



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

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

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FAAE • NUMBER 033 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, April 25, 2012**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**



## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** Pursuant to Standing Order 32(5), the Department of Foreign Affairs user fee proposal relating to Passport Canada was referred to the committee on Thursday, March 29. I want to welcome our officials from Passport Canada. They are going to talk to us and give us a bit of an update on what's going on.

From Passport Canada, we have Christine Desloges, who is the chief executive officer. Welcome, Christine.

We have Lisa Pezzack, who is the director general, policy, research and communications. Welcome, Lisa, to you. And we have Michel Brunette, director, resource management and compliance. Welcome to all of you.

I believe, Christine, that you have an opening statement. Then we'll take some time to ask questions, going around the table. I'm sure you know how everything works here, so we'll turn it over to you. The floor is yours.

**Ms. Christine Desloges (Chief Executive Officer, Passport Canada):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee.

I'm delighted to be here today to speak to you about Passport Canada's fee-for-service proposal, the result of two years of inclusive public consultations under the User Fees Act.

I will begin with an overview of Passport Canada's operating environment and the challenges we face from a business point of view. I will then outline our accomplishments in preparing and consulting on our fee-for-service proposal.

[Translation]

Passport Canada is one of the most visible services offered by the Government of Canada. Last year, we issued more than 4.8 million passports to Canadians, and more than 99% of our clients received their passport on time or earlier.

Passport Canada is a self-funding special operating agency working on a 100% cost-recovery basis. We are funded solely through the fees paid by passport applicants. These fees have not increased since 2001, except for a \$2 postal fee increase in 2005. And yet, the business of issuing passports is much different today than in 2001. Over the past decade, Passport Canada has more than doubled the number of passports issued annually. Today, 67% of Canadians hold a passport.

[English]

Passport Canada runs a deficit on every booklet issued. A fee increase is needed to support our move to the e-passport, to bolster our ongoing fight against identity fraud, and to support our shift from a five-year to a 10-year business cycle.

When I speak about a business cycle, it is because, as a cost-recovery agency, Passport Canada functions more like a business than like a conventional government department. We use activity-based management to monitor and track the actual cost of each part of our operations.

Over the past decade, we have streamlined our business processes, making effective use of technology, and have found operating efficiencies wherever we could. However, our existing fee structure has fallen out of step with our business realities, and it cannot support the investments needed to keep pace with the advances in technology, international standards, and recommended practices. These concerns were raised by the Office of the Auditor General in 2005, and were reiterated by the public accounts committee in 2006 and in 2008.

[Translation]

The national roll-out of the ePassport and the implementation of its associated technology is a very complex project. Adopting the ePassport requires the creation of an entirely new passport booklet. We must build up an operating inventory of blank booklets.

Producing the ePassport also means replacing our printing technology across Canada, as well as IT system changes. Moreover, to ensure consistent service to Canadians, staff here in Canada and in our missions abroad must be trained in the new technology.

• (1535)

[English]

I will now move on to a snapshot of our User Fees Act process.

We began by consulting Canadians about our services through a website questionnaire, and we received input from more than 7,000 Canadians. We involved external stakeholders by organizing round table sessions with representatives from consumer and industry groups. More than 70 non-governmental potential interest groups were also invited to provide input through a letter campaign. We believe that these consultations and outreach initiatives provided an accurate overview of Canadians' opinions and preferences.

Mr. Chair, I can assure you that we listened closely to what our clients and stakeholders told us during our consultations, and I'm pleased to report that the results highlighted Canadians' satisfaction with Passport Canada's services.

Further, there is widespread support for the 10-year passport. About 80% of Canadians said that they will opt for a 10-year validity booklet, but many still want the option of having a five-year e-passport booklet as well.

So we will also continue to offer Canadians the option of a five-year validity booklet at a lower upfront cost.

Canadians told us they value being able to travel freely to many destinations around the world, without the need for costly visas. That is why, once its technology and the new security features were explained, most Canadians expressed a favourable view of the e-passport, citing the need to comply with international practices and stay at the forefront of passport security.

[Translation]

Canadians clearly indicated that they support a reduced price for children's passports and this is reflected in our proposal. Children's passports will still be valid for five years and fees will remain at 60% of adult five-year passport fees. In preparing our proposal, our goal was to keep the fee for the 10-year ePassport as low as possible.

Under our proposed new fee structure, the 10-year ePassport will cost \$160, meaning that it will actually cost less per year than the current passports. The 5-year ePassport will however cost more per year. In addition to our consultations, we conducted an international comparison. With this proposal, Canada compares favourably to other countries despite being in the unique position of operating on a fully cost-recovery basis, contrary to our international counterparts.

[English]

After listening to everything Canadians told us, consulting with consumer and industry organizations, and evaluating passport services in other countries, we published our fee-for-service proposal on November 10, 2011. We invited Canadians to provide input on the proposal until November 25. During that period over 7,000 people visited the web page, and 56 provided input.

Passport Canada replied to all the input by mid-December within the prescribed timelines. As per the User Fees Act, those who submitted input were allowed to request independent advisory panels if they were unsatisfied with our responses, and no requests were received.

This brings us to the parliamentary tabling of our proposal, which we believe will best serve the interests of the millions of Canadians who depend on Passport Canada for reliable, secure, and internationally respected travel documents. Our organization prepared a balanced and comprehensive fee-for-service proposal. The proposal accurately reflects our costs and puts forward a fee structure that will allow us to move to a 10-year business cycle.

[Translation]

After more than a decade without increasing passport fees, the new fee and service structure will allow us to modernize services and improve the security of the passport program, while ensuring the

financial sustainability of the organization. Thanks to the implementation of the ePassport, Passport Canada is ensuring that Canadians will have travel documents that are secure and highly respected the world over.

Passport Canada is working closely with its public- and private-sector partners. In order to ensure a timely deployment of the ePassport, the months ahead will be critical. Passport Canada will ensure that services to Canadians will not be affected as we transition to the new technology.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be pleased to answer any questions you and the committee members may have.

• (1540)

[English]

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

Madame Laverdière.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

I thank Ms. Desloges for this very interesting presentation on an important topic, a service a large number of Canadians have access to and need on a regular basis.

My first question concerns transfers to consular affairs. I note in particular that regarding the 10-year passport, \$25 consular fees continue to apply. We may assume that people who opt for the 10-year passport will be making half as many passport applications. This will thus significantly reduce the amounts that are transferred to consular affairs. Can you tell us a bit more about that, please?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack (Director General, Policy, Research and Communications, Passport Canada):** Of course. The consular fees do not come to us. They go directly into the fund—

[English]

I'm going to have to use the English expression—Consolidated Revenue Fund.

[Translation]

Consular affairs are a departmental responsibility and this has no impact at all on our program. However, in connection with the consular program, it is up to them to decide whether they want to impose a fee change, in light of these circumstances.

[English]

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much.

I do understand that Consular Affairs, which is still financed significantly from this amount of money, will get less money from Passport Canada. On a related topic, numbers have been coming out that not all the money received for the consular fee was transferred to Consular Affairs. In the past, some of the money—at some point numbers were flying, \$30 million, I think it was—collected for consular fees didn't go to Consular Affairs and stayed in passport services. However, then we saw numbers that it was the other way around or something like that.

