

**THE EVACUATION OF CANADIANS
FROM LEBANON IN JULY 2006:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA**

**The Standing Senate Committee on
Foreign Affairs and International Trade**

The Honourable Senator Consiglio Di Nino, *Chair*
The Honourable Senator Peter A. Stollery, *Deputy Chair*

May 2007

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Membership

The Honourable Consiglio Di Nino, *Chair*
The Honourable Peter A. Stollery, *Deputy Chair*

And

The Honourable Senators:

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Eymard G. Corbin
Dennis Dawson
Pierre De Bané, P.C.
Percy E. Downe
Janis G. Johnson
Frank W. Mahovlich
Pana Merchant
Hugh Segal
David P. Smith, P.C.

Ex-officio members of the committee:

The Honourable Marjory LeBreton, P.C., (or Gérald Comeau) and Céline Hervieux-Payette, P.C., (or Claudette Tardif).

In addition, the Honourable Anne C. Cools, Mobina S. B. Jaffer and Vivienne Poy also participated in this special study.

Staff from the Parliamentary Research Branch of the Library of
Parliament:

Allison Goody, Analyst
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François Michaud
Clerk of the Committee

Order of Reference

Extract from the Journals of the Senate of Tuesday, October 24, 2006

The Honourable Senator Segal moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Keon:

That the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs be authorized to examine and report on the evacuation of Canadian citizens from Lebanon in July 2006; and

That the Committee submit its final report no later than March 30, 2007, and that the Committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until April 30, 2007.

After debate,

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Paul C. Bélisle

Clerk of the Senate

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1:

To improve Canada's response to large-scale crises overseas,

- The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should develop comprehensive communication plans for use in Canada and overseas in the event of future emergencies such as the case of Lebanon in 2006;
- DFAIT should consider adopting new strategies for communication that go beyond regular updates to its travel advisories Web site, including the use of text messaging to mobile phones, to make it easier to contact Canadians during large-scale overseas emergencies.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should conduct more frequent assessments of its missions abroad, particularly those situated in areas with large Canadian resident populations and areas where the potential for destabilization is high, to ensure updated risk assessments of the region and the risks to Canadians, thorough contingency planning and logistical preparation for large-scale emergencies, and assessments of resources required for that mission.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should review its allocation of personnel and other resources to missions abroad, in order to place greater emphasis on countries where the size of the resident Canadian population is high and/or where there are risks for regional destabilization.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

- The Government of Canada should ensure that there are trained and designated personnel within DFAIT and other relevant departments and agencies, as well as intergovernmental mechanisms, which can be activated immediately to respond to crisis overseas.
- In undertaking large-scale evacuations like the case of Lebanon in 2006, the Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces should coordinate and lead the government's evacuation effort, particularly so that DND personnel can oversee the security and logistics of the operation and the movement of large numbers of Canadians.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

The Government of Canada should clarify and strengthen existing agreements with like-minded countries for mutual assistance in times of crisis, and Canada should enact new agreements and understandings for mutual assistance with like minded countries where they do not already exist, in order to ensure the quick and safe evacuation of Canadian nationals overseas.

Introduction

On 12 July 2006, Hezbollah militants based in Lebanon conducted a raid into Israel killing several Israeli soldiers and capturing two. In response, Israel launched air attacks and limited ground incursions in Lebanese territory. Due to the rapid deterioration of the security situation in the region and the heavy shelling of southern Lebanon and the city of Beirut, citizens from many countries who were living in or visiting Lebanon at the time began requesting that they receive assistance and be evacuated by their respective governments. The Government of Canada, through the Canadian embassy in Beirut and relevant departments, responded to the crisis and devised plans to evacuate Canadians from Lebanon. In light of the unprecedented scale of the effort and the complexities involved, the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade undertook an examination of this evacuation. While the Committee believes that its hearings have shed some light on the events surrounding the Lebanon evacuation, it also strongly urges the Government of Canada to prepare and release to the public a report on the lessons learned by government departments involved in the evacuation effort, and the steps that should be taken as a result of the Lebanon experience.

Background

At the time of the crisis, it was estimated that up to 40,000 to 50,000 Canadians were visiting or residing in Lebanon. Approximately 11,000 Canadians had registered with the embassy in Beirut prior to 12 July 2006; by 17 July, this number had increased to 22,000, peaking at 39,100 people at the height of the crisis. The Committee was informed that, by the end of the crisis, approximately 14,370 people had been evacuated by Canada voluntarily. Canadians were evacuated by sea transportation to holding centres in Cyprus and Turkey and from there by air to Canada. In total, there were 34 departures by ship from the port of Beirut and another from the port of Tyre. Evacuees were subsequently returned to Canada on 61 chartered flights, with an additional 4 flights on aircraft belonging to the Department of National Defence. It should be noted that despite the complexity and unprecedented scale of the Canadian evacuation effort, only approximately 35% of those people who had registered with the Canadian embassy at the peak of the crisis in fact needed and/or accepted the Government's assistance in leaving Lebanon. The number of registered Canadians requiring and accepting Canada's assistance in ensuring their safe passage from the crisis area could have been much higher.

