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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Order.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. This is meeting 44 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, Tuesday, March 20.

Members will be reminded that today's meeting is televised.

We're very pleased to have with us this afternoon the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Peter MacKay. This is the minister's fifth appearance before our committee in less than a year. He testified before us four times in 2006: March 30, August 1, September 27, and November 5.

We're pleased to have you back again today.

The minister appears today because we've invited him to come and speak on four main issues and motions that have appeared before this committee: the closing of Canadian consulates; the federal government's efforts to ratify the United Nations covenant on the rights and dignity of people with disabilities; the situation in Afghanistan; and the 2007-08 main estimates.

The minister is accompanied today by his appropriate deputy minister and associate deputy minister: Mr. Edwards and Mr. Mulroney, welcome.

I can assure members that following the minister's opening statement, we can ask questions on all four of those main topics of discussion, those motions that have been brought. There is no requirement that we adhere to the agenda on the notice of meeting. The notice merely lists the topics, with no particular order of precedence.

Finally, we hope at the end of this meeting to go in camera for a very short period of time to discuss a few brief points in regard to our study on democratic development, and also to pass the report that will be brought today from our steering subcommittee. We want to be able to give our table the opportunity to go ahead and call some of those witnesses for next week and the few weeks after.

On behalf of the committee, Minister MacKay, thank you for being so responsive to the invitations to appear before our committee and to provide us with news from Canada's new government.

I will now turn the time over to you. Normally we'd have 15 or 20 minutes for a minister, but we recognize that you have those four points to address, so you just take the time. We're pleased that we have two hours with you today.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you as well to distinguished colleagues and committee members, officials, and those from the public who are joining us.

Let me begin, Mr. Chair, by thanking this committee for being what I would describe as among the most active, if not the most active, in Parliament. I commend you for the work you do.

[Translation]

I am pleased to have this opportunity to celebrate with you *Le jour de la Francophonie* and to discuss important elements of the government's foreign policy and the contribution of my department in serving Canada and Canadians.

[English]

First, Mr. Chair, a word or two about the government's foreign policy. Our foreign policy is very clear and focused. It is aimed at restoring Canadian leadership in the world. It is focused on priorities, and responsive to the needs in emerging circumstances. And it is implemented through action, not through empty rhetoric or promises that cannot be kept.

The Prime Minister and I have spoken repeatedly about our foreign policy priorities. So have other ministers, so let me restate them. Our priorities are to play a leadership role in peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan; restore Canadian-United States relations to a respectful, businesslike relationship; rebuild our defence capabilities; promote Canada's values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law; and ensure Canadian competitiveness through internationally playing a stronger role within our own hemisphere, where we have shared history, substantial interests, and growing people-to-people ties.

Our actions over the past year and more are evidence of a focused foreign policy agenda. It is one that will advance our interests and our values in an increasingly complex world.

I've been asked to address four issues, you're correct, Mr. Chair, and I beg your indulgence; this perhaps will be a longer presentation because of it. The four substantive areas are Afghanistan, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the consolidation of our diplomatic representation abroad, and the department's main estimates, including our report on plans and priorities.

First, Afghanistan. At my last appearance before you, in November, I spoke of a complex, changing world, one in which Canada's interests and values were very much at stake through this mission. I said that Canadian security and prosperity depended on global, economic, and political developments, and on the quality and depth of our engagement with them. As a result, Canada needed to influence and shape the world as best we could.

Nothing has occurred in the time since then for me to change that view. In fact, the intervening months have only strengthened it. Canada's mission in Afghanistan is a central priority of my department. We are committed to it, not just for today but over the longer term.

The Government of Canada is drawing on the skills and determination and courage of the personnel of other government departments as well—most notably, National Defence, Public Safety, RCMP, CIDA, Correctional Service Canada, and Border Services—to help build an Afghanistan where human rights are respected, where development, rule of law, and good governance are taking root.

Let me remind this committee of the reason why the Government of Canada is so committed, so determined, so focused on achieving success in Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

First, a stable Afghanistan, free from extremism, strengthens international security and thus Canada's security. We are there to protect the security of Canada and Canadians by providing stability, security, and development and humanitarian assistance to the people of that country. That's a primary responsibility.

This NATO-led mission is solidly supported by the international community through a UN Security Council mandate. We are there to help the Afghan people and their government implement the Afghanistan Compact, of which we are signatories. The compact commits the international community, along with the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, to achieving progress in three interrelated areas: security; governance, which includes the rule of law, human rights, and tackling corruption; and economic and social development.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

So how is Canada's mission in Afghanistan doing, and what is our prognosis as spring approaches?

I encourage committee members and all Canadians to read the report that ministers O'Connor, Verner and I tabled in Parliament three weeks ago. It is called "Canada's Mission in Afghanistan: Measuring Progress".

[*English*]

This report measures progress and identifies what yet needs to be done. It is a frank, realistic assessment. It harbours no illusions about the difficulties that lie between where we are today and where we would like to be over the longer term.

There is real progress that can be measured. It is occurring in expanding security, in building democratic institutions and public infrastructure, and in providing development assistance. There has

been Canadian assistance in providing food, water, and basic necessities. The assistance has also gone to schools, to villages, to communities, and to microcredit for individuals, especially women, so that they can start small enterprises and businesses of their own.

I've seen this progress myself. I've taken two trips to Afghanistan, most recently in January, and I've seen the difference Canadian-financed microcredit loans are making for women, allowing them to take their rightful place in Afghan society. I've seen it in the faces of young boys who are learning to be carpenters and tinsmiths thanks to a Canadian project that gives them a trade and a stake in their own future, plus the tools to go out into their communities and begin to work and train others. I've seen it in the eyes of young girls who are going to school for the first time, who display enthusiasm about learning to read, who dream about being teachers themselves. I've seen it in the pride displayed by graduates of a police studies program, graduates who swore to uphold the law, who celebrated and supported and saluted their own country.

This is the progress we are seeing there, Mr. Chair. It gives us cause for optimism and encourages us to continue our efforts. The tough questions we ask in the report should, and do, keep us focused on what works, what challenges are yet to be addressed, and what lessons have been learned thus far.

As you know, the Prime Minister recently announced that Canada is providing an additional \$200 million for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. This is in addition to our annual allocation of \$100 million to development activities. That now places Canada among the leading donor nations in Afghanistan. Indeed, Afghanistan is already our number one recipient of Canadian foreign aid.

We're continuing to look for partnership programs with countries like Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands. New money will go to proven Afghanistan-designed and UN-supported programs throughout the country. Performance-based success criteria are part of that decision-making.

What's more, Canadian assistance is helping to kick-start the local economy. Not only does it have the effect of raising people's confidence and hope, but it also gives them a real stake in the continuity and success of Canada-funded initiatives and projects.

Here I'm thinking of our funding for the supply of police uniforms, for example, which were made by the people in the community. I'm thinking of water projects, roads, bridges, and one very unique project that I'll describe for you. A boxcar or a large container—filled with such agricultural implements as hoes and rakes and seeds and rain clothing and boots and the other types of necessities that farmers need—is taken out into a community and locked. The keys are given to a member of that community, an elder or other representative, who decides how they would use it. That aid in a box is instant aid, and it immediately makes a tangible, touchable impression in a community.

One of the additional \$200 million to \$120 million will go to the Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund administered by the World Bank. Portions of this will go to three successful development programs: the national solidarity program, the Government of Afghanistan's primary program for community development; a program to provide operational support to the Government of Afghanistan; and the national microcredit program, to which Canada has already committed \$40 million.

When I was in Kabul to meet with the community development minister for the Karzai government, I saw a map that showed the various areas of concentration that the Afghan government itself was making in disbursing development aid and programs throughout their country; \$20 million will go to the UN office on crime and drugs to combat illicit drugs and international crime—another high priority—and \$10 million will go to the counter-narcotics trust fund, to improvements of Afghanistan law enforcement and criminal justice institutions in support of the Afghan national drug control strategy.

Also, \$20 million will go to the law and order trust fund in Afghanistan, which allows police officers to draw their full salaries directly from the banks, thus furthering the creation of a more professional police force and ensuring security for Afghans. This amount builds on the previous Canadian contribution of \$20 million. I can tell you that this is very much a necessity in an area where the Taliban are, in some cases, trying to recruit these same said officers.

• (1545)

If we are able to enhance the ability of the Afghan government to ensure that the officers' salaries are paid, allowing them to earn a decent living for their families, this will make an enormous difference in recruitment and training, in the building of a professional police force.

Finally, another \$20 million will support the UN Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan, which will take us further towards our goal of making Afghanistan free of mines and unexploded ordinance. An average of 60 Afghans are killed or injured every month by mines. Half of those victims are under the age of 18. Again, that's a clearly identified need.

Mr. Chair, \$10 million will go to the Asian Development Bank, which is supporting the construction of a vital transport link for Kandahar city, a priority of the Afghan national development strategy. Not only will this help farmers get their products to market, but the road's construction will provide much-needed local employment.

Canada maintains such key bilateral programs as vocational training and food aid for war widows. In Kandahar, 16 vocational courses are currently funded by the national solidarity program, and we hope to replicate these types of successful programs further, throughout Kandahar.

Canada is also assisting in the immunization of more than 7 million Afghan children as part of a polio eradication initiative. A \$5 million contribution made last October is currently supporting the immunization of 350,000 children in Kandahar province. We've distributed women's wellness diagnostic kits to Kandahar University's medical program. The provincial reconstruction team has

donated medical supplies and linens to the Afghan National Police hospital in Kandahar.

Mr. Chair, this is by no means the whole list of what Canada is doing for development, reconstruction, and education. But it serves to illustrate, I hope, a fundamental point: there is huge and measurable progress, and impacts are being felt all over that country. The Prime Minister has made the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade the lead department in coordinating, focusing, and implementing the Government of Canada's policies in Afghanistan. His former foreign and defence policy adviser, David Mulroney, has become associate deputy minister for foreign affairs, responsible for interdepartmental coordination and for ensuring foreign policy coherence for Afghanistan.

I believe Canadians are gaining a better understanding of this international mission, the mission of the Afghan people, the challenges, and what's at stake in the region. They are hearing more about how Canada is helping the Afghan government and the people reach and achieve their objectives. They understand that Canada's efforts include development and humanitarian assistance, diplomatic and governance support, and the much-needed presence of our troops to provide security in difficult and dangerous circumstances.

I underscore that point, Mr. Chair. None of the previous programs—the aid, the humanitarian work—can happen without the security perimeter provided by the NATO forces, which include our troops.

From coast to coast, Canadians have shown their appreciation for these troops serving on this mission. Whether by wearing red shirts on supportive red Friday, attending rallies, or writing to the troops, Canadians are showing how proud they are of our forces. I extend my condolences to the families and friends of those who have suffered, from those soldiers who have sacrificed their lives—most recently Corporal Kevin Megeny, a young man from my hometown in Stellarton, who lost his life just a few short weeks ago.

Our support for those who have sustained injury on this mission in the name of Canada can never be expressed often enough or loudly enough. But only if there is security in Afghanistan can development workers and humanitarian assistance specialists get on with their task of helping Afghanistan through these economic development, education, and reconstruction projects. Only if there is security can the fledgling steps in democracy and democratic governance and rule of law be consolidated and extended throughout the country. Only if there is security can human rights in Afghanistan be grounded and protected, in law and enforcement, in public.

Thanks to the skills and professionalism and courage of our soldiers, the nascent peace stretching over the country has now been extended to large parts of Kandahar province. We are now consolidating these security gains, and using this opportunity to increase our focus on bettering the lives of civilians, pushing ahead with reconstruction, building schools and roads, encouraging small businesses, implementing governance programs.

Measuring progress in Afghanistan's difficult environment is also a challenge. Nevertheless it's encouraging to see the people themselves in Afghanistan, with their government, starting to take ownership over their development agenda and priorities, building a professional army and police force.

●(1550)

Mr. Chair, again, to give you a personal observation, when these roads, bridges, and projects are built by local citizens, they fiercely defend them from the Taliban. They take ownership over those projects. There is an intrinsic pride that takes hold in the way in which they defend those projects.

Mr. Chair, this will continue. We'll continue to keep all development projects under constant review to ensure that our efforts align closely with the intent and purposes that have been set out in the annual UN Security Council resolutions and the benchmarks established by the Afghanistan Compact.

True, Canada's mission in Afghanistan is demanding, but the costs of failure and abandonment would be very high. Afghanistan's poverty, their narcotics trade, and the Taliban insurgency in the south, combined with Afghanistan's complex political situations, pose a huge challenge for the Afghan people.

You will recall the words of Chris Alexander, who appeared before this committee. He stated:

The billions of dollars spent in the last five years assisting Afghanistan would go up in smoke, while the very existence of NATO and the UN would be threatened if the west withdrew. And most tragically, none of us around this table would be able to explain to the families of the 44 Canadians who have lost their lives in Afghanistan what the purpose of that sacrifice was.

James Appathurai, a spokesman for the international defence committee staff, also gave testimony, I believe. He spoke about the disastrous and devastating impact that Afghanistan would feel should the NATO mission be withdrawn.

Mr. Chair, it poses a grave and continuing risk to stability and safety in the region, and as we saw five years ago and more, it can spill out into the world and into our own continent.

●(1555)

[Translation]

Canada is taking action to ensure that Afghanistan is not becoming a haven again for those who would threaten international peace and security, including Canada's security. Canada is also delivering on its promise to support the people of Afghanistan. Canadians can be rightly proud of our role and our accomplishments.

[English]

The Government of Canada will stay on track, and I can assure you my department will lead the way in this regard. It is our government's highest foreign policy priority.

Now, Mr. Chair, if I might, I'll turn to another issue on which I have been invited to speak today. It concerns the important recent developments in the field of international human rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006. The convention will be opened for signature in 10 days' time, on March 30, at a special signing ceremony at the United Nations in New York.

The UN convention is a significant development in international human rights law. It is a specific application of existing human rights to respond to the situations and realities of persons with disabilities. As such, it promises to be an important tool in the protection and the promotion of these rights. For this reason, we believe the development of the convention was long overdue. At its core, the convention is a legal instrument aimed at preventing discrimination. Canada thus welcomes the strong equality rights provisions contained therein and the significant contribution this convention makes to development of the concept of reasonable accommodation so crucial to ensuring the full participation in society of persons with disabilities.

Mr. Chair, Canada is proud to have contributed to the new convention through our active participation in its negotiations and fully supports the principles reflected therein. Throughout this process the federal government has worked closely with the provinces and territories in connection with this convention and with respect to any agreement that may affect their areas of jurisdiction. This is an example of what the Prime Minister calls flexible federalism, Mr. Chair. We have conferred frequently with the members of civil society throughout the negotiation of this instrument and have recognized the particular importance of this agreement to them, both in practical terms and symbolically.

We are now engaged in the provincial and territorial consultation process required prior to signature, and I personally reached out to every single province and territory over the past two weeks with a view to moving this file forward expeditiously. I understand and I share your strong interest that Canada proceed with the signing of the convention at the earliest possible opportunity. Therefore, I wish to assure you of my commitment to remain actively engaged in this matter and I certainly hope to see a positive conclusion to this matter in the near future.

I would like to address the next item, Mr. Chair, which is the consolidation of our diplomatic representation abroad. The Government of Canada is strongly committed to the responsible and effective spending of tax dollars in pursuit of our foreign and international trade objectives. Following an extensive departmental review, a review process that examined how to best allocate and reallocate our resources, the decision was taken to close the consulate general in Milan, Italy; the consulate general in St. Petersburg, Russia; and the consulates in Osaka and in Fukuoka, Japan. The review found that the embassies in Rome, Moscow, and Tokyo were able to provide at reduced cost a wide array of programs and services to promote Canadian interest in these countries.

●(1600)

[Translation]

These mission consolidations are part of the spending restraint exercise announced by Canada's new government on September 25, 2006. The closing of missions reflects the government's readiness to reduce costs, set priorities, review existing expenditures and make choices, hard choices at times, in the interest of Canadian taxpayers.

[English]

Just to give you an idea, Mr. Chair, of the ebb and flow that come with shifting resources to priority areas, during the period of 1993 to 2006, Canada closed 31 missions while opening another 43 missions in new locations. The new Canadian embassy in Kabul is but one example, a prominent example, of a new embassy.

The countries in which we have consolidated services currently have excellent transportation and communication infrastructure with which to facilitate continuing client service. As another example, our consul in Osaka is developing a strategy and a handbook for the trade program in the Kansai region. He will be reassigned to another post in Japan, so he's not leaving. Meanwhile, the embassy in Tokyo and our consulates in Nagoya and Hiroshima will take over the strategy and the handbook and will continue to develop it.

The mission consolidations are thus in no way a reflection of a downgrading of the importance to Canada of the countries that are concerned. Our relations with Italy, Russia, and Japan remain strong, excellent. They are key G-8 countries and important partners. We have strong people-to-people contacts currently, and we will facilitate our continuing partnerships with these countries in the future.

Countries affected also understand our position very well. They are facing similar challenges; namely, how to maintain diplomatic contacts and deliver a range of services at a time of rapid globalization and major security challenges. So are our allies and our friends. No one is escaping the need to stay flexible, to shift resources, to strengthen representation in some areas, while consolidating in others, to reduce costs where possible.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade is a department that has, for nearly 100 years, had a strong tradition of engagement in the world, of defending and pursuing Canada's interests in the world, and of ensuring that the voice of Canadians is heard internationally. The Prime Minister has been very clear in recent public statements that standing up for Canada's interests and values internationally is one of the government's top priorities. Indeed, international issues have increasingly been at the forefront of Canadians' concerns. Recent high-profile consular cases underline the need to protect Canadians abroad. We have, in fact, Mr. Chair, approximately 2.3 million Canadians living, working, or travelling abroad.

Let me sketch out briefly how the department's budget is to be apportioned. Maintaining Canada's network abroad takes up just half of our total budget, but this network isn't the sole preserve of DFAIT. What few people realize is that my department supports 20 partner departments and agencies, as well as three provinces, through mission networks or platforms.

Let me emphasize this point. When we speak of Canada's representation abroad, we are not simply speaking of DFAIT alone; we are speaking of Canada abroad, that is, a Canada-wide service for the whole of government. And when we speak of Canada's diplomatic missions, you may not find only foreign service officers working at them; you will find people from Citizenship and Immigration, RCMP officers, people from provincial governments, and specialists from Health Canada or Agriculture Canada. DFAIT's

support of other departments and partnerships is not always well understood, and I believe it needs to be more widely recognized.

Another quarter of DFAIT's budget covers the cost of Canadian participation in international organizations, again on behalf of the whole of government. The remaining 25% of our total budget, which is about \$500 million, is devoted to operational and program sectors.

At the same time, we, like other departments, are experiencing expenditure restraints. This is part and parcel of the government's economic agenda for controlling program spending and getting value for our money. I can assure you that DFAIT will do, as it is doing, its part in managing budgetary reductions, while remaining committed to providing the best service that we can to Canadians.

All good organizations are faced with challenges, and DFAIT is no exception. Good organizations respond by seeking challenges and seeing them as opportunities. Good management is all about identifying and seizing such opportunities, even as one is going through a belt-tightening exercise. We need to be flexible to respond to the important world events as they occur. We need to be in places where there are emerging opportunities and the interests of Canadians and Canada remain strong and where our presence can have a multiplier effect.

• (1605)

Take, for example, our office in Philadelphia. It reaps more than the usual consular office rewards. That is because Philadelphia is also the site of Pharm Expo, one of the largest biotechnology exhibitions around. That's where so many of the start-ups in biotech go for exposure. It's where Canadian companies go for market opportunities, and where we can help them through our department's commercial services.

This is what the department has been doing and will continue to do. We will continue to reallocate and shift resources from lesser priorities to higher-priority areas, such as the government's foreign policy priorities, which I cited at the beginning of my remarks. We will continue to do our level best to meet high standards, and wherever possible, to continue to improve services. To this end, we have taken important steps to improve DFAIT's management practices, to provide a more results-based diplomacy, clearer strategic alignment with the government's overall policy priorities, and better reporting and communication with the rest of government.

[Translation]

For example, the country strategies developed for each mission and the mandate letters that accompany them ensure that each head of mission has clear direction on priorities and expected results, and each is accountable for delivering on them.

[English]

We're also improving innovative new ways and implementing new ways of delivering Government of Canada services abroad to supplement its traditional bricks and mortar operations. One such initiative is the virtual trade commissioner, or the VTC service. This interactive tool enables our trade commissioners to distribute up-to-date, relevant information to all our clients and partners on a 24-hour basis, regardless of their location. Recently, the VTC won a Treasury Board Secretariat award of excellence. So did our public diplomacy online services and our consular affairs bureau electronic resource. These awards were for outstanding leadership and improving service for Canadians, Canadian businesses, and international clients.

DFAIT remains committed to ensuring that our resources are invested in ways that will allow us to effectively pursue the government's international agenda. The department's report on plans and priorities describes this in detail. Against this fiscal backdrop, my department is tabling its 2007-2008 main estimates and report on plans and priorities for the same year.

The main estimates for the department are \$2.6 billion, \$2 billion for budgetary items and a \$670 million non-budgetary item for Canada's Export Development Corporation. If we exclude the EDC non-budgetary item, the department's main estimates show a net decrease of \$142.8 million. The main estimates contain a considerable amount of detail on programs, activities, operations, and expenditures as well as our plans and priorities for the fiscal year.

I'm happy, of course, to respond to any questions committee members may have, either in our discussions or by subsequent written answers.

Mr. Chair, I'll conclude my remarks and I look forward to receiving your questions.

Merci beaucoup.

The Chair: Merci, Mr. Minister.

We'll go into the first round of questioning, and I remind all members that the first round is ten minutes.

We will have a split: Mr. Wilfert and Mr. Patry. Mr. Wilfert, please.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the minister for coming, and I want to congratulate Len Edwards and David Mulroney.

You have two excellent officials with you. I have known both of them over the years, particularly because of their expertise in Asia. I'm glad to see we finally have an Asian perspective to foreign affairs, which I think we have lacked for some time.

Minister, you said that our diplomatic presence abroad is constantly reviewed to reflect this government's needs and priorities. That's very admirable, except when it comes to the closing of the consulates. I'll deal with the two in Japan.

The Canada-Japan Society of British Columbia notes:

Japan is Canada's largest offshore export market, second only to the United States as a destination for Canadian goods and services. Japan is the world's second largest economy and is bigger than all of the other economies in Asia combined.

Even prior to our announced closings of the consulates in Osaka and Fukuoka, Canadian interests were under-represented in Japan relative to Japan's importance to Canada as a market for our goods, a source of tourists and students, and a major source of investment in Canadian resources in the automotive sector.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Japan notes that the consulates also serve as a focal point for the collection and dissemination of information to Japanese and Canadian companies, organizations, and individuals. The information, contacts, and goodwill developed over years will be lost in these closures. In a relation-based culture such as Japan, the cost of this loss is beyond calculation, and it will be felt for many years to come.

These two letters I quote from, one dated January 25 and one dated January 30, were written to the Prime Minister. I did an access-to-information request on January 31. The 30-day statutory period has come and gone, and they've told me they can't provide everything and that they need a 60-day extension.

Minister, a handbook doesn't cut it. Given the importance of priorities, I'm assuming you're saying that Japan, with the second-largest economy in Asia, which is greater than all of Asia combined, including China, is not a priority for Canada.

The former ambassador to Canada, Ambassador Numata, was less than pleased. I have all sorts of correspondence that clearly indicates we have made the wrong decision.

I also understand, Minister, that we may close another 14 or more consulates around the world. I'd like you to comment on that as well.

In my view, this sends the wrong message. You cannot do it from Tokyo. You may know, Minister, I know a little bit about Japan; I've been there enough times. I can tell you that in my view this has really damaged a very important and strategic relationship.

Could you comment?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilfert.

Maybe it would be better if we take Mr. Patry's question as well, and then you could answer both.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Okay. There were about 15 questions there, but if you'd like to add another 12, go ahead.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): We have many questions. That's fine, they'll be short.

Monsieur le ministre, in your remarks you say that "Our actions over the past year are evidence of a focused foreign policy agenda for Canada".

In the budget highlights it says that "Budget 2007 significantly enhances Canadians...and ensures Canada plays an even more effective leadership role in world affairs in three key strategic areas".

Apart from Afghanistan and international assistance, the budget is totally silent about the effective role. There is no mention at all about foreign affairs. We didn't even mention the two words "foreign affairs" in 470 pages in the budget. Why is that, Mr. Minister? Why that silence? We try to understand, but we don't even know if the department is focusing—or is the department now just a desk for the Prime Minister's Office?

Secondly, Canada has always been recognized as a major leader in the international field. I think about Canada's leadership role in land mines in 1995, and also our role in the responsibility to protect, which was accepted by the United Nations after an extensive study and intensive lobby by Canada with the members of the United Nations. My question is about cluster bombs. Where was Canada in the beginning? Why did you wait until after opposition questions in the House of Commons before you decided to send someone to represent Canada and sign the Oslo agreement? Also, can you name just one file where Canada is a leader in the international community in this field?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister, now you have your 17 questions.

• (1615)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Let me work back to front.

Where is Canada a leader on foreign affairs files? In Afghanistan, Haiti, and Africa, in many files throughout Europe, in many files when it comes to trade, and in many files when it comes to humanitarian relief Canada is a leader. I'm surprised that a member of this committee, who purports to know about Canada's reputation abroad, would even suggest somehow that Canada wasn't a leader.

As far as Canada's decisions go, we have to make tough decisions when it comes to closures of consular offices and embassies due to the necessity—as the previous government, as the government before it, as all governments I would suggest have done to adapt to changing circumstances—to adapt to realistic budgetary limitations from time to time.

I would also suggest that what Canada has done is not limited to just what the previous government did on subjects such as responsibility to protect or land mines. We have a storied reputation for standing up for human rights in places like South Africa. We have a storied reputation for being innovative, outward-looking, and compassionate, and for being a country that has always been there in times of need, in times of crisis. Canada's most recent intervention to remove Canadian citizens at a time of conflict in Lebanon is another reflection of the current administration's understanding of the traditions that exist for Canada and the world.

With respect to Mr. Wilfert's specific questions about closures in Japan, I acknowledge his interest and his expertise in the area of Asia, and particularly in Japan. This was a very difficult decision. Yet I would suggest to him that the Japanese understand fully the types of constraints countries are under with respect to consular services, with respect to trade relations. Our consolidation effort has in no way been interpreted as a slight or a withdrawal or a downgrading of importance of Canada-Japan relations.

I spoke with the Japanese foreign minister, Taro Aso, yesterday morning, and there was no diminishing whatsoever on the part of Mr. Aso or his government of the importance of the relationship between Canada and Japan. To carry out these closures, as I said, was a difficult decision, and yet the level of service will remain high. There was no loss of employment, except in some cases for locally engaged staff. Anyone who was working in the public service abroad at those missions will be reassigned, in most cases in-country. That is to say that the consolidation will absorb those employees into existing missions.

They reflect, as I said, a realistic approach, a practical approach that requires from time to time a reassigning and a realigning of our resources in various countries. The service remains, as I said, at a high standard. We will continue to monitor these particular consular services and embassies to ensure that those standards are met, and we will adapt to the changing circumstances as we continue through this exercise.

As far as any further closures or further reassignments go, I can only say that there has been no final decision made in that regard, but it is part of this government's agenda, just as it was part of the previous government's agenda, to examine the circumstances in each and every country, to look at the priorities of the various countries where we're engaged, to look at the need, to look at the trade potential, and to look at the level of service that is required from time to time.

I can tell you something that brought to mind very recently the need to elevate consular services in parts of the world, and that was our experience in Lebanon, at the Beirut office, where we saw evolve in a very short time a situation that demonstrated an immediate need. What did we do? We deployed consular officials. We deployed people from various government departments directly to have an immediate influx of person power on the ground in that country to respond to that very pressing need.

Decisions continue to be made in the Department of Foreign Affairs, as they are in every department, which reflect a very volatile world, very rolling circumstances that we have to respond to. I also acknowledge your commentary with respect to Mr. Mulroney and Mr. Edwards as being very capable officials. We are, in fact, blessed at the Department of Foreign Affairs with very capable officials and very dedicated public servants.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilfert. You're out of time.

We'll go to Madame Lalonde, for ten minutes, please.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Welcome, Minister and gentlemen.

I have several questions and I will try to be brief. There's a large difference between Canada's actions in Afghanistan and the needs as we know them, which we are reminded of on a regular basis in studies such as that published recently by the Senlis Council.

The study recommended a better balance between spending related to development and poverty alleviation, and military spending. It also recommended firm action on the poppy issue, that these crops be purchased for the purpose of the manufacturing of medical drugs, for example. There were several other recommendations which I will refrain from sharing with you as you have easy access to them.

Even if you are committed to this, and even if we support you, how can we be sure that sufficient assistance is being provided to Afghanistan to get people out of poverty and to win at this battle? The news we hear is discouraging.

My second question has not been raised. Does the budget or do the votes—I have looked everywhere—contain any funds to modernize the passport system? When one inquires into this, one can only note how inadequately needs are being met—this is extremely discouraging.

Another issue was raised recently. When I was in Haiti the Prime Minister of that country, Jacques Edouard Alexis, told us that he could not come to Canada because a visa could not be issued to him. The issue was about to be resolved—has it? Will the Prime Minister of Haiti be able to come to Canada?

Lastly, \$679 million have been allocated to Canada's Export Development Corporation and that comes out of the department's expenditures. I looked at the cuts you have made and they include \$600,000 for mine and explosives clearing, as well as \$300,000 from the Canadian Landmine Fund. Many other cuts have been made, including approximately \$542,000 for the Francophonie internationale, and \$925,000 from the United Nations Voluntary Fund for the Environment.

These cuts have been made to humanitarian and assistance sectors and the funds allocated to Canada's Export Development Corporation are for exports. I need some explanations.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde.

[English]

Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

First, in answer to your question on the Prime Minister of Haiti, I spoke today to the Minister of Public Security and he told me that a temporary solution has been found. Therefore, yes, he will be able to come to Canada.

[English]

To be honest, we are looking for a more permanent solution to this. It is a situation that we inherited. He was wrongly placed on a list as a result of a misinterpretation of a response he gave surrounding an incident that took place in Haiti that was observed and reported by Brazilian officials. In an interview, he gave the misinterpreted impression that he was somehow personally responsible or involved, as opposed to what I think was a reflection of him taking ministerial responsibility, which he should be commended for.

We are trying to extract this reference out of the system so it will not continually come up and act as some sort of black mark on his

visa documents, or something that will prevent his permanent visits. He has family here, as you know. I've spoken to him personally about this, and I assure you we will find a solution.

Madam Lalonde, you raised questions about Afghanistan, how we can be confident that there will be sufficient practical relief provided to those in need, and how we can gauge the significant humanitarian impact that occurs on the ground.

We can look at the sheer numbers of Afghans who have returned to that country, and the number of children who have been vaccinated for serious illnesses. We can start to calculate the number of young women who are now able to get an education, which was completely prohibited under the Taliban. We can calculate the amount of infrastructure that is appearing throughout the country—roads, bridges, schools, clinics, hospitals, and places of commerce. We can start to look at the number of landmines that have been removed from the terrain. We can start to add up the programs for vocational training for young men, who are now able to have vocations and go out to earn a living and support their families. Micro-finance has been enormously successful. We had a very wonderful world summit in Halifax, where Nobel Prize winner Professor Yunus talked about the benefits of micro-finance. All of these things surely demonstrate the degree of progress that has been made in a relatively short time.

• (1625)

[Translation]

The mission began five weeks ago and the results are now tangible and visible in the field. There has been an important change in the Afghan government's profile. Many of the government members are now women who have responsibilities and the ability to represent their country.

[English]

This is a sea of change to not only have a democratic government making decisions on behalf of the people who elected them, but to have women who were prohibited from voting now sitting as elected officials in that government. That's not a complete list.

[Translation]

However, those are examples of change that are giving us a positive impression of what is happening in the country.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Nevertheless, several recent reports have stated the opposite with respect to the situation for women, the ability of children to undertake studies, security, poverty, the ability to find food, obtain medical care, etc.

Regardless, have you considered the issue of passports?

Hon. Peter MacKay: You are right. More remains to be done in this country and I agree with your assessment. But each program must be developed and that is exactly what this government has done.

[English]

On the passports, I'm very aware, believe me, of the challenges that exist. This is again an example of a branch of government that has been stretched to the max, given the circumstances. The influx of daily applications for passports has increased from an average of 10,000 to 13,000 a day, to 20,000 to 21,000 applications a day. So it has nearly doubled. With the existing infrastructure that was in place over a year ago, we are now attempting to alleviate the pressures and the bottlenecks by increasing the number of receiving agents, but that's not going to deal with the immediate problem. We obviously need to have more personnel able to receive and process these passports.

We recognize the challenge and inconvenience this poses for many who are waiting to make decisions on travel, business plans, and personal plans, yet we cannot sacrifice the integrity of the passport and the security aspects to simply expedite this problem in the short term. We need to have new infrastructure and improve the receiving capacity, which means eventually having the technology in the field and in different regions to do so.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: But have any funds been provided for this? I looked but I did not find any. Increasing staff numbers or improving technology requires money.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: In this particular budget, there is not a specific allotment for passports. I can assure you that there is the ability to make Treasury Board submissions, and we will do so when the time is right. We have 500 new employees coming on stream. We are making arrangements to deal with this in the short term. We've had blitzes on the weekends, and they have allowed us to produce a tremendous number of passports.

There are rolling circumstances with the western hemisphere travel initiative, as you know, and the possibility of changing technology that we need to adapt to. Having said that, we are doing everything humanly possible. Passport officials have been working extremely hard and are putting in overtime. We also have a plan—and I spoke yesterday with Monsieur Cossette, the president of Passport Canada—to have other departments with security clearance and the necessary skills to help us, so that they can come on stream immediately and we can get these passports out the door and get the wait times down.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKay. We certainly wish you all the best on that. I know that for most members of Parliament, a lot of our office time and our staffs' time is taken up by passport issues.

We'll go to Mr. Obhrai, for ten minutes.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the minister for coming. As the chairman said, this is your fifth visit to the committee, and when you come to the committee and share your thoughts and vision about Canada's foreign policy, it makes our job very easy.

I also want to congratulate Mr. Mulroney and Mr. Edwards for their new positions.

I have two short questions. Under your direction, I went to New Delhi in November, on the reconstruction of Afghanistan project. Countries like China, Iran, and Pakistan were all there, all committed to assist in the development of Afghanistan. We keep talking about the fact that we are under the UN mandate and how all the NATO forces are there, but we don't talk about how other countries are also involved in the total development of Afghanistan, not just us.

I was just wondering if you could tell the committee, if you do know—or you can send it later on—the total amount of money given by other countries, including Canada, toward the total development of or toward the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It shows that the whole international community is in Afghanistan, not just us. I understand that the next conference will be in Pakistan.

Following on that, we have a large diaspora of Afghan refugees in our country. I was just wondering if you have figures to say how many of them are involved with us in the development of Afghanistan.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai. I know you have a particular interest in this file, and you have ably assisted us in your capacity as parliamentary secretary and as a participant in this committee.

You're certainly right to point to the fact that this is very much a multinational effort. We have working inside Afghanistan currently, alongside Canada, in the UN capacity—that is, not under the NATO flag with the security provisions but on the UN capacity-building side—in excess of 60 countries, most of which were signatories of the Afghanistan Compact, which was signed in London in January of 2006.

This list of participating countries continues to grow. And as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we are constantly looking for ways to partner with a number of those countries and participants. A number of those countries have already expressed a willingness to take us up on that effort, to join us, potentially, at the provincial reconstruction site in Kandahar at Camp Nathan Smith.

The work there is what I would describe as the most important for us. It's where so much of the humanitarian aid work, projects, and the quarterbacking, if you will, of our capacity-building, our development, and our exercises that make a real and tangible difference in the lives of Afghan people is done.

On the total support that you have inquired about, the support, as I understand it, expressed by the delegations of the various countries that make up this UN mission is in excess of \$10.5 billion. That is an impressive amount of money by any measure.

Canada, as I mentioned in my remarks as well, is among the top three donors in that country. We have committed now in excess of \$1 billion over a 10-year span on the development side. We hope to see more fruits of our labours when we start to expand that security perimeter. That, in effect, gives the partners we will be working with, the aid workers themselves, and the diplomats the ability to go further afield to reach into the communities and the lives of more Afghan people to deliver the types of programs and actual physical assets and infrastructure I spoke of in my remarks.

All of this, to me, points to the fact that we are winning. We're winning every day, with every child who's educated, every school that's built, every physical piece of infrastructure that takes hold in that country, and every program that reaches out to people to improve their lives. That's winning. That's making a difference. That's building that country. That's preventing the return of the Taliban. All of those important contributions that are made by Canada and by our NATO and UN partners are proof that, yes, we are providing hope, leadership, and a brighter future for Afghanistan.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): I want to comment, Mr. Minister, on your accessibility and availability for the committee meetings here. It's greatly appreciated.

I'm looking at some of the numbers, and I find it rather astounding that 5.5 million children now go to school, compared with 700,000 before. Of course, based on our study on democracy, and I think in general, it is agreed that to create real hope for the future and to be able to capture and be involved in the full democratic governance for the future, you have to begin with the school children and go through the next generation.

One other issue that you mentioned is that you qualify everything by noting the need for security with it. Of course, our soldiers are doing a great job there. You made a comment about the police. We saw before that if the police aren't paid, then corruption gets into the policing system. So it's absolutely essential for the police to be paid.

Perhaps you could tell us what other things were involved in the policing and what positive things are happening with the policing, given that ultimately they're going to be the organization that will take over the security of the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Goldring, you're absolutely right. A basic responsibility of any government, any country, including our own, has to be to provide security for their own people. Clearly there's an enormous responsibility within Afghanistan for them to build their own policing and security ability. We have been assisting in that regard, not only in the provision of uniforms and equipment—belts, utility belts, and other implements that go with policing—but also a lot on the training side. That includes first aid training. During my visit, we went to a graduation ceremony that came on the heels of this type of training for these young officers—men, in most cases, although there were a few women present. That's what eventually, we hope, will lead to a nationwide, capable, professional Afghanistan national police.

Because we are in this frenetic pace to try to speed up the development of policing and an Afghan army, in addition to our development work, we've tried to urge some of our other NATO partners to pick up the slack, to invest more of their own resources into those subject areas, policing most notably. But Canada has adopted the approach that one of the fundamental things we have to

do, and we have done, is to make salaries available, and to make that money readily available to those police officers so that they see in that profession a reward, and see that by virtue of their choosing to join the Afghan police, they can feed their families and live a basic quality of life that is rewarding.

We have deployed a number of Canadian civilian police, RCMP officers, to Afghanistan, and they have participated in the training. They're doing commendable work there, trying to instill the strong traditions that exist within our own policing community here in Canada. Our effort is on police reform, to ensure that they're not corrupted, to ensure that the training that goes into these police is not lost by a conversion to the Taliban. We need to instill some of the same traditions, a sense of loyalty and commitment to country, that we have seen within our own police force in this country. So Canada has and is playing a significant role in that regard.

You were right in your earlier remarks about the numbers, numbers that are starting to grow in terms of vaccinations for children, in terms of those who are able to access education now, in terms of those who are accessing basic health services. For example, in terms of children being inoculated at medical facilities and being given vaccinations against childhood diseases, those numbers are incredible. We take so much of this for granted in Canada, that children will have those vaccinations through our schooling programs. That literally did not exist in Afghanistan a few short years ago. So there has been a sea of change in terms of people's access to basic social services in Afghanistan.

While much more has to be accomplished, and certainly we want to project the progress into the future, I would say that when you start looking at these figures in their totality, and look at the starting point and then where we are today, these are impressive numbers by any stretch—the number of teachers in the field, the number of health care workers. Of course we want to have Afghans themselves filling those positions. The object, the exit strategy, I would suggest, is to eventually have Afghans doing the policing, the security, the health provisions, the education. All of those things have to be assumed by the Afghan government and the people themselves so they can be self-sustainable and are able to walk on their own.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

Madam McDonough, you have ten minutes, please.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much, Mr. Minister and departmental officials, for being here again—and for two hours. It's way better than the short time that we sometimes have to squeeze our questions into, so it's much appreciated.

Mr. Minister, at the outset you stated that Canada's chief foreign policy priority is restoring Canadian leadership in the world. I can't let that pass without a mention. And perhaps you don't want to engage around it; you might want to say "Go talk to the CIDA minister". But if we're actually going to restore Canada's leadership and reputation in the world, it has to be said that as it relates to ODA, the very disappointing budget that was brought in can't possibly make sense if that is in fact the real priority.

And with some justification, Mr. Minister, you could say that it was not the Conservative government that dragged us from 0.53% of our gross national income for ODA down to 0.23%. Those were the Martin budgets and the Liberal government. But we have to start where we are and try to make progress.

Yesterday's budget actually will take us backwards from where we finally had climbed, out of the position of being the ultimate laggard, from 0.3% up to 0.34%. We did that in the previous budget. But yesterday's budget drags it back to 0.31%.

At the rate we're going currently, even if 600 million extra dollars had been put in the budget yesterday, it would take us 37 years to get to where we would meet our ODA obligation of 0.7%, and that, of course, was always meant to be a minimum.

Meanwhile, we go to countries like Sweden and Finland, as this committee did recently, to be reminded that they've already reached 1%, or 0.98%.

How do we end up looking like we've restored or resumed our position as a leader in today's world?

I have very little time for questions. I have two further questions I want to raise. As perhaps the easiest and most direct one, I want to start by congratulating the government for stepping forward when there was a lot of unease on the part of the community of persons in the country living with disabilities about the possibility that Canada was going to back away from participating in this signing ceremony that's coming up. I want to congratulate the government for being there, working in tandem with tremendous leadership of civil society, of the disability advocacy groups and so on, to be part of passing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I want to ask this very specifically, because you've raised further concerns, frankly, by your statement today—and perhaps I'm reading too much into this. You suggested there needs to be more collaboration with the provinces and territories before you can sign. Now, I'm hoping what you really mean is before you can ratify. Because as you've already said here, you've been engaged in some consultations with the provinces and territories. That will be ongoing. But of course to participate in the signing ceremony is the next important step. There's nothing in that signing that commits to legal obligations per se. It's really a way of saying we honour the point we've reached and we want to make sure that we continue to be a leader here.

So my question is asking you to clarify whether Canada will participate in the signing ceremony that's coming up, because it's going to mean a great deal to not just the huge number of persons in Canada living with disabilities, but to 650 million people living with disabilities in the world. If Canada is going to continue to resume its position as a leader, I guess I'd like to hear you confirm that.

Secondly, on Afghanistan, there are so many questions, and it's very difficult to deal with the complexities, but I want to go directly to the issue that has been addressed again and again, by people before this committee as well as in international venues, that there can be no real peace and security in Afghanistan, let alone genuine human progress, without there being engagement with the Taliban, with other political actors, and with ethnic groups that have been excluded, the Pashtun being the most obvious one.

•(1645)

Ten million Pashtun people in Afghanistan are excluded from, really, the whole political process, are excluded from government, are excluded from meaningful representation. This point has been made again and again by everybody, from Chris Alexander, who was very direct before the committee that this needs to happen, and by Brahimi, the key figure in the negotiation of the Afghanistan Compact, who said it was his greatest regret. Karzai himself said it when he was here in Canada, and he's said it since, most recently back in Afghanistan.

My question to you, Mr. Minister, is whether you are in agreement with the position, which has been articulated by so many people, that we need to bring the moderate Taliban into negotiations and we need to ramp up a robust diplomacy and peace negotiations and be more inclusive.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam McDonough.

Mr. MacKay, you're going to have to really hurry. You don't have a lot of time left to answer the questions.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Sure.

I have spent a lot of time on Afghanistan, and I agree with Madam McDonough's assessment that in fact we could spend many more hours just discussing that one subject alone.

I'll try to answer these questions succinctly. The short answer is there's no intention on the part of the government to engage directly in discussions with the Taliban, for a number of reasons. First of all, they're a banned terrorist organization. And there is no identifiable leadership to engage with. Having said that, you've also made the very important point that there are occasions within the Karzai government itself, and with other international organizations, when communications are happening.

And the more important issue you've touched on is the need to ensure we are not leaving huge numbers of Afghan people out of this process of reconstruction, development, and building their capacity within government. I can assure you that those discussions are happening at a meaningful level.

The Afghan government itself, clearly, in President Karzai has a leader who is Pashtun and who understands the need to reach out to all of the people, and of course not just the people currently in Afghanistan. There was reference earlier to Pakistan, where we have somewhere in the range of three million to four million Afghans living in refugee camps, and countless others who are dispersed around the globe, who need to be given a sense of inclusion and be brought back—and many of them have come, thankfully. There are estimates of four million to five million who have come back.

So the moderates, yes, those who have renounced their affiliation to the Taliban and to violence, are certainly included, and we want to find and identify more of those people.

On the issue of the UN convention, let me return the compliment you made when you referenced the importance Canada has placed on it. I know you have been a champion in this regard; I know you are very passionate about this and have engaged with the persons in your community on this subject, and perhaps even more nationally. We have every intention of being there on signing day. I have personally spoken to every attorney general and minister of community services, depending on who was assigned the file in the provinces and territories, to explain Canada's position.

I appreciate your clarifying this, because there is a big difference between signing and the obligations that flow from that act and the ratification process to follow. In the ratification process, we must be respectful of the obligations that will then be assigned to the provinces. I've had discussions on this very recently with the Quebec minister. There are real concerns about the legal obligations, because the last thing we want to do—and I think you would agree—is to sign another international accord, document, or commitment and not live up to that obligation, because if there's anything that can tarnish our reputation quickly, it's doing that.

So it is our intention and our stated purpose to not only be signatories, but also to live up to those obligations. We owe nothing less to the people in the disabilities community. They have been so active and so progressive in bringing us to this point, they have to be included in the process beyond just the signing ceremony.

Finally, on the subject of our national commitment to overseas development assistance, I'm glad you pointed out the recent history where it was the last Conservative government that was moving in the right direction on this subject. The numbers were actually inching up towards that magic goal of 0.7% that we all want to see this country aspire to reaching. Having said that, the numbers have fluctuated. We've been in office now just 13 months. We have increased our overseas commitment. When you start to calculate, the issue is how do you calculate overseas development assistance? Do you include certain projects and certain commitments on which we have expended enormous amounts of money to assist? The figures through CIDA that I'm being given are that the money that will take us to 2011 includes \$900 million over the next two years. The budget commits to doubling overseas development assistance, and we hope to reach these goals and to do so in a targeted way.

• (1650)

You're right in talking about other countries and how they have reached those goals. For lack of time, we can't get into all the specifics of this, but I would suggest that in some instances, such as your two examples of Sweden and Finland, they have a different calculation. Their GDP figures compared to Canada's are quite different.

I would suggest to you that Canada has a much larger footprint in the world than either of those two countries that you cite as examples. That is to say, we have missions in over 170 countries. We have development assistance projects in many more countries than those two that you have cited.

Let me just conclude by saying I share the goal and the concerns that you have about ensuring that Canada's reputation is continually enhanced by our commitments, particularly in places like Africa, the Americas, and Haiti. We are committed to doing just that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

In the second round, we have five-minute rounds. We will go to the government side, to the opposition, back to the government, to the Bloc, and then back.

We'll go to Mr. Casey.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you very much.

Mr. Minister, welcome to the committee. I have three quick questions for you, and they're very simple.

As the first question, where will the \$200 million go that was recently announced for Afghanistan? I didn't see the breakdown on where that was going to be spent.

The second question would be with reference to the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Most people knowledgeable about the situation in Afghanistan agree that the border has to be tightened up and made less porous. I just wonder if you could speak on that a little bit. There has been turmoil in Pakistan lately, and I'm wondering if that will have any effect on that.

The last thing involves Egypt. Canada has had a long-lasting, good relationship with Egypt that has benefited both sides. Recently there was a Canadian-Egyptian arrested for spying, and I'm just wondering if that has had any effect on the relationship. Are we working to maintain that good, long-lasting, beneficial relationship?

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Casey. I'll try to respond to these quickly.

This is the breakdown, Mr. Casey, of the \$200 million in additional funding, announced on February 17, that is to be spent in the coming fiscal year. There is \$120 million for the Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund—that is money that is placed in a fund that the Afghan government, in conjunction with us and other countries, will designate for certain projects. There is \$27 million for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in Afghanistan, which is specifically aimed at counter-narcotics. An additional \$3 million is specifically for counter-narcotics. There is a \$20-million fund for law and order, a \$20-million fund for a UN mine action program inside Afghanistan, and finally, \$10 million for the Asian Development Bank. There are specific projects, like road construction, that will be accessible through those funds.

The issue of Pakistan and its porous border remains, perhaps, one of the biggest logistical challenges and the biggest threat to our troops and the NATO forces there. The flow of Taliban—the ability to recruit from refugee camps, to re-arm, to retrain, and to then come back into the country—is very much expedited by the nature of that border and the sheer size and rough terrain of that area.

I've had occasion to speak directly to President Musharraf, the President of Pakistan, my counterpart, about the need to do more. We have, since my return, sent a team of Canadians made up of officials from Canada Border Services Agency and American officials who have a similar experience to our domestic capacity, to share some of our expertise, if you will, on types of surveillance, whether it be aerial surveillance, the types of communications we use, techniques like fencing, patrol—I mentioned aerial patrol—and the type of global satellite communication that's necessary in a large, vast border region like that. And, yes, we continue to work with the Pakistan government and with our NATO partners to address this issue.

One of the recent discussions involved talk of a buffer zone, which would involve both countries taking responsibility for an area on either side of the border. One of the big diplomatic challenges, if you will, is the fact that both countries continue to dispute the actual location of the border, which is described as the Duran Line.

As to the last question you had with respect to Egypt, we are, of course, concerned about any Canadians who find themselves caught up in the justice system of another country. We have made a number of specific interventions in the case to which you refer. It's a complex case, to say the least. There are other countries involved and allegations that are quite serious.

We have always made Canadians and consular cases a huge priority at Foreign Affairs. We work diligently with the governments in question to ensure that Canadians' rights are protected, that they are afforded humanitarian relief, and that they are afforded access to legal counsel and medical personnel, if necessary.

To get into the specifics of this case in any detail would take a lot of time, but as I mentioned, I have raised, specifically with the Egyptian ambassador and their government, concerns about the allegations of the Canadian in question. These are very serious allegations. I've been given assurances that this person would be given access not only to counsel, but to a medical professional to see that he is being treated properly. I do not believe that it has impacted negatively the overall relationship with Canada. We have to work these issues through in a professional, diplomatic way, and forcefully, if necessary, as we have exhibited in other consular cases, including in the Celil case, including cases in Mexico, where we have made very forceful, direct interventions, high-level interventions. In some cases, the Prime Minister himself has been involved.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We'll go to Mr. Eyking, please.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming here, Mr. Minister. As you can see, Nova Scotia is well represented around this table here today, so it's good to see you here.

I was quite surprised with your answer to Dr. Patry stating that we are taking a leadership role in Africa. We had a meeting today with the Somali ambassador, and we've met with ambassadors over the last few months, and they seem to be quite disappointed in some of our actions in Africa.

Northern European countries were mentioned today. They seem to be very proactive in stepping up to the plate. We had the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway here not too long ago.

I have two short questions, I guess, and one comes out of your inspiring budget book. It's dealing with our commitment to the Kananaskis agreement. We committed to doubling our aid in Africa by, I think, 2010. It doesn't seem to reflect that here in the budget. Why?

There was an African report done by the Senate, and it was led by Hugh Segal. It had quite a few criticisms, but it also had some good insight and direction in there for Canadians in Africa. I guess my question would be whether your government is going to implement any of these objectives.

● (1700)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Let me begin by thanking you for calling our budget inspiring. I think that's what I heard you say.

Hon. Mark Eyking: I was sarcastic.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I know you would want that sincerity reflected in my response.

On the Senate report, you are absolutely correct. I commend not only the chairman, Senator Segal, but all the senators who worked on that. It was an extensive report, and there are some very important, insightful recommendations, which we intend to study.

The issue of the effectiveness and the accountability of the delivery of aid appears to be one of the areas they have specifically earmarked. That is to say it is not only necessary to try to increase and enhance our assistance there, but to ensure that it's actually reaching the recipients, that the money is being delivered to the people who need it most and that it's not being used up in either bureaucracy or worse, or corrupted. That has been a serious concern in the past, unfortunately, for many of our attempts to assist in Africa.

The report also talks about strengthening and being more effective in the delivery of good governance practices in democracy-building to help the country itself stabilize. We have been effective, I would suggest. In fact, it's an area I would highlight as leadership for Canada in the area of election monitoring, working to help build capacity and good governance practices, and trying to include greater transparency, greater law and order, and human rights issues in those countries' governments.

On the question you had specifically on how we intend to meet those goals in 2010, the short answer is we're not there yet. We are certainly looking at ways in which we can make a greater contribution. I would point to Sudan and the Darfur region specifically as an area where our ability to make a greater contribution is very much contingent upon the willingness of the Sudanese government to be more inviting not just to Canada, but to the UN mission itself. That transition is still under way, as you know, but Canada is there; we are working with local NGOs, we are working in some cases with the African Union specifically to deliver aid, to provide gas, to provide heavy lift, to provide the type of training that is necessary in that country, but there is so much more to do.

I don't want to diminish any country's efforts. You mentioned Norway. I met with the Norwegian foreign minister. They are showing leadership in many parts of the world, and we're looking to partner with them in places like Sri Lanka and Africa as well. Certainly it's our intention to continue to focus on the places where we can, Somalia and Zimbabwe. We need to have a presence in those countries, and those countries similarly look to Canada for assistance in leadership and direct intervention when they need it most.

The Chair: Thank you, Mister Minister.

Mr. McTeague, for a very short question.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Minister, for being here.

I will confine my comments to one particular consular case, Minister, and I raised it with you in the House. Your secretary of state has also been following up on this, and I think the family would certainly like to hear if you can update this committee as to the case of Brenda Martin, who has been languishing in a Mexican jail for the better part of a year. She has the affidavit from the accused, or the individual who was in fact accused of the scam. A co-accused, who happened to be the former deputy chief of police, was released after three days, and she continues to languish in jail. I provided you with the affidavit of Mr. Waage. Can you update this committee as to the status and the work that your department has been able to do to secure her justified release?

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. Peter MacKay: As you know all too well from your previous role, Mr. McTeague, on these consular cases it's not a matter of being able to go in and tell a country how their justice system is to operate. We can certainly make very forceful representations. We can certainly render criticisms against the way their system works. In many cases, we have. Mexico has a long way to go before they reach the standard of legal rights that exists in this country.

With respect to Ms. Martin, we were notified of her arrest in Guadalajara back in February 2006, so sadly it has been over a year since she has been in custody, as you've pointed out. Since that time, we have regularly visited and communicated with her. We have followed up on concerns that she raised at that time and have tried to assist her to the best of our ability, to meet her needs, and to provide whatever physical items of comfort we could in her current state of confinement. We've also been in contact with her family and have followed closely the developments in the case.

You did provide an affidavit that pertains to the case. I'm led to believe that an attempt was made to enter that particular information into court as an exhibit. Again, on the rules of evidence and the admissibility of evidence in Mexico, while I have practised law in Canada, I can assure you that their rules of evidence are quite different and perhaps of a much different threshold from what we have here in Canada. To my knowledge, while that affidavit is in the hands of both the defence and the prosecution, it has not resulted in securing in any way the release of Ms. Martin.

We will continue. At your request, shortly after you had asked questions in the House, I raised this matter directly with Mexican

Secretary of Foreign Affairs Patricia Espinosa, and I also spoke directly to President Calderón about the importance not only of this case, but a number of cases that involve Canadians, sadly some of whom are not in custody, but lost their lives in that country.

So, Mr. McTeague, I can assure you that we are taking all of these matters very seriously. We are doing whatever we can to protect Canadians' interests, to protect those who are in custody, to see that they are not only treated fairly and receive due process of law, but that we can return them to Canada when we can secure their release, when we can see that the justice system has run its course.

What I wish I could tell you, sir, is that I was able to redraft the Mexican constitution or somehow rewrite their rules of evidence or impact on these cases in a direct way. I can't do that in Canada. I could not interfere in a criminal court case in my own country. Yet what we can do is certainly prod the Mexican government in the right direction and make them fully aware of the interest the Canadian government has in this case and many others.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Khan, please.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I'll be very quick. I just came back from Afghanistan, and I have one disappointment that CIDA is not getting enough attention. Questions around this table indicate that people need to know that the terrific work they're doing is exemplary.

Can you imagine in Kabul having an industrial compound where there is a project called Maharat funded through the Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund? There are 250 women sitting there working at full speed. Their wages are \$120 to \$150 per month, which is four or five times greater than the average family income in Afghanistan. CIDA is now building another such project elsewhere to provide uniforms for all the military. There will be fully trained factory workers.

I also want to compliment the strategic assistance team, which has taken the deputy minister and the government officials of the Government of Afghanistan to 17 provinces, extending the writ of the Government of Afghanistan.

I was really proud, as a Canadian, when I stood in front of General McNeil, the ISAF commander, and Deputy Commanding General Chambers, who said that since Medusa, Canada has undertaken 100 projects in Kandahar. They complimented our troops and our developmental people. It is absolutely remarkable work that CIDA is doing.

Nobody talks about the de-mining projects. There are 8.3 million Afghans who have benefited from mine risk education. About 150 people used to die every month clearing mines. That has been reduced by 55%. This is phenomenal work, amazing work by these people.

I even had the opportunity to meet the grand jirga that has been established on the Afghan side. On the Pakistan side there are two governors and three federal ministers involved in that.

This is the kind of work that is ongoing—border settlement program initiatives are taking place. These things need to be brought to light.

Minister, I have a couple of quick questions and I'll give you time to answer.

Can we perhaps give our diplomats the ability to talk about these things so the concerns that Canadians have are addressed and we really see the progress and success we're having? There's no question in my mind that there will be success in Afghanistan. I am from that area and know the culture and the people, so I think I speak with some knowledge.

The absorptive capacity of our investment is an issue. There is no dearth of money; how quickly it can be absorbed and the projects delivered is the question.

The other question I have concerns the capacity and will of the NATO countries—Canada and others—to stay the course. There is a huge project that is one of the most important projects, because it is said that when you control Kandahar you control Afghanistan. The Kandahar highway is being built, and that is so crucial for development aid, etc. They have asked for Canada's help on that. Could you please comment, sir?

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kahn.

Minister MacKay.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Khan. You've displayed quite an intimate knowledge of the country and what has to happen and what's currently under way.

Picking up on your last point, the highway itself is one of the largest infrastructure investments that country has ever had. Canada is front and centre in supporting the completion of that road. It will not only increase the ability of movement of traffic for merchandise, goods going to and from the capital city to the rest of the country, but it will also once again demonstrate the need for Afghan-led projects to unfold. That is to say, the Afghan people themselves, their government, the employees who are involved in the construction of this road are the essential component. We want to continue to marry up the CIDA projects with those identified priorities as stated by the Afghan government.

You mentioned some of the CIDA initiatives. One that very much comes to mind where there is great emphasis put is the still very real inequities in the country between men and women and the need for women to be more active in the community, more able to access services and improve their own futures. A specific \$14-million contribution to a project that has been implemented and undertaken

by the Afghan Ministry of Education has established 4,000 community-based schools around the country and after-school learning programs to train as many as 9,000 new female school teachers.

I would suggest that there is very little that is more powerful in empowering young women in that country than seeing their own women take leadership roles and become role models, teachers, officials in the government itself, police officers, or army officers. They need to see that the country is very much embracing equality. So there is an intrinsic value in targeting those types of initiatives.

Micro finance is another one that I could go on about at some length, to empower women entrepreneurs in business. Vocational training is another area where we're able to help provide the assistance and the necessary tools, the actual equipment and technology, to elevate them to a much higher level.

The Chair: Was there one more?

• (1715)

Hon. Peter MacKay: There may have been one other question, but I'll speak with Mr. Khan afterwards.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Good afternoon, Minister and gentlemen.

What strikes me in the department's budget is that cuts have been made everywhere and they seem to focus primarily on areas involving humanitarian assistance.

I will simply give you two examples. This year, the budget for mine clearing went from \$1.480 million to \$815,000. The same applies for the Francophonie, that has seen its funds go down to nothing this year from a budget of \$542,000. This general trend that we have seen in several areas is of even greater concern because there has been no indication with respect to the direction the department is taking. On what basis are these cuts being made? We are in the dark.

You stated that you are reducing your spending by consolidating missions. It's all very well to want to spend as little as possible, but there are reasons why money is spent.

You have closed consulates or embassies and obviously you are telling us that you'll be able to meet Canadians' needs. That is all well and good but consular services are also there to meet the needs of people in those countries.

You'll tell me that this already began under the previous government. In fact, several consulates in African countries had to close down and people did not have the means to go to the countries where those services were subsequently offered. I'm talking about students and all kinds of other people who, for one reason or another, are travelling. This makes their lives more difficult. Thus, on the one hand, we're being told that there's a will to assist these countries through international aid, and on the other hand, lives of individuals in those countries are being made more difficult because of the measures being adopted here.

In terms of consulates in particular, you told us that between 1993 and 2006 Canada closed 31 missions and opened 43 elsewhere. Since you have been minister, how many missions have you closed and how many have you opened? We're trying to understand how the missions that were closed were replaced and how those services have been reorganized. Perhaps information could be given to us that would explain clearly how those Canadian services have been moved.

In some ridings, at least in mine, people travelling abroad are having a much harder time accessing those services.

You also mentioned that a Canadian presence also involves provincial delegations, etc. However, to my knowledge Canada does not pay, for example, for delegations from Quebec to go abroad. I would like to hear your comments on this.

Obviously, this is all taking place in the context of reducing spending. You stated that this is not a reduction in services, but rather a reduction in expenditures, however this is at a time when the government is making more and more money. I'm therefore having difficulty in understanding what is being done.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Barbot.

Mr. Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Peter MacKay: First, the government closed four missions this year. Only four, that is all. All the other closures occurred as a result of decisions made by the previous government.

[English]

These decisions are made very much to try, as I said, to realign the priorities of the government, to consolidate the services that are made available through one large consulate, as opposed to, in some cases, having two or several within a country.