What kind of measures are you taking to make those figures available to everybody, so that we can look at the situation exactly and understand it well?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** We don't have any control over the arrangements between the department and Finance and Treasury Board in terms of how much money is then transferred to the Consular Affairs section of the department, but I can assure you that the \$25 fee is deposited directly into the Consolidated Revenue Fund from our program when it is collected.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** So if I understand well, it means that some of the money collected for consular fees may not go to Consular Affairs.

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** I think that what we have said is that the money goes directly to the government's Consolidated Revenue Fund.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** I still have time, Mr. Chair?

Three minutes, thank you very much.

I have a question on the issue of passport security. I've seen a lot of questions and I've seen also that when you surveyed Canadian citizens there were some concerns about the security of personal information. I would like you to comment, if possible, on the measures taken to....

• (1545)

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** A number of features protect the security of the information. The difference between a regular passport and an electronic passport is that this has a chip in it. This is what it looks like. It has a little gold thing on it. Other than that, it's exactly the same.

The information that goes on the chip is exactly the same as the information that's already on page 2 of the passport, including the photo. Then the information is put on the chip and it's locked, and as part of that locking process, a digital signature is put on that chip that other countries will then be able to verify with the ICAO public key infrastructure to ensure that the information was put on once and hasn't been tampered with.

There are different kinds of RFIDs, radio frequency identification tags. The kind of card that is in this is a card that has to be read within 10 centimetres, and there's also what we call basic access control so you have to read this machine-readable zone on the passport and it has to be open. So you can't skim the information from it. We're quite confident that the information is protected once it's put on the chip, and that it can't be read and picked up by somebody who shouldn't be reading it.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much. That's quite a good explanation.

I have time for one last question.

I understand that it's a complicated process, and it's timely, and it needs to be done right. That's absolutely essential. Still, I think Canada is the last of the G-8 countries to adopt such a passport. Can you explain why?

That's not an aggressive question, by the way.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** That is an excellent question. After the events of September 11, 2001, we had to strengthen our security procedures. First, we brought back to Canada all of the production of Canadian passports that was being done all over the world, in order to have better control over the production of the passport, which is a document. Secondly, we introduced facial recognition technology which allows us to compare the photo of the new applicant with what we have in our database. We now have 21 million files. We have to confirm whether the person making the application is really the same person as the one we have in our databases, or whether we are dealing with identity fraud, which is an increasingly frequent problem. We have made the passport issuing procedure more secure. Naturally, there has been an increase in the number of applications with the IVHO, or WHTI in English, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which you are all familiar with. Five years ago, there was an increase in passport requests when the American government started requiring that Canadians travelling to the United States have a passport.

This slowed us down a bit but allowed us to develop, in 2009, a pilot project for the issuance of ePassports for special and diplomatic passports. We issued 50,000 ePassports and so we were able to test the electronic passport technology and determine the most effective ways of implementing it. We also had to look for funding for the issuance of ePassports. We dipped into the 2008 and 2010 budgets for a government credit margin so as to begin implementing the electronic passport. We are in a consultation period under the User Fee Act, which will allow us to reimburse that loan. We are systematically rolling out this ePassport. I can assure you that we are doing everything in our power to accelerate its implementation.

[*English*]

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

We're going to turn it over to Mr. Williamson, from the government.

**Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks for being here.

I'm actually quite pleased about this announcement of a 10-year passport, but I have a couple of questions.

When do you expect the delivery of this? When will Canadians actually be able to get hold of a 10-year passport? What's the delay we're looking at, and what are the challenges you're facing in that period?

• (1550)

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** Perhaps I can take you through what we need to do.

I should say that the next few months are going to be critical. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we need to create a brand new book. We also need to build inventory. Last year we produced 4.8 million passports. We have to have sufficient inventory to be able to deliver this passport from coast to coast to all Canadians.

We need to bring in some updates to the information technology software, and that's well under way. We also need to procure some equipment, and that process is well under way. We actually expect the equipment to be there soon.

Then we need to roll it out, phase by phase, across the whole country, and then we need to install it in the major plants we have. We have two printing plants, one in Gatineau and the other one in Toronto. Finally, we need to do the training across the country.

We also need to be aware of the fact that, as we are cost recovery, we need to make sure that we balance demand with supply so that we do not waste anything. So we have to do a gradual elimination of the old passport and an introduction of the new one. We're working very carefully with the private sector as well as with our partners in government to ensure that this will happen as quickly as possible.

We anticipate, to answer your question, that we will start the rollout at the end of the calendar year. At that point, we will be issuing both an e-passport and a non-e-passport for five years. We'll roll it out across the country, and when we are in a position to offer it to all Canadians, we will roll out—likely in the spring of 2013—the 10-year e-passport to all Canadians.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Thank you. That was very helpful, particularly drawing down the current stock.

This is actually a big issue. I have a border riding. I'm right next to the state of Maine. In fact, I have an island in New Brunswick southwest, Campobello, with 400 or 500 households, and nine months of the year there's no direct link to Canada and to get to the rest of the riding it's an hour's drive through the state of Maine. So a passport is not a convenience. It is a requirement for these citizens, as for many others with blood ties on both sides of the border.

Can you talk to me about the cost. Why \$160? Why not similar fees as to what we're saying today? I recognize there are costs that go into it but it's also one where... You're going to tell me that there are more costs to produce it, and I understand that, but why are the fees so high? That's probably the biggest issue all members of Parliament are going to get. Why are we paying so much now for a new passport?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** I think the first thing is that we have not had a fee increase in 10 years. The second part of the answer is that we're pretty much the only passport agency in the world that is 100% cost recovery. For the third part, I should say that we do activity-based management, activity-based costing, on every single process, every single channel, and every single office to make sure that we are as efficient as we can be, because we have no other source of funds than the revenues from the sale of passports and other services. We do have externally audited annual financial statements every year. In fact, the auditors are coming into our offices very shortly.

What I'd like to do is ask Michel Brunette to take us through how we put together the proposal and the fee structure.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michel Brunette (Director, Resource Management and Compliance, Passport Canada):** When the 10-year electronic passport was created, we had to balance the program for a 10-year period. We used activity-based management criteria, as Ms. Desloges mentioned, to determine what the costs would be over 10 years.

In addition, we wanted the cost of the child passport to remain at 60% of the cost of a 5-year passport, while keeping the cost of the 10-year passport as low as possible. We know that the 10-year passport subsidizes the child ePassport, among other things. That is, roughly, how we arrived at the \$160 cost.

• (1555)

[English]

**Mr. John Williamson:** Chair, what's my time like?

**The Chair:** It's at two minutes.

**Mr. John Williamson:** I'm curious, how do you expect this to impact employment? For example, there was, I think anyway, a ramp-up in employment post-9/11 when passports became a requirement. We saw the lines, and we saw the government, the passport office, react. Do you see administrative cost efficiencies here from a 10-year passport, in terms of staffing levels and things like that?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** Actually, I should say that we are producing more passports now with fewer people than we were during the crisis five years ago, so we have enhanced our efficiency by introducing national workload management. We also have a national tactical response team that watches in an executive committee every week, looks at the dashboard and the demand right across the country, so as to see how we can rebalance and meet all service standards. That's what we do right now.

The challenge with the introduction of the 10-year e-passports is that we must move to a 10-year business cycle. This means that for the first five years, the demand is there, but then on year six, those folks who have a 10-year e-passport are not coming back. So the demand drops dramatically, and what you have is first applicants and children. As Mr. Brunette just mentioned, children's passports are subsidized. Not only are they 60% of the cost of an adult's passport, but they also cost us more money to produce because we have to confirm that the adults getting the passports are the custodians of the children. So in fact it requires greater scrutiny to produce children's passports. That's a significant factor.

We have to be able, in the second part of the cycle, to sustain our operations, downsize the organization, and then upsize as the clients are coming back at the end of the cycle. That's a significant challenge, which our colleagues in other countries have not met. In fact, in the case of New Zealand, when they introduced their e-passport, they went to a five-year e-passport and they doubled the price.

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

**Mr. John Williamson:** Can I ask another quick one?

**The Chair:** We're out of time. Maybe we'll catch you on the next round.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Okay. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Mr. LeBlanc, seven minutes, sir.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Translation]

Ms. Desloges, I thank you, as well as your colleagues, for being here with us and for the often difficult and very technical work that you all do.

Like Mr. Williamson, I am a member for a rural riding in New Brunswick. You say that you allowed Service Canada agents in small rural communities to help people by checking to see whether their application had been properly filled out. In my riding, we often give advice to those who are not very conversant with filling out an application electronically. I know that this helps people a lot and reduces frustration. In small remote communities far from Passport Canada offices, that initiative was very helpful, and I wanted to let you know.

According to the experience of electors that I send to your Fredericton office, the staff there is exceptional and very professional. In my area, in case of emergency or complications, the most direct way of dealing with things is to go to Fredericton. As members, we note that the service we receive from those offices and from your office in Ottawa is also very impressive. I wanted to tell you that and to thank you.

I am going to follow up on the questions put by my friend John Williamson. People certainly want to know about the costs when they come to our offices. Everyone wants more services while paying less tax and fewer service fees. That is often what we encounter. In your proposal, you attempt to assess the cost of the ePassport. You talked about costs of 13% for auxiliary products and services and 10% for new and ongoing investments.

That sounds like bureaucratic expressions that may mean something, or perhaps nothing at all. Can you give me an example of these

[English]

“auxiliary products and services” or “new and ongoing investments”.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** As for the auxiliary products, child passports are subsidized products. It costs us more to produce those passports. This is the result of consultations we carried out with Canadians who told us that they agreed with that. We think that it is worthwhile to keep the cost of children's passports low.

• (1600)

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** As Mr. Williamson said, in my area, we used to go by car once a year to see an aunt who lived in Boston. We used to show our driver's license and everyone was happy with that. Today, having a passport is essential because of the decisions made by the American government. Have you thought of subsidizing seniors' passports, for people who have very modest pensions, who don't have MP's pensions or something akin to that?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** Indeed, we asked that question during our consultations. For instance, there were consumer groups, and among these we had representatives of seniors' groups, students, and so on. People were not very favourable to the idea of subsidizing other kinds of passports aside from those for children. This was the result of all of these consultations, and that is what you see in our price proposal.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** There won't be much support if we ask people whether they are ready to pay \$170 because your grandmother wants a discount. They will answer no.

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** We have to balance the program as a whole. Since we don't get budget appropriations, we have to balance revenues and expenditures. If we reduce the cost of a passport for one group, we have to increase the cost of the passport for other groups so that at the end of the 10-year cycle, we have a balance between revenues and expenditures.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** I understand that. Thank you very much.

I was a bit surprised by your answer to another question. You said you repatriated the production of passports to Canada. In the past, I presume that this was done in certain embassies. For instance, now if a Canadian makes a passport application in an embassy in Europe or in Asia, the passport is not produced in those places, but the application is sent to Canada, where the passport will be made.

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** That is correct. The idea is to strengthen security and that is the tendency the world over. We work in partnership a great deal with the United States, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. There is an international tendency to strengthen security, as this is an element of national security.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** I understand and that probably explains why there is a difference between someone who submits an application in an embassy in a given country as compared to someone who submits an application in Fredericton.

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** In fact, there are two parts to the answer. First, there are indeed costs to send things abroad and this generates higher costs, and secondly, there are a lot of children whose applications are received abroad. And so it costs more to produce those passports abroad because, once again, they are subsidized.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Fine, I understand that.

In your proposal or in the explanation of costs, there was a reference to modernizing infrastructure. Does that mean to modernize the technical equipment that is used in the production of passports, or is it for the renovation of offices?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** We are referring in particular to passport issuing systems, because we have an obsolete system that has to be replaced to improve security. We also want to consider online production, which will allow us to modernize and have the most effective systems possible. We also want to automate our capacity to verify people's identity.

When we refer to the “social footprint”, this is a reference to the process of confirming that people are indeed who they say they are. With the introduction of the chip passport or ePassport, the risky part, and the part that worries passport agencies internationally a great deal, is the confirmation of identity, and identity theft. It is also a concern for Canadians, and that is why we have to see how we can enhance those procedures.

When we talk about investments, you have to consider that there have been no cost increases for 10 years. And thus, we have several obsolete technical infrastructures that we were not able to replace because we didn't have the money to do so. So there are a combination of factors that mean that we must now—

• (1605)

[*English*]

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

We're going to start our second round with Mr. Dechert.

You have five minutes, sir.

**Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Desloges and your colleagues, for being here today and providing us with information on what I think is a really exciting new product.

I concur with some of the comments made by other members about the need for a 10-year passport. It's something that people in my constituency in Mississauga have been requesting for quite some time.

Canada is a country of international trade, with diaspora connections all over the world. The ability to move freely across international boundaries is vitally important to us. Thank you for all the hard work you and your colleagues have done in bringing these 10-year passports forward.

I was struck by something you said, Ms. Desloges, in your opening remarks about Canadians telling you that they valued being able to travel freely to destinations around the world without the need for costly visas. I wonder if you could elaborate a little bit more on that and give us some examples of places where Canadians do need visas today and how that might change in the future, if that's the case, or if we didn't do this, where visas might arise.

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** I believe Canada currently has access to 164 countries around the world without requiring visas. That's really quite extraordinary.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** What about exceptions?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** There are a few notable exceptions, but as far as international comparisons we're way up there at the top of the pack in our access.

If we didn't go to an e-passport, our concern was partly that we would face more visa requests from more countries. As part of their border security initiative, the United States required many countries that had visa access to go to e-passports sooner rather than later. Part of our concern was that if we didn't go to an e-passport that might be one of the countries where we would need visas, and they're very expensive.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Thank you for that. That's a good example of why we need these.

You mentioned the new security features in the new e-passport. I took it that this would make it much more difficult for people to forge Canadian passports. We know that there have been celebrated cases of situations where it was suggested that Canadian passports were forged internationally, sometimes by the kinds of people that we really don't want to have Canadian passports.

Can you provide us with some examples of the kind of fraud that has occurred in the past with Canadian passports, and how these new passports will prevent those things from happening in the future?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** There are two types of issues, in terms of security. One is the security of the book itself. The security of the book itself is improved because we have put the chip in it; we save the information to the chip. There is, as I mentioned earlier, a public key infrastructure. Border officials can actually go directly to ICAO and say, “Is this the digital signature of Canada?” If that's wrong, then they know the information has been tampered with. That is the physical security.

The other security relates to how we process the applications themselves. One of the issues we have had in the past is people using somebody else's passport to either get a new passport or another piece of identification or to get more than one passport in more than one name.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** How does the facial recognition technology work?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** I was just going to answer that. If somebody applies for a second passport in a different name, we always run a check against our database. We say, “Well, wait a moment, we have issued you a passport already.” We have found fraud in that way, where people have applied under different names.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** I can certainly think of some high profile cases where that may have been the case. I appreciate that explanation.

A number of Canadians have expressed a concern that there is some sort of tracking mechanism that will infringe on their privacy rights. I think you touched on this briefly in your opening comments.

Can you explain that again and clarify if there is anything of that sort in the new passport?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** As I mentioned before, there are two types of radio frequency identification tags. The kind of chip in this is what we call a proximity chip, so you have to be within 10 centimetres. The other type is a vicinity chip, which can be read from 30 metres away. That's a very different type of chip. Because those types of chips give off a signal at a greater distance, they are the ones you could put in a sleeve, or you wouldn't have the same type of information on them.

The chips here will have all of the information on page 2. Those chips normally have a number which refers you to a place in a database. Even if somebody skimmed the number on your NEXUS card, for example, all it would give them would be a number that would pinpoint them to a database, which they can't get into anyway.



•(1610)

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** That's where your name, address and date of birth, etc., would be.

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** Yes.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Okay. Thank you very much.

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

We're going to move back over to Madam Laverdière, for five minutes.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

I have two brief questions, to start.

First, will the new passport that will be valid for a 10-year period have the same number of pages as the 5-year passport?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** In fact, Canadians asked us to keep the costs as low as possible and that is why both the 5- and 10-year passports will have 36 pages each. Thus, rather than having one 24-page passport and another 48-page passport, we will have a 36-page passport for all users, which will allow us to rationalize stocks.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** That's fine, thank you.

I have another question. This concerns the matter of the transfer of consular fees, again. Could you possibly tell us how much money was collected in consular fees over the past year and transferred to the central fund? If you do not have the information now, you could send it to us later.

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** Well, I won't do the math in my head because that's probably not a good idea, but I would say roughly \$25 times 4.8 million passports.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Times four million—?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** 4.8 million.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Okay, thanks.

Still speaking of the—

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** I'm sorry. Michel has just corrected me. We don't collect the consular fee on children's passports, so it wouldn't be exactly 4.8 million. We can get the number and send it to you.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much. That would be much appreciated.

Still on the issue of money, I see that the emergency travel document, which I think in the old days we called the white passport or something like that.... Or am I mistaken?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** Yes, EP, the emergency passport.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** It is used normally for just one trip, usually to come back to Canada. I see that the fee is going from \$31, including the consular fee, to \$75. Do I understand that this one-trip passport will have a chip too?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** No, it will not have a chip. However, we're looking at having to balance, again, the cost of the program abroad. So one of the things....

[Translation]

I am going to continue my answer in French.

One of the things Canadians told us is that they did not see the relevance of subsidizing services for Canadians abroad with the costs they pay here, in the country. Given that, we had to determine how to balance all of the costs of the program abroad over a 10-year period.

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** In addition, it costs more because we are providing emergency passports to people who have lost them or who had their money and ID stolen. This means that more in-depth identity checks have to be carried out in Canada before travel documents can be issued.

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** I should mention that we issue 4% of our passports abroad, but 30% of our security-related cases come up abroad. What we really have to consider are the children, first applications by adults, and persons whose passports were lost or stolen.

•(1615)

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** I expect that there is an explanation, but I saw that the cost of identity certificates had gone from \$127 to \$260, so it has more than doubled.

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** Once again, the cause of that is the confirmation of identity. Identity confirmation is a lot of work. Through activity-based management, we see that the production of an identity certificate costs us about \$700. A lot of very specific work is involved in carrying out that activity.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's all the time we have for this round.

We're going to move back to Mr. Williamson, for five minutes.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Just on a quick point of reference, do you have any idea what it costs currently for a 10-year U.S. passport, with any consular fees they might have?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** It's \$139.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** In the case of a first application.

[English]

They have a special security fee that they apply on the first application. So it's \$113 for those.

**Mr. John Williamson:** We're not doing that, though, we're just going to have those straight fees, right?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** Yes.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Something in your remarks jumped out at me. You mentioned that you're cost recovery, and I understand that. Then you were saying that Passport Canada currently runs a deficit on every booklet issued. Are you running a deficit year in and year out right now?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** We are. We try to balance the books. We introduced as many efficiencies as we could. However, through the budget of 2008 and 2010, we got this line of credit on the fiscal framework from the Government of Canada to help us complete the User Fees Act consultation process so as to be able to secure the fee increase that would enable us to modernize and continue to maintain our mandate.

**Mr. John Williamson:** How big is that line of credit right now, or the deficit? What do you owe on the line of credit? And what will you owe by the time the new fees come into place?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** Could I ask Michel?

**Mr. Michel Brunette:** By the end of this current fiscal year, 2012-13, we will have an accumulated deficit of \$88 million.

**Mr. John Williamson:** You anticipate paying that down...?

**Mr. Michel Brunette:** We anticipate repaying it over five years.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Okay, thank you.

Bob addressed this, but how big is the problem of passport fraud today in Canada?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** It's one of those problems that's very hard to put a figure on, because if you do your job properly, it's not going to happen. So it's kind of...

**Mr. John Williamson:** So you don't want to admit how bad it might be.

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** No, I think we do a pretty good job. Increasingly, we have the tools that are allowing us to do it. We've not only instituted facial recognition, but we also have a case management system. We work—

**Mr. John Williamson:** Let me go the other way. With this new system in place, how confident are you that there will be fewer cases of passport fraud? I don't know the business, but will passports be able to be produced elsewhere, for example?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** No. They're much more difficult to reproduce, and that's why you see the fraud moving from the booklet to the front end.

What we know about the use of e-passports is that once you've locked the chip, it makes it much more difficult for somebody who is a look-alike, for example, to use somebody else's passport. Increasingly, what we see internationally are countries using passports for automated border control. They will take your picture, compare it to the picture on the chip, and do a facial recognition match right at the border control, which will even enhance the security of the process because it will make it even harder to do impersonation.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Thank you.

Do I have time for one more?

My last little bit is just a comment or two. Is there any chance you'd do a passport for 10 years and six months, or five years and six months? I always find it frustrating when I travel and I'm told that the last six months that I've paid for—and are good—are not good in some countries. You can take that away.

I'd ask that when this rolls out, you also provide a good rationale, as you've done today, for all members of Parliament as to why the costs are what they are, particularly vis-à-vis the United States. We seem to be in line with that fee for service. That would help members of Parliament to do their job, because for many members in the House of Commons, we're the first point of reference for applicants.

Thank you.

● (1620)

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** We do plan to have a communications campaign. For those of you who are interested, we have videos on our YouTube channel; one of which explains how the agency is financed, and one explains the passports. We may look at doing a video explaining the new fee at the appropriate time.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Is there any chance that you'll do five years and six months, and 10 years and six months?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** It is not in our current plans.

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

We're going to move to Ms. Brown, for five minutes.

**Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much. This has been most helpful to all of us.

I know that in York region, where my riding is, there is a real problem with fraud and the production of identification for a fee, which is then used illicitly. I know that York Regional Police have really struggled to get this under control, so I'm really pleased to hear that these mechanisms are coming into play.

Following up on that, we're talking about fraudulent documents, and really what this passport is going to allow is almost a form of insurance for identity theft, isn't it? Because if I have my passport, which has my photograph embedded in that chip, it's going to be virtually impossible—maybe I shouldn't say that, but almost impossible—for anybody to decode that and prepare documentation that can then steal my identity, because I'll always have that backup with Passport Canada to say that this is the person who presented originally. It's an insurance policy, really, that all Canadians ought to think about in the future.

My question, then, goes to the second step of that. I have my NEXUS card, and I know that NEXUS now has the retina scan that I can step up to. I was at the Toronto airport, and you just step up to the machine and it scans your retina. Is that ever going to become part of Passport Canada? Is that another step down the way, or has it been considered?

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** At this point in time there is no plan to introduce a second biometric to the e-passport. Should that come up there would, of course, need to be some consultations under the Privacy Act, in order to make sure that the proper privacy assessment is made.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** How long would that take to implement? I did my interview and I had my NEXUS card in weeks. Again, it's another form of security.

I'm getting at this whole issue of identity theft, which is becoming more prevalent in our society. I know people in York Region who had their identities stolen, and their house was gone. It follows through a whole number of things. I feel far more secure being able to say that I've had a retina scan, I can prove who I am, and the government has that backup document—or the American government does at this point in time, but my NEXUS card is good.

Can you comment on that?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** The international norm for e-passports, which is set by the International Civil Aviation Organization is the face. The benefit is that all the passport agencies have a face, so it's a relatively simple thing to do.

Those countries that are adding a second biometric to their passports tend to be using a fingerprint as opposed to a retinal scan, I believe, in part because it's easier to collect. Not everybody can give a retinal scan. Some people can't give fingerprints, but I think they're fewer than the number who can't give a retinal scan.

The benefit of a fingerprint biometric is that there's a database you can compare them against. Police agencies, for example, have fingerprints on record. You're only sharing the retinal scans among those people who have collected them for that purpose. In terms of interoperability of information, which is what you want to have at the border, because the border people want to know that you are who you say you are, those that are going there are going to fingerprints on a massive scale as opposed to trusted-traveller programs.

• (1625)

**Ms. Lois Brown:** I think it is a secondary insurance program, almost. Maybe we need to have some discussion with our insurance companies or mortgage brokers to talk about how that information could be implemented, just to confirm someone's identity.

I just have a comment about consular fees. We know that the money gets transferred into the Consolidated Revenue Fund. I expect that we would see that then transferred through the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the appropriate place to ask that question would be with respect to the estimates. Is that correct?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** Yes. The money goes into the Consolidated Revenue Fund. On the other hand, the department is appropriated for its services, including consular services. So yes, the main estimates and the department would be a much better place to have those questions answered.

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

We have a couple of minutes left. The next person on the list is Madame Laverdière, and then we'll wrap up.

[Translation]

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** I will be brief. In 2001, if I am not mistaken, Passport Canada was blamed somewhat for not having complied with the User Fee Act in its public consultations, when there was an increase in the cost of passports.

How did you ensure that this time you complied with all of the requirements of the act?

**Ms. Lisa Pezzack:** The Auditor General had made two recommendations in her 2005 report.

[English]

One was to develop liable cost information tied to service standards, which is precisely what Michel was talking about in terms of activity-based management and activity-based costing. We know now what everything costs.

The other thing they said was to improve client consultation. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, what we did that was of most concern to the OAG, I think, was double our time for delivering

passports. It's because we were instituting new security protocols. We had an increase in demand. We instituted a "one person one passport" rule that required that children get passports. So we expanded our delivery time from five to 10 days for in-person service. That was the biggest no-no we did.

We've gone through this very long consultation process, which Madame Desloges explained. I think we've had great response from Canadians in terms of the number of people who have engaged in the consultations. We've engaged through social media sites: YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. I think we've really received a lot of involvement in the consultation through this process.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Christine Desloges:** If I can add to that, 7,000 Canadians gave us their suggestions in an open-ended consultation process. It was very beneficial for us because it enabled us to see how we could make our program more relevant to Canadians. That was really critical for us, because when you're in the cost-recovery business you really have to make sure you're aligned with what your clients need.

A huge amount of work was involved in sorting through the feedback we received from 7,000 Canadians in the round tables that were organized and the focus groups that took place across the country. That is also why we're confident we have a robust proposal for the committee to review.

If there were so few complaints and little feedback, it was perhaps because Canadians knew we had listened and we incorporated their feedback into the proposal. We saw that they went to the consultation site. When we put forward the price proposal, 7,000 people took the trouble to look at it. That is not a small number. We used social media to publicize it. There was very little media interest or coverage at that time, perhaps because there were no surprises. We consulted for two years to make sure we were inclusive and had a robust proposal for Canadians.

• (1630)

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

To our witnesses from Passport Canada, thank you for taking the time to get us up to speed on what has been going on.

I'm going to suspend the meeting until we get our new witnesses in place. Thank you.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

**The Chair:** Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we have our briefing on democracy and human rights in Sudan. I want to welcome today Asha Elkarib, who is with the Sudanese Organization for Research and Training.

Ms. Elkarib, I will get you to introduce yourself and tell us a bit about you and your organization. Then I believe you have an opening statement for us. We will have our members ask some questions as we follow up, based on some of the comments you'll have for us.

Welcome. The floor is yours.

**Dr. Asha Elkarib (Executive Director, Sudanese Organization for Research and Development):** Thank you so much. Hi, everyone.

Allow me to thank you all for the opportunity. I am Sudanese, and I live and work in Sudan in Khartoum. I am a researcher by profession, and I am the executive director of the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development. Later in my statement I will talk briefly about my organization.

I'm really honoured to have the chance to talk to you today and I thank you for that.

Since July 2011 the Sudan we used to know has split into two countries, following a referendum where southern Sudanese chose separation over unity.

The independence of southern Sudan unfortunately did not lead to stability in both countries, as hostilities started again and will seemingly continue unless more pressure is put on the two countries—the two leaders of the two countries—to resort to negotiations and go back to the negotiation table.

The resumption of hostilities was not unexpected as certain outstanding issues were not resolved at the end of the interim period following the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Those issues include the settlement of the borders between the two countries, the contested Abyei area, and definitely the whole problem of the oil, and the situation of southern Sudanese in the north, and northern Sudanese in the south.

In addition to that, conflict in Darfur, which started in 2003, is still going on. Although it's not in the spotlight as it used to be, it is still going on. After the independence of southern Sudan more conflict erupted in the region of South Kordofan and the Blue Nile.

The economic situation in Sudan has deteriorated from bad to worse, and the Sudanese pound continued its fall while prices are rocketing higher, rendering Sudanese people hungry, homeless, unemployed, and sick.

Human rights violations continued where the national security forces act with full impunity and they enjoy full immunity. Human rights activists are frequently arrested, imprisoned, and interrogated. Independent newspapers are frequently shut down, closed, and censored. Women in particular are harassed. Unconstitutional laws, such as legalizing marital rape, girl child marriage, and wife battering, are applied under the so-called Islamic sharia family laws.

● (1640)

The space for civil society is therefore shrinking. Our area of work is also limited to providing emergency assistance and income-generation activities.

Support to non-governmental organizations and civil society groups and community-based organizations decreased significantly since southern Sudan independence. Most UN agencies, international NGOs, and donors shifted their weight to southern Sudan. This move is explained based on the comparison between the two countries in terms of the level of infrastructure and services and the capacity-building needs in South Sudan. Also, the international

community assumed that Sudan enjoyed stability and was governed by a so-called democratically elected government.

Both assumptions, stability and democratic government, proved to be invalid. My country is far from being stable, with war covering almost one third of the country and the so-called elected government increasingly practising atrocities and human rights violations, actively working towards effecting an Islamic constitution and building an Islamic state in Sudan.

In 2007, in the midst of the comprehensive peace agreement and interim period, the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development was born as a result of a series of conversations among like-minded civil society activists, who were concerned at the time about the role of civil society in promoting notions of democracy, citizenship rights, and peaceful coexistence. SORD soon started to take its place among the civil society organizations working to achieve those goals.

As a research-based organization, SORD has proven itself and gotten recognized through its serious work and engagement in civic education, gender justice, and social inclusion. During the past four years, SORD has successfully implemented programs and projects for civic education, support to community-based organizations, and women's rights. Our work has expanded to include five other states beyond Khartoum, reaching thousands of women and young people around the country.

One of the main umbrella programs that the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development is currently undertaking deals with issues of gender justice and women's rights in Sudan. Under this umbrella program, we are advocating for the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the African protocol on women's rights.

● (1645)

We are working on enhancing women's political and social leadership. We are working on combatting discrimination and discriminatory practices, mainly within the legal framework of Sudan, and we are challenging the existing personal status law between two brackets—the family law for Muslims and providing or proposing alternative laws. The work SORD is doing is making a difference at two levels: increasing the level of public awareness and education, and changing the behaviour and the practice of a huge number of segments of society. We are seeing some potential for changing those laws.

Producing research-based evidence, and using documentary films and women's stories and experiences have helped and give SORD credibility.

Having said that, our work is in a religiously sensitive area such that the family law for Muslims has opened fire on us from the Islamic fundamentalist Salafi groups, which have lately become very vocal in criticizing our work and criticizing SORD—even naming some names inside the organization—saying that we are doing some work that is against Islam and Islamic culture.

However, at the same time, that has provided publicity for our work, and we are getting a lot of demand from different parts of the country, based on these attacks from the hardliners or the Islamic fundamentalists.

**The Chair:** Ms. Elkarib, could you wrap it up so that we can ask some questions?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** Yes, just one minute.

I would like to end with an appeal on behalf of the democratic civil society in Sudan. We still need support from the international community and governments. The work we do is very important in maintaining the values of human rights and democracy, and in resisting religious hegemony and fundamentalism.

Finally, I would like to say we very much appreciate our partnership with Inter Pares, a Canadian organization supported by the Canadian Partnership Branch, and I hope that Canadian government support for women's rights defenders in Sudan, for women in particular and youth groups, will continue because we know some governments have pushed their way to the south. We know that is important, but staying in the north is equally important.

I thank you so much, and I'm ready to take questions.

• (1650)

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

We're going to start with Mr. Dewar.

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

Thank you to our guests for appearing before our committee.

Actually, just before the last election here in Canada, we did a report on Sudan. We pushed for it because we were concerned about doing a report on Sudan before the referendum.

It's interesting to note that what we heard before the referendum were concerns around Abyei, concerns around oil fields, and concerns around what would happen to southerners who were in the north, particularly women, and of course there was some mention about northerners who were in the south. You come to us today and present us with all of those issues. Many of us were hoping that after the referendum there would be peace flowing like a river, but we understood that in fact it was not going to happen, particularly when the talks broke down around Abyei, for instance.

My question to you is a geopolitical one. Then I'm going to hand this over to my colleague, Mr. Saganash.

We've heard in the last number of days very disturbing language coming from President al-Bashir. He is using language that certainly concerns me when he speaks with regard to members of the south and the military as bugs that can be squashed. We do not have to go back too far in history to see that when people start referencing people as other than human, this is a warning for us to be seized with. I read today that former U.S. president Jimmy Carter has talked about maybe having a UN peacekeeping presence there.

So clearly there is a need for the world to pay attention. That's not a question. My question for you is, in your opinion, what do you think the world, and obviously Canada, should be seized with when it comes to our ability beyond helping you as an organization—I'll let my colleagues get to that a bit more—but in general terms?

What should the UN be doing? I know that there have been the usual discussions at the UN. But very specifically, what would be

your recommendation to the UN as to what should be happening to quell the violence and to deal with some of the outstanding issues?

Thank you.

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** Thank you so much.

First of all, allow me to agree with you and say that we are all very much disturbed by and concerned about the statements of al-Bashir, which didn't go by without impact. Immediately after the speech, there were so many other media leaders who started to quote him. Accordingly, some raids have already started. I'm not sure whether you know that a very big church for the southern Sudanese in Khartoum was demolished last Saturday.

That said, at the same time, there are now huge numbers of people gathering, from civil society and from human rights defenders, and they are issuing statements—and political parties are also issuing statements—condemning what al-Bashir has said, and at the same time trying to look at what happened in a more objective way.

I think I said in my testimony that pressure has to be exerted. At the same time, I think this is also because the democratic movement in Sudan has not been well supported, especially during the interim period. It was left to only the SPLM and the NCP. I think it is high time for the international community to pay attention to the counteracting forces in Sudan, the pacific and non-violent movements in Sudan, and particularly the sorts of democratic movements. They have to be supported. Youth groups have to be supported.

I think that although the international pressure is important, the internal pressure is equally important. The internal pressure needs to be acknowledged and needs to be really supported. It is the only guarantee, in my view, to bring about that balance. At the same time, I feel the same has to be done in this House. I don't want to talk on behalf of this House, but the same thing is happening...yes.

• (1655)

**The Chair:** Mr. Saganash.

**Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witness for her presentation.

I was privileged to meet with the delegation that came to Canada some two years ago, I believe, to discuss referendum processes in this country, including with Quebec and the Cree. I raised the same concerns you raised today when I met with the delegation. Having worked in international law and human rights in particular for more than 20 years, I share the great concern you've expressed, as well as my colleagues.

Within the present context—and I'm glad you ended with that part in your presentation—I would like to have at least some idea of what level of foreign aid is required right now. You were crying for help at the end of your presentation, and I'd like to know how we can help.

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** After the referendum we observed, with a lot of concern, the withdrawal of many donors and international organizations from the north to the south. I have, personally, talked to missions from different countries that have decided to move to the south, and some of them have already moved. I think the level of foreign aid to Sudan generally in that area is very small.

That being said, we know that a lot of support for Sudan is coming from different parts of the world. China is heavily involved in Sudan. Some of the Arab groups are heavily involved in Sudan. Certain parts of the country are flourishing. For example, construction in Sudan is flourishing. Certain companies that produce consumer goods are flourishing.

But the services—education, health, infrastructure—are deteriorating. Foreign aid is not necessarily not coming to Sudan; it is coming from certain parts of the world. I think international advocacy has to work on that, because it is no longer only Europe and North America. It is also Asia, and something has to be done about that.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We're over time a little bit.

We'll move to Ms. Brown for the next question.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Elkarib, thank you very much for your presentation. Welcome to the foreign affairs committee. We're delighted to have you here.

I was privileged to be in Juba three months ago. I had the opportunity to visit South Sudan with the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association. I believe that we were the first foreign delegation hosted in South Sudan. We have a head of office there, Adrian Norfolk, who is managing Canadian affairs there.

Canada still has Sudan as a country of focus for our foreign aid money. I know that we visited several projects going on there. We didn't get into the north, into Sudan itself, so we weren't in Khartoum. But we were in Juba, and we saw a number of projects in Juba that Canada has been supporting for several years, one of them being a hospital and a training program for nurses.

Then we flew to Wau and saw a CIDA project in Wau that is investing in agricultural assistance. We saw a number of programs where women are accessing some microfinance. It was a remarkable opportunity to see some of the country and to become acquainted with people of South Sudan.