The purpose of the Committee's study was to examine the adequacy of contingency planning and preparation by relevant Canadian government departments and agencies prior to the evacuation in the summer of 2006; the response of the Canadian Government to the need for such an evacuation, including the actual operations of the evacuation and the communication and coordination strategies that were developed and put in place; and, the challenges facing officials

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

in attempting to locate, protect, and evacuate the Canadians in Lebanon. As a result of this examination, the Committee has identified operational and policy related lessons learned from the evacuation and possible areas for improvement for the next time Canada is faced with such a situation.

In the course of its hearings, the Committee heard from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Peter MacKay, whose department was responsible for the overall planning and coordination of Canada's evacuation effort. In addition, officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the Department of National Defence, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada commented on their respective responsibilities for the operational aspects of the evacuation. Finally, Susan Ormiston, a CBC correspondent who was on the ground in Cyprus and Lebanon at the time of the crisis, provided the Committee with first hand observations.

Overall, the Committee is of the view that the Canadian public servants and members of the Canadian Forces who worked from Ottawa and who were deployed to the region to conduct this extraordinary evacuation effort, worked very hard to accomplish a difficult task under trying circumstances. Hence, this report is not intended as a criticism of Canada's evacuation effort, but rather as a careful examination of the actions that were taken and the decisions that were made by the Government of Canada. It provides recommendations for areas of planning, preparation, resource allocation, and organization where the Committee feels that improvements can be made in the event of future large-scale evacuations.

Chronology of the Evacuation⁽¹⁾

12 July 2006	In response to a raid within its territory by Hezbollah militants that were based in Lebanon, Israel launches air strikes in Lebanese territory.
13 July	Israel strikes the Beirut airport, rendering it unusable, and begins to enforce a naval blockade against Lebanon. Hezbollah militants begin launching rocket attacks against Israeli cities.
13 July	DFAIT issues a travel warning for Lebanon.
15 July	The Government of Canada convenes an intergovernmental task force on the evolving situation in Lebanon.
13 - 15 July	Messages are sent to registered Canadians in Lebanon apprising them of the evolving situation.
15 July	DFAIT's emergency operations centre is expanded to include a crisis call centre and family liaison centre.
16 July	Israel begins to target air strikes in central and southern Beirut and in the city's suburbs.
16 July	Seven Canadians, most of them members of an extended family who were vacationing in Southern Lebanon, are killed in an air strike.
16 July	Canadian Foreign Minister Peter MacKay announces the government's plans for the evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon – transportation assets are contracted, safe haven and evacuee reception centres are identified in Cyprus and Turkey, and relevant government personnel are prepared for departure to the region.
17 July	Limited Israeli ground incursions begin in Lebanon and significant air strikes continue, particularly in Southern Lebanon.
17 July	The Government of Canada announces that the evacuation of Canadians will begin by the middle of the week. Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter MacKay announces that six vessels have been contracted to move Canadians. Canadians in Lebanon voice concerns that information from government officials is unsatisfactory and that the evacuation effort was not proceeding quickly enough. The Canadian embassy in Beirut activates its warden system to apprise registered Canadians of the evacuation plan.

⁽¹⁾ This chronology is based on Committee testimony from meetings on 1 November and 6 December 2006 and 13 February 2007, and a variety of news media sources, including CBC.ca, "Evacuation timeline: the biggest rescue in Canadian history," *In Depth: Middle East in Crisis*, www.cbc.ca/news/background/middleeast-crisis/evac_timeline.html.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE EVACUATION

17 July	Limited evacuations begin: Sweden evacuates approximately 1,000 people on a chartered ship. France, Italy, the United States and the United Kingdom also begin to evacuate their nationals.
19 July	The initial evacuation of Canadians begins. 308 Canadians are evacuated to Cyprus, arriving on 20 July.
19 July	Over 1,000 United States nationals are evacuated on a cruiser, and 800 Americans are transported by U.S. Chinook helicopters to the airport in Larnaca.
19 July	Canadian Forces personnel are deployed to the region to assist with the evacuation.
20 July	More than 1,300 Canadians are evacuated to Adana, Turkey.
21 July	The first Canadians begin to arrive in Montreal on chartered flights.
21-29 July	Thousands of Canadians are evacuated by sea to Turkey and Cyprus for air transport to Canada. In total, by mid-August approximately 14,000 Canadians had been evacuated.

