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—
Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (1050)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): I call this meeting back to order.

This is meeting number 61 on Tuesday, June 5, of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

We are moving into committee business. We have three things we want to deal with today, quickly. We have Mr. Goldring's motion, Madam McDonough's motion, and the format for allocation of questioning in tomorrow's joint meeting.

You have a copy of that in front of you. Do we have a consensus that we can accept this? This is the 10-minute rounds—the Liberal, Bloc, New Democratic Party, and then the Conservatives. It's changing it.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): First of all, I am

The Chair: I should say that our two clerks have worked this out.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: No, I appreciate that. I understand that the defence committee was seeking only three ministers and we were seeking three or four, and now we have five ministers coming, with seven minutes each for statements. That's what it says.

The Chair: No. Madam Guergis isn't speaking.

We have four ministers, and one minister, Minister Guergis, has asked to come with no presentation. So we have our four.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: So you have four ministers coming with—

The Chair: Seven-minute presentations.

I have told them that they're going to keep this down.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I have a concern. You're going to have two committees.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Just wait. He's on a point of order.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Let me just say...if you want to go first, I'm fine.

My view is that ministers belong to the government. They can work out one statement. They can take 10 to 15 minutes making that statement. Whoever can read that statement, that's fine. I don't believe we need to hear from three or four or five ministers, however many are here, because that simply consumes too much time and leaves very little time to ask questions.

And then in terms of the questions, all of them are going to want to respond from their perspective, and that's going to eat a lot more time.

My view is that we should urge the ministers to come with one statement that they can agree upon among themselves. It can be 15 minutes long; it doesn't have to be seven or 10 minutes. And then in terms of the questioning, I'm fine with the arrangement that's been proposed.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

As far as this goes, Mr. Dosanjh's problem is with the presentation.

Mr. Obhrai, on the point of order.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, as much as I do appreciate what Mr. Dosanjh has said, the fact of the matter is that all of these are opposition motions that have asked for the ministers to appear at one time or another, to come and talk. And because it is written like this here, now suddenly for you to come along and say we don't want these ministers to do this, and we want one minister.... That should have been in the first motion that was done.

What the government is addressing here is all the motions that were put forward to call in all the ministers, and they have the right to make statements because these motions specifically deal with that.

The Chair: All right. Very quickly.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: If I may, rather than going back and forth here, I don't recall the Liberal Party asking for Verner or Guergis to come to this committee to say anything.

So if you want to load up, as government, with five ministers and take up all the time with different statements and all of the five responses to each question, we might as well go home.

The Chair: You're right. I agree with that.

But I'll tell you what. We have invited the four ministers. The four ministers are coming, and the minister has the prerogative to bring someone else along.

I have asked that those four ministers give a very brief presentation. I guess I didn't ask that. It was just understood that this is what normally happens. When you have two ministers, they each give a presentation. We have four. I'm not going to have 10-minute or 15-minute presentations. They have been told that if they're going to do four, they're going to be very short and precise. I can talk to them today and try to get that down a little bit more.

We have another committee meeting after this, and there are two motions that we have to discuss. I'm willing to go to Madame Lalonde.

I understand the problem here. I understand what an opposition member would be feeling. The opposition would be saying, are you just loading up so we can hear great, wonderful speeches from the government? I have asked them not to do that, to keep those presentations very concise and allow questions.

And in fact what we will do, because time might be of the essence—we have a vote—is not go Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, but go Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative. If we run out of time, I want the opposition to get their time.

An hon. member: Did you tell them a time?

The Chair: They were going to come with 10 minutes, and I said, listen, it's not going to be over seven. I can try to tell them to cut that back even more.

But I understand the frustrations of seeing five people sitting there. It's my understanding that they will not all be presenting, but they may be here.

An hon. member: Let's go to the motions.

• (1055)

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): If you want a unanimous motion, that you're entitled to ask them to speak for a maximum of seven minutes—That way, they'll know right away.

The Chair: I will cut them off, then, if that's understood. Are we all right with that?

They've probably already been translated. I told them, not 10 minutes, I want them at seven minutes.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we have committee business to attend to. I think we should get to that rather than argue back and forth on this.

The Chair: This is for a meeting tomorrow. I definitely want to get to the motions.

Madame Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Chairman, Mr. Dosanjh's motion is important because there has been a considerable outrage, and justifiably so, over the issue of torture.

They are coming here to provide some answers, but we know there is virtually nothing new to report. The answers we received in the House of Commons showed that they had not learned anything new. Even if they had two hours, they would still give the same responses. This is nothing more than political grandstanding. Apparently, they refused to adopt my motion to invite the authors of the secret report to testify before the committee. We do not have the unaltered report produced by the commission under the Access to Information Act. Some details have been blacked out. Surely we are not about to give them this much time to come here and repeat the same things, when we know they are not true.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right. Thank you. I will try to make sure that isn't it.

Okay, so we're all right on that format, and I will tell them to cut that back. We'll try our best, and I will try my best, to make sure the opposition gets the time to question these ministers.

We're going to move into committee business.

Mr. Goldring, would you speak to your motion?

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Yes. The motion is in the agenda. I hope you've had a chance to read it.

There's an additional circumstance that I'd like to say. Where it says in here that it's in relation to our study of Afghanistan, I think it also fits in very well, rationally, with our study on democratic development. The two of them go hand in hand, and I think there's an important reason for us to visit Afghanistan, to substantiate what we've studying and learning.

The Chair: Mr. Goldring, I think that is something that, when I go to the Liaison Committee, I definitely will be bringing out as well. First of all, our committee has been asked to go to study Afghanistan. As to this motion, it's very important that it gets either accepted or denied today, because if this place shuts down, I have to get this to the Liaison Committee and this probably wouldn't take place until next fall.

Is there anyone else on this?

Very quickly, Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): I'm substantially in agreement. If we all were in agreement with making the amendment to refer to democratic development as well, maybe that would strengthen it.

But let me also say I assume we then will have more input around what we're actually going to do in terms of who we're going to see and who we're going to talk to, because I want to see that if we're serious about democratic development, we deal with the horrors and the nightmare of what has happened to Malalai Joya. I mean, we're either a great democracy or we're not.

The Chair: I would just state this. There is a concern. There's a place here where I'm saying we should just make reference at Liaison Committee.

This travel may not take place until October. It may not take place until way into the fall. To go now, we probably would not see much different from what we know. But later on, when it's not 45 degrees, for example, we might be able to learn more and even see more.

Are we in favour, in principle, of Mr. Goldring's motion, without cutting off debate?

• (1100)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Including the democratic development?

The Chair: Including whatever you want in there.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Madam McDonough, I don't know what we're going to do here. We have another committee waiting. Can we wait until Thursday on yours?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Well, the problem is that we won't deal with it on Thursday. Right? We're having the ministers—

The Chair: No, on Wednesday we'll have the ministers. On Thursday we'll have committee, for sure, and you will be first up.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: All right, I agree with that too.

The Chair: I want to thank you specifically for that. You've been waiting on this one for a while.

We've done our process. So that's for tomorrow, Wednesday, from 3:30 until 5:30.

The meeting is adjourned.

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