My question revolves around the issues of education and health care, though, which I think are probably similar in both northern Sudan and South Sudan. There is an enormous Sudanese diaspora in Canada. I wonder if any of that diaspora has become engaged in both the problems and the good things that are going on in Sudan. Are they assisting in taking some of those positions of responsibility to perhaps bring a different perspective to some of the issues, particularly education?

I saw some of the child brides. I saw some little girls, who were probably not more than 12 or 13 years old, with babies in their arms, and these were their babies. The problem of child brides is something that needs to be addressed. They need education. They need the opportunity for education, because that's what's going to change their lives.

I wonder if you're seeing any recall, I guess, of the diaspora who have migrated to Canada or to other countries. Are they coming back to invest in South Sudan to help mitigate some of these problems?

Let me preface that by saying that my son-in-law is from Ghana. My son-in-law has just finished his Ph.D. here, in science. I don't

think he's going back to Ghana, which is a great loss for Ghana, I believe.

Are there opportunities for the diaspora to invest, themselves?

• (1700)

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** Thank you. That's a very important question.

First of all, let me say that the context of South Sudan is completely different from the context in Sudan. Most of the diaspora, particularly in Canada—I hope I'm not taking their name—are here because of political reasons. The political context is the same in Sudan. That is why, although at the level of civil society there is very strong coordination between us and the civil society, and the diaspora here in Canada and in other parts of the world, in terms of coming back and investing in Sudan, given the political context and the legal context, there is no opportunity in Sudan.

For example, on education, it is not illegal in Sudan to take girls out of school. In fact, the law says that a girl of 10 can get married. Even for us inside Sudan, struggling to encourage girls to go to school, the laws are obstructing us. So it is not easy for people to come from outside, from the diaspora, to invest in this area, I must say.

There is a little bit of movement in the area of health, such as supporting some health activities, coming and working during holidays, and doing some operations from the Sudanese diaspora all over the world, but unfortunately, not when it comes to women's rights and girls' rights. That's mainly because of the political context. In the south it is different, because the political context is facilitating that. In Sudan, it is not facilitating that at all.

• (1705)

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Are you suggesting then that we might be better to invest our aid in capacity building at the government level? Is that where we can assist in giving guidance as to how a government needs to put in place the institutions that the country needs? Is that where our money would be best spent?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** I think, given this framework, I would advise investment at the state level. States are more responsive than the central government, and the needs for these services, such as education and health, are most pressing. They take priority over the political agenda at the state level, and I would like to see more support going to the states and the localities, to governments at that level, not government at the central level.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** So if we invest at the state level, how does that then plug into a country plan? Let's take health care. If we're investing, for instance, in the hospital in Juba, there is a nursing program that we viewed where they are graduating 40 nurses this May but they only have capacity for 40 nurses at a time. So it will be another two years before they're able to graduate another class. And I would think that capacity building would be investing in that program so they could do a continuous intake of 40 nurses, because that's going to get nurses out into the countryside far more quickly.

But there's a plan then for having a health care system that is at the state level but it's being implemented from the top. So I guess I'm just asking how would investing at the state level help to plug into a country-wide plan that is capacity building for the country?

Do you have any thoughts on that?

**The Chair:** And you know what? We're going to probably have to come back. We're over time there.

So we're going to move over to Mr. LeBlanc for seven minutes and maybe we can catch that in another round.

Mr. LeBlanc, seven minutes.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for your time here, for your presence, and for the candour with which you describe some of the difficult circumstances in Sudan. It's a learning experience certainly for me and I appreciate you being here. Perhaps I'll pick up on our colleague, Ms. Brown's, line of questioning, because I think all of us are wondering what the Government of Canada can do, what Canadian civil society can do, what can the diaspora do, to support a greater advancement of human rights and particularly women's rights in Sudan, capacity building in public institutions—painful as it is—and some evolution towards democratic institutions.

Could you expand on your comments, which I think Ms. Brown reflected on, on the idea that partnerships might perhaps be better in some respects with state governments as opposed to the national government. I don't pretend to understand the federation or the structure in Sudan. If national institutions are weak or show massive disrespect and an inability to protect the rule of law, and the rights of women are subject to, I think you said, influence or very negative interventions from fundamentalist Islamic groups, how would that not then work its way down into lower orders of government?

Different levels of government would be ashamed to invest considerable amounts of money and energy where, from the top, is coming a series of rather negative interventions that either make it not sustainable, or very quickly it becomes money that hasn't brought about the change we were all hoping to see.

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** The federal system in Sudan is very well identified. Health and education are state responsibilities. Each state has full authority and the full right to decide, of course within a national framework. But in terms of investing in education, in terms of the quality of education and health, these are state-level issues.

We no longer have national hospitals. Even the hospitals in Khartoum belong now to Khartoum state. We need to understand that, and that's what I'm talking about when it comes to, particularly, health and education.

When it comes to issues of rights and legislations and freedoms, this has to be done at the national level for sure. Issues of rights, women's rights, all the legal framework has to be worked at the national level. But the government at the national level has proved beyond doubt that they are not willing.

One of the most important commissions related to the CPA, the human rights commission, never materialized until the Comprehen-

sive Peace Agreement expired. That shows how the government is not committed to issues of human rights.

Who is working on issues of human rights and the civil society? There are the ones who are pushing. There are the ones who are trying to provide the space with the help of the international community. That's where support from governments such as Canada is so important to the civil society and the democratic movements in Sudan.

In my view, and this is my advice, unless drastic change has happened, and particularly if they are affecting the Islamic constitution, there is no space to work on issues of human rights with the government at this stage.

I don't want to go into the fact that generally the Sudanese now are not very happy about the government and there are efforts to change the government through the upcoming elections or otherwise. While that is happening, I think the money and support should go to the civil society.

Capacity building for civil society is so important, and the value for money which goes to the civil society proves to be much higher than the money that goes to the government. When I say civil society, I include international organizations of course. I mean the national civil society, but also the international civil society, who are very instrumental in working on issues of rights.

When it comes to services, I think it is going down, in the localities and at the federal level, if there is a chance for support in that sense. That's exactly what I meant by saying the context in southern Sudan is different from Sudan.

• (1710)

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** The chairman is indicating that we have very little time.

You've talked a couple of times about your fears of Islamic influence in the drafting of the constitution.

Can you tell us briefly where Sudan is in terms of developing a permanent constitution? How far along is that, and how pessimistic are you—I fear you'll say very—about women's rights being protected or acknowledged, or gender equality, in that constitution?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** There are now two parallel processes for drafting constitutions. One is led by the government and government-affiliated bodies working on drafting an Islamic constitution. This has also been asserted in al-Bashir's latest speech—we are going to go for an Islamic constitution. A draft has already been given to Parliament in its early stages as an Islamic constitution where the whole issue of rights is contested, where they say very clearly that in Sudan there will be no equality, particularly meaning equality between men and women.

The other parallel process is led by civil society, and my organization is part of that. We are leading a nationwide campaign to involve Sudanese citizens in the constitution, constitutional issues, and the constitution process itself—the importance to the Sudanese people of owning their constitution.

This is also an area where support is highly appreciated, because we need to talk to people, to different stakeholders, and this process is very much appreciated by the Sudanese people. However, we have difficulties in going outside Khartoum. In most cases we are not allowed to talk in public about that. We are not allowed to use the media to send messages.

But these two contradictory parallel processes are going on, and we don't know what will happen.

● (1715)

**The Chair:** Thank you, and thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

We're going to move to the second round of five minutes now.

Ms. Brown again.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Thank you very much.