The Response of the Canadian Government

A. The Role of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) is responsible for Canada's embassies, high commissions, and consulates around the world. DFAIT is responsible for providing travel advisories, for issuing and reconciling problems with passports, and for providing consular services to Canadians in Canada and overseas. DFAIT is also responsible for assisting all Canadians overseas in emergency situations, including those resulting from natural disasters or violent conflict.

DFAIT oversaw the evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon, coordinated all participating Canadian officials and departments, and had responsibility for the overall planning role and the final development of an evacuation plan. Foreign Minister Peter MacKay told the Committee: "The safety and security of Canadians is of the utmost concern of this and any government. Put simply, there is no higher priority."⁽²⁾ The Government of Canada, spearheaded by DFAIT, put mechanisms in place to evacuate "all Canadians seeking to flee from the deteriorating security situation in Lebanon."⁽³⁾ Approximately 200 DFAIT officials were redeployed from Ottawa or reassigned from abroad to assist with the evacuation, and an additional 215 DFAIT employees volunteered at the Emergency Operation Centre in Ottawa. This Operation Centre responded to 45,323 phone calls and approximately 13,000 emails, and placed 30,000 phone calls to Canadians in Lebanon. Senior officials from DFAIT were responsible for chairing and coordinating an intergovernmental task force that oversaw the design and implementation of Canada's evacuation plan, which was based on a review of the department's contingency plan for Lebanon – the consular contingency emergency plan (CONPLAN).⁽⁴⁾

B. The Role of Other Government Departments: the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Forces, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada

The Department of National Defence (DND) and Canadian Forces, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) assisted DFAIT with the evacuation. Officials from Transport Canada, Canada Border Services Agency, and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) were also deployed.

⁽²⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 1 November 2006.

⁽³⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽⁴⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006. DFAIT officials informed the Committee that Canada has developed 253 country-specific CONPLANS, including one for each Canadian mission in the United States.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT

DND deployed 151 personnel as part of the Canadian Forces Contingency Planning Assistance Team to assist with the evacuation. This contingent comprised a headquarters element, telecommunications specialists, a medical section, naval liaison officers, and security and movement control personnel.⁽⁵⁾ The Committee was informed that DND “personnel played a critical role in providing information and advice to [the Canadian] ambassador, handling crowd control at both the evacuation centre and the Canadian embassy, as well as liaising with Lebanese military authorities at the Port of Beirut and providing additional security on charter vessels.”⁽⁶⁾ DND and Canadian Forces personnel also helped with the logistics of the movement of evacuees on their arrival in Cyprus and Turkey and for the evacuees’ air departure.

Thirty four officials from CIC assisted with the evacuation. CIC officials were responsible for confirming the citizenship of Canadians eligible for evacuation and for screening immediate family members and non-Canadians who were authorized to accompany minors in both Beirut, and for second-tier screening before the evacuees’ air departure from Cyprus or Turkey. The Committee was told that “Citizenship and Immigration officials ensured that all requirements under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, including security and medical criteria, were met.”⁽⁷⁾ All screening was done in the evacuation areas and in partnership with officials from the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service. CIC officials were responsible for issuing required immigration, visa, and emergency documentation. The Department stated that it “provided priority visa services to immediate family members of Canadian citizens and permanent residents who wished to leave Lebanon. Over 2,000 visas were issued.”⁽⁸⁾ It has been estimated that 1,817 emergency and temporary passports were issued by the Beirut embassy from 12 July to 31 August 2006.⁽⁹⁾

On the issue of screening and determining the eligibility of those seeking Canadian assistance and transportation back to Canada, the Committee was not able to receive a full and accurate assessment of this aspect of the evacuation process from department officials. In its Committee meeting on 6 December 2006, department officials were asked specific questions regarding those cases where individuals did not possess required documentation and the number of individuals who were denied access to Canada for security-related reasons. As the following exchange with a witness reveals, however, the Committee did not receive explicit answers:

⁽⁵⁾ Department of National Defence, “Operation LION: CF Support to DFAIT,” www.forces.gc.ca/site/Operations/lion/index_e.asp

⁽⁶⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006.

⁽⁷⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006.

⁽⁸⁾ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Situation in the Middle East,” accessed 1 December 2006, www.cic.gc.ca/english/middle-east/index.html

⁽⁹⁾ Ross Marowits, “Canada Issued 2,430 Passports during Last Summer’s Lebanon Evacuation,” Canadian Press, 14 November 2006.

Senator Downe: I understand from your answer that you stopped a number of people from coming to Canada. How many were stopped?

Daniel Jean, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Citizenship and Immigration Canada: We stopped a few people. I do not think it would be appropriate for me to go into detail on that. A number of people, however, who were foreign nationals asked to come but were not allowed to. We screened everyone that we had concerns with.⁽¹⁰⁾

In a previous meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Committee asked a similar question regarding the role of CSIS in the evacuation:

Senator Downe: You were operating in a difficult situation, trying to get 40,000 Canadians out of a war zone. I assume not all Canadians had all their documentation. Some documentation would have been lost, misplaced or maybe destroyed when buildings were destroyed. How many people were stopped by CSIS?

Honourable Peter MacKay: I cannot give you those figures. I probably would not, if I had them. I can tell you that the process of checking passports and citizenship was rigorous. CSIS was obviously a participant in this evacuation, as were, more notably, officials from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.⁽¹¹⁾

However, in an article from December 2006, the *Globe and Mail* reported that seven potential evacuees from Lebanon were denied entry to Canada.⁽¹²⁾ Regrettably, this figure had to be obtained through an Access to Information request. The Committee firmly believes that parliamentary committees should not be required to file an access to information request to obtain such information and that the Committee itself should not have to rely on media reports to secure the necessary information to complete its studies. Such information should be forthcoming from government witnesses.

⁽¹⁰⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006.

⁽¹¹⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 1 November 2006.

⁽¹²⁾ Ross Marowitz, "Only seven Lebanon evacuees denied entry," *Globe and Mail*, A14, 23 December 2006.

Analysis of the Evacuation

A. The Challenges Involved in the Evacuation Effort

In general, the evacuation of Canadians from other countries is challenging and rife with potential problems. The logistical and resource challenges associated with conducting an evacuation effort of any number of Canadians from an international crisis zone are significant, whether that crisis is the product of a natural disaster such as the South Asia tsunami in December 2004, the result of a terrorist attack in another country, or the result of a deteriorating security situation as was the case in Lebanon in July-August 2006. The challenges associated with locating and transporting to safety a significant number of Canadians, which could have potentially been as great as 40,000, were extraordinary.

The costs cannot be measured in monetary terms alone. Given its wide-ranging responsibilities for the management of Canada's international diplomatic and trade relations, and the cutbacks to the department's resources and staffing in the 1990s, DFAIT has limited resources and operational capacity with which to focus on consular affairs. During the evacuation and the period immediately following, many DFAIT headquarters and foreign-based personnel and officials from other Government departments were re-tasked to handle the evacuation effort. Redeployment means that these officials were unavailable to perform their regular duties.

While it is important to discuss the responsibilities and examine the performance of DFAIT in this report, it is equally important to note that many Canadians have high expectations of receiving assistance from the Government of Canada when they are overseas. The number of Canadians living and working abroad and the international mobility of Canadians have all increased substantially.

Unfortunately, these expectations cannot always be satisfied. There exist constraints on resources and on diplomatic and logistical access, which can limit the ability of the Canadian government to provide consular and transportation assistance, particularly in countries where the potential for violent conflict or political destabilization are high.

All of these difficulties are compounded if Canadian citizens abroad do not register with Canadian missions and formally indicate their presence in a country. It is difficult for government personnel to act quickly and effectively in assisting Canadians overseas if they are unaware of their presence in a country.

Overall then, it is clear that consular affairs have assumed a new level of importance and complexity. The Committee feels that it is because of all the challenges described above that Canada's consular services, its contingency planning relating to Canadians located abroad, and its capacity to conduct large-scale evacuation operations, must be infused with adequate resources and guided by strategic and comprehensive planning and preparation.

During the evacuation from Lebanon there were unique challenges that complicated the efforts of Canadian personnel. According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

The evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon is by far the largest and most successful effort ever mounted or attempted in our country's history. To put this in context, 500 Canadians were evacuated from Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami; 200 Canadians were evacuated from Cote d'Ivoire when a crisis erupted in West Africa in 2005; and even fewer were evacuated from the Cayman Islands and Haiti in the midst of storms there in 2004.⁽¹³⁾

As was noted above, the Minister informed the Committee there were approximately 40,000 Canadians located in Lebanon at the time of the outbreak of hostilities in July 2006, while only 11,000 had registered with the Canadian embassy. Approximately 14,000 were eventually evacuated. The challenges associated with locating the un-registered Canadians and evacuating such a large number of people from an active conflict area are evident. Only the United States had a greater number of nationals in Lebanon at the time of the crisis. Moreover, it is important to note that the security situation in the region deteriorated very quickly after 12 July – in a 48 hour period – which contributed to an atmosphere of panic and confusion. As one witness described the situation to the Committee: "... [I]t came upon us in an instant; the whole war did."⁽¹⁴⁾

Canadian officials did not have access to the kind of significant military assets that were available to the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Canada does not possess a fleet that is permanently stationed in the area. A decision was made by Canadian officials to conduct the evacuation by sea routes as the Beirut airport was incapacitated and land routes were deemed to be too dangerous. The inability to use the Beirut airport was the greatest challenge facing Canadian officials. Other compounding factors included the imposition of an air and sea blockade of Lebanon by Israel, the destruction or damