is that I'm fine with the proposal of Mondays and Tuesdays and the time...sorry, Tuesdays and Thursdays, one to two—I'm okay with that.

Two, Wednesday is a bad idea because that tends to be the day of caucus meetings, so lunch time is a time you can actually meet with people. It's the only day I have available to meet with people, even for lunch. It really could be rushed, as it is for one o'clock.

Three, I would say that maybe what members should do is also hand in their meeting schedules, because we sort of chose Tuesdays and Thursdays from one to two based around people's committee schedules. I know my committee, for example, now meets Mondays and Wednesdays in the afternoons—it's no longer on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I'm fine with the proposal of Tuesdays and Thursdays; I don't have a problem with that. But if there are other times we could meet for two hours, I have a lot more flexibility than I did before. I can tell you that much. I'm not sure if it's the case for all members.

• (1315)

The Chair: The sense I'm getting—I think it's good if everybody could submit their regular schedule of committees to the clerk.

We have a new clerk, by the way. I meant to do this right off the bat. Unfortunately, we're losing one Julie, but we're getting another.

If everybody could do that—I'm asserting that we should work on the basis of the current schedule until further notice and perhaps adjustments can be made as we go.

There were a number of documents distributed to members of the committee. I want to make sure that everybody got them. The first concerns the routine motions that we had previously adopted. Every committee, of course—and subcommittee—has its own list of such rules. They're kind of standard. We did make a slight variation. I think the only variation we actually made was that we said it's important that if you have a motion you want to get on the agenda for the next meeting, it has to be submitted by 3 p.m., not the day before but the day before that. Is that correct? I'll let you read the exact motion because I want to make sure.

We did it in French.

[*Translation*]

That a two working days' notice be given for any substantive motion to be considered by the subcommittee, and that notices of motion be filed with the clerk of the subcommittee by 3 p.m. Upon receipt of the notice, the clerk shall put the motion on the agenda of the subcommittee's next meeting and distribute it to members in both official languages.

[*English*]

So that's what we had agreed on last time. I just wanted to indicate that one. Everything else is the same as was discussed before, as is standard.

Yes, Mr. Marston.

Mr. Wayne Marston: My apologies. My headset was cutting out so I had to change in mid...all I really need to know is that the deadline time is three o'clock?

The Chair: Three p.m., yes.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Okay. Of which day...?

The Chair: Two days before....

Mr. Wayne Marston: Forty-eight hours or two days before....

The Chair: Yes, so that means Friday in the case of a Tuesday meeting and Tuesday in the case of a Thursday meeting. I guess we should make sure that everybody has your e-mail address. They can send it in to you if they want to send it that way. So we'll just make sure that everybody gets....

We also have a list of correspondence received, a list of witnesses that has been submitted vis-à-vis our ongoing Venezuela hearings, a list of witnesses who have appeared vis-à-vis the Venezuela hearings, and finally the calendar. I think we can safely go through the correspondence and the witnesses, and then I think we'll do the calendar in camera.

Before we get to the correspondence, much of which asks us to undertake one or another set of hearings, I do want to remind people that we had three criteria that we had informally agreed ought to guide us. These do not bind us, but there seemed to be some consensus on using these three rules in choosing our subjects for discussion. One was, is it something on which we think we can achieve a consensus, as opposed to having to vote on it? That's not binding, but it was something we seemed to agree on. Secondly, is it something we can get done in a timely fashion, given the fact that we never know when the next election is going to be and there's no point in doing a study that will result in us not having completed some work prior to the next election. Thirdly, is it an area where Canada can have an influence? Obviously there are some areas where we're more influential than others.

So those are the three criteria we had discussed. They're not binding upon us, but they seemed to be items on which we had some agreement.

All right. We turn now to the correspondence received. You have a considerable package here. I'll go through these things in order without comment.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, could I suggest that if we're going to deal with things that are a priority, because there will not only be the correspondence making requests but also individual members, that we move in camera?

The Chair: All right. Whenever someone suggests that, we take a direct vote without discussion. Is there agreement to go in camera?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, then we'll go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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