I wanted to pursue that and ask you whether or not you're feeling persecution in any form right now as far as this parallel process that you've initiated. How do you get to talk to the people you're engaging in those discussions? Is there any police activity following you or making it difficult? What are you experiencing in this process?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** Yes, we are working in a rather difficult situation. We are a non-governmental organization. We have a legal presence. We are registered. We are following the procedures that are described by the government to legally exist in the country.

Having said that, our activity is not necessarily approved by the government, and we are frequently summoned by security. Some of my staff have been arrested by security for working on issues like children's and women's rights. We always try to talk to our members, to our board, and to our stakeholders on how we can navigate such conditions.

SORD is part of a human rights defenders group whereby we are trying to educate ourselves on how we can protect ourselves, our documents, and definitely the target group we are working with.

Yes, we know we are working in a delicate situation. We try to work together and always have contingency plans on how to do things. But of course, it is our decision to do that, and we are making a difference. We also try to approach women, especially among the government, because there are certain issues where women can listen beyond their political ideology. So we are trying to work with some soft-liners—if that's the right word—and to have them on our side, which is not an easy thing to do, but that is how we have been existing up to now.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Speaking about women's independence, one of the areas we've been looking at in some of our committee work is the issue of microfinance. Can you speak to the availability of microfinance in Sudan, and is that giving women the opportunity to build an enterprise for themselves that is giving them a voice, first of all, and secondly, giving them financial independence?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** Microfinance projects led by organizations are very successful, and they are really helping women. Women prove to be quite serious when they work with microfinance and microcredit projects.

Having said that, there is also a huge microfinance project that is led by the Central Bank of Sudan. This program, or policy, is not working at all. It is now increasingly taking women into prison because they have failed to pay their installments and so on, mainly because of the strategy. The strategy itself is not a well-founded strategy as compared to the small strategies of different international organizations and local organizations.

We in SORD are now supporting some of the family law victims through small microfinance projects, which is working brilliantly. This is very little money, but it is making a lot of difference. So I think it is one of the strategies that is highly appreciated.

● (1720)

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Are they mostly in agriculture? What are the businesses the women are starting?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** There are different businesses, depending on where the women are. In urban settings, mostly it is small trades and selling food and so on. That is in urban settings. In rural settings, they have to do a lot with agriculture and livestock, such as raising small animals and poultry and so on. It really depends.

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

We're now going to move over to Madam Pécelet, for five minutes.

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Thank you very much.

I have been hearing you talk about women's rights a little bit each time someone asks a question. So I would like you to focus on women's rights and the effect of the separation of South Sudan and the north of Sudan.

We had some guests from Sudan who suggested that the separation would result in undermining women's rights. What is the situation right now in regard to women's rights?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** The separation has definitely affected the women's movement in Sudan. Before the separation, and particularly during the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, there was quite a strong women's movement. Women from the north and south were working together, coordinating with each other, and supporting each other. And we have lost that, you know.

We are still trying to connect. We are still trying to share strategies and experiences. But for sure, that has affected the women's movement in the north.

It has affected it also in another direction, especially when it comes to the issue of Islamic laws. Before independence, there was a strong argument for religious diversity. We are not all Muslim, so that gave us an argument against Islamic sharia laws. We are losing that, because now most of the people in the north are Muslims.

We also have to change our strategies. We can no longer use that excuse. Although we are not yet 100% Muslims, we are definitely not as we used to be before independence. This is definitely affecting the movement.



It is also affecting the South Sudanese women, because they were also very much supported by the relatively strong women's movement in the north, and they are now losing that. They are also losing it increasingly because the government structure in the south has taken some of the women from the civil society to now be ministers and part of the government. So the movement in the south is also struggling.

We are now part of a society that is bringing the women from the north and south together. I hope that what happened last week is not going to affect that, but I am afraid that it will.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is that all? We have one minute left.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much for your presentation.

I noted with particular interest your point about internal pressure being as important as international pressure, and thus there is the need to build civil society and to help civil society develop. But I also heard you saying that the democratic movement was not well supported. I was wondering what kind of support you get from outside, either from NGOs or government, for your nationwide campaign for the constitution.

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** We are getting good support for the constitution, but not to the extent we expected. But I must admit, acknowledge, and appreciate that we are getting support.

Most of the work the civil society is doing on the constitution is supported from outside. We are not getting any support from the government. It is not enough for us to reach everybody in Sudan, but it is enough to start these processes.

There are more than 120 civil society organizations Sudan-wide now involved in working on the contents of the constitution. That is a huge number of organizations under one coalition or umbrella.

• (1725)

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

We have a couple of minutes left, so maybe we'll have a quick question and then wrap up.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Elkarib, you are probably aware that Canada has implemented a number of national measures against Sudan in response to the current human rights and humanitarian situation. These measures include withholding commercial support services, including export, finance, and trade investment development activities; and withholding government-to-government development cooperation. In addition, Canada has implemented, in Canadian domestic law, the sanctions mandated by the United Nations Security Council, including an arms embargo, and an asset freeze and travel ban directed against designated persons.

First of all, are you aware of these measures that Canada has implemented?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** Not fully, but I know of some of them.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Do you agree with the implementation of these measures by Canada?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** Yes. I believe that any pressure on our government is important. However, governments effecting such embargoes have to be more aware of how they will affect the Sudanese people. For example, we had a strong discussion on the sanctions by the U.S., and whether they were affecting the government or the Sudanese people. That is the only concern we have.

But generally we believe that our government responds to pressure—

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Can you briefly give us an example of some of the sanctions that have been imposed by the United States and how you think they are negatively impacting the people? Outline for us the kinds of things you would suggest Canada not do in that regard.

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** We believe they do. They are not necessarily affecting the people in the government.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Can you describe for us the U.S. sanctions, just so we have a full understanding of what you're referring to?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** For example, not being able to bring in goods, services, and dollars is affecting the Sudanese people. It is affecting the quality of our imports. It is also affecting the small investors in Sudan. But it is definitely not affecting the people in the government, mainly because they already have huge investments with Asia, Malaysia, the Arab world, and China.

The quality of services in Sudan, particularly health services, is going down, and that is affecting normal Sudanese people. When the people in the government get sick, they go to Europe or the U.S. They go wherever.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** So designated travel bans on some of those individuals would be helpful. I think we have done some of that.

In your opinion, what kinds of additional measures could the Government of Canada implement or impose to put added pressure on the Sudanese government to do better in human rights and the rights of women in Sudan? What would you suggest we do?

**Dr. Asha Elkarib:** Pressure on the Sudanese government, particularly on human rights, works. It has worked before. They have moved a little bit from being very brutal in the treatment of human rights defenders to not doing the same things they used to do, mainly because of resistance inside and pressures from outside.

However, continuing the pressure is important. It's not just one-time pressure. It is important for the international community to continue hammering on the issue of human rights, because they are changing their strategies and using different ways of harassing and violating human rights, without necessarily the awareness of the international community. So the continuation and consistency of the pressure are very important.

The collectivity of the pressure is also important, because sometimes when the pressure comes from an individual government it isn't the same as when it comes from a group. We have seen that, for example, when one country talks. But when the EU talks about human rights, the effect is different.

Again, liaising and connecting to the civil society so the international community has fresh knowledge of what is happening on the ground with human rights is very important in order to embarrass and put more pressure on the government.

•(1730)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Elkarib, for being here and telling us about your story and the great work you're doing with your organization in Sudan.

The meeting is adjourned.

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