Many of the decisions around the opening of consulates or honorary consulates or an entire embassy are currently under consideration. There are countries that come to mind, countries like Yemen, for example, where we are yet to decide whether we can justify, given the amount of business and the amount of Canadian presence in that country, going forward with opening consulates or embassies right now. We're still assessing the need and will continue to do so. It's a rolling process. It isn't fixed in time.

With respect to budgets and priorities, I do note that in this budget there is \$60 million more placed in the global commerce strategy, which is all about negotiating trade agreements and reinforcing Canada's presence in parts of the world where we want to increase our current standing. There was also, as I mentioned in my opening and as has been discussed here, an increase of \$200 million to the amount of our assistance in reconstruction and development in Afghanistan.

There are other initiatives, in some cases with regional specific implications, such as the Asia-Pacific gateway project that's taking place on the west coast. We hope to have a similar initiative take hold in Atlantic Canada. This is money for enhancing infrastructure. A \$52 million funding announcement was made in this budget for

the 2008 Francophonie summit in Quebec, which I know you are very interested in.

These reflect government priorities. They're a reflection of need. They're a reflection of the capacity we have to meet the priorities we've set. We continue to do that, and we continue to constantly respond to circumstances. Lebanon was one such example, but we have seen others, such as the response in Sri Lanka to the tsunami. We have seen responses to issues like pandemics, issues like increases in consular traffic, which have, indeed, been very challenging for the Department of Foreign Affairs. The number of Canadians travelling now, working outside the country, or living outside the country clearly brings about a set need and recognition for Canada to be able to expand our reach.

How and where and when we do that are dictated by the circumstances and dictated by the budget that is made available for this department. I continue as not only a minister in this department and one other, but also as a member of the Treasury Board, to make representations that I feel reflect that need and the government's response to that. So we are constantly under pressure. We constantly receive requests from other countries and provinces and from members such as you, who identify areas in which we have to invest.

There is no one silver bullet or one magic formula or solution that is going to meet every single, solitary need. We have to try to meet the priorities and respond in a way that we feel is responsible to Canadians and responsible to other countries to whom we owe an obligation, and other countries, in particular, that we've identified as priority areas.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I would like to ask you a question. I know that here at this committee we have been studying Afghanistan; we've been doing reviews of our work in Afghanistan. Today's committee is televised, and I know a lot of Canadians want to look in at our committee as we talk, because they learn then about Afghanistan.

A couple of statistics have been of some interest to me. For instance, since the rebuilding of Afghanistan we've had 4.6 million refugees return to that country. I think a lot of Canadians picture refugees as basically showing up with nothing other than the clothes on their back and perhaps a horrific story to tell. These refugees who are returning are returning because of hope. They have hope and they're going back to a country that they've left. Are these refugees going back with perhaps some capital they can invest to build the country, or are many of them returning to be fed and looked after because they have nothing? That's one of the questions.

We know in Afghanistan that the per capita has doubled, the Afghan economy has tripled. We even heard today about its significant growth, and people are working. Maybe also give us just a bit of information on who these refugees are.

For my own interest's sake, 6,000 kilometres of road have been rebuilt, built, or refurbished. I have a hard time getting ten miles built in some parts of my constituency. Who is doing this? Are these Afghan crews that come in? Is it our army that's helping to do that? Are we contracting road crews from other countries? Who actually is doing this?

• (1725)

Hon. Peter MacKay: It is predominantly done by Afghans, but of course some of the heavy equipment that is required for the excavation, just as it would be in Crowfoot, requires the assistance of the military. It requires the assistance of construction crews, designers, and engineers.

It ties into the question of who are these four million to five million Afghans who have returned. Well, they're professionals. They are engineers, doctors, and academics.

The foreign affairs minister for Afghanistan lived in Germany for 10 to 15 years during the Taliban regime and now has returned and entered public life. That can be said of other members of President Karzai's government. These refugees are ordinary men, women, and children who fled an oppressive, horrifically violent government to try to raise their families and pursue their career ambitions elsewhere. Many of them now are anxious to return, and have returned, yet more continue to flood into the country.

Let me just give you some other statistics in line with the 6,000 kilometres of road: 4,000 new houses and shelters have been constructed; 63,000 soldiers have been disarmed, and many of those same soldiers and combatants are now being recruited into the service of their country, either through policing or the professional Afghan army; almost 5.5 million children, one-third of whom are girls, are now getting an education in school; 4,000 medical facilities have been opened; and 23,000 community development projects have been approved, of which 10,000 have been completed.

Many other institutions of government in terms of departments are taking shape and expanding their reach. Women occupy 25% of the seats of the parliament of Afghanistan. Per capita income has doubled. The Afghan economy itself has tripled in the past few years. These numbers don't really speak to the human impact that this is having in the country: the confidence, the hope, the feeling that there is a future there. That's exactly the type of tangible proof of progress that we need to underscore but never become complacent about. All of it is still fragile and very much dependent on our ability to keep this progress going to preserve, to have, and to hold what is currently there, and to build upon that base.

The Chair: Thank you.

The last question will have to be short.

I want to remind the committee to stay. We will hopefully adopt the report filed from the steering committee.

Madam McDonough, for just a few moments.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Notwithstanding some important progress that the minister has reported, I'm sure, Mr. Minister, you're aware of a report that has recently been circulated based on a March 2007 survey conducted by Senlis Council and reported "On a Knife Edge". This report has documented that Afghans increasingly believe that the international community is losing Afghanistan to the Taliban. In southern Afghanistan, more than one quarter of those interviewed—27%—were willing to openly admit that they support the Taliban. The Senlis Council predicts that it would be considerably higher if it

weren't for the reluctance of people to participate. I suppose we don't know that for sure.

I guess my question goes back to your earlier indication that there is no way to engage directly with the Taliban; they're a terrorist organization. Yes, there may be some side discussions, but in terms of bringing them to the table, bringing them into the genuine peace process, I took away no real optimism that this is being confronted directly, that there is that kind of commitment to engagement. In fact there's support for the Taliban, which seems to be increasing in Kandahar, based on several reports—

The Chair: Madam McDonough, can we have the question, please?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: —it indicates that this is a really significant number of people. One is left to wonder if the plan is that if it's not possible to engage them, the only way we're going to win is if we kill them. That's such a stark notion for people that I guess I'm asking the minister if he would address what these findings indicate and what the government's prepared to do about it.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam McDonough.

Very quickly.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'll answer very quickly, and I'll speak further to Madam McDonough about this.

The Senlis report is very disturbing in some of its proclamations. But I want to point out for you—because I inquired specifically about the size of the survey, for example, and I wanted to know where the people were from who were giving these observations and making these very stark statements—that the survey polled only men, and it was in a very specific area of the country. It was only in the southeastern part of Afghanistan and at a very short period of time that they based those observations and those declarations, if you will—the development activities that are under way.

It underscores that yes, there are huge challenges, and I'm not sitting here today before you trying to put a sunny face on a situation that has been completely stabilized or saying that we're near the end of the road as far as the progress that's yet to be made. But the fact is that we are doing these things, and you've heard the figures and you've seen it with your own eyes, Madam McDonough, and you would see more if you went back today. There's enormous progress, real progress that we can point to.

Yes, much more has to be done, and perhaps in a more coordinated way. There are other NATO countries that have to be brought into this exercise, I would suggest, in a more fulsome way, and it falls to me and others at diplomatic fora to impress upon them the need to continue to do the work, particularly in the south. But if you take a report like this that focuses on a relatively small group of people, men only, in one corridor of the country, in one area that does not reflect the entirety of the success of this mission, the success of the work that's being done there, yes, it paints a much more depressing picture, but I would suggest that's not the correct picture. It's not reflective of the real picture, and the progress and the optimism and the hope and the future, I think, that exists for Afghanistan, which is positive.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

I want to thank you, on behalf of our committee, for being here for a two-hour session, for answering the questions, all four questions. We appreciate your time.

I would ask our committee to stay very briefly. The bells are ringing. The vote will take place in about eight minutes.

We have a report from the steering committee, and this report will help us plan for next week's meetings. You can read the recommendations from the steering committee.

It was agreed that the committee will sit from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Thursday, rather than its usual time of 9 to 11. This is to accommodate a visitor who will be with us. Do we have consensus on that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We do.

It was also agreed that former Ambassador Smith, along with Dr. Barnett Rubin, visit on March 29. Are we agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: There is consensus.

It was agreed that the meeting on March 29 be televised, if possible. Are we agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: There's consensus.

It was agreed that the members would submit a revised list of witnesses on Afghanistan. Agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: It's agreed.

It was agreed to invite the Minister of National Defence to appear before our committee, and that's agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We have consensus.

It was agreed to discuss the draft outline for the draft report on democratic development this Thursday. Agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We have consensus.

Is it agreed to invite Walter Dorn to appear on Thursday on the situation of Afghanistan?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The one committee meeting will be over the lunch hour. Do we have agreement that we can ask our clerk to bring in some sandwiches for that day?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Can we pass this, then?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: It's passed.

We're adjourned.

Thank you very much, committee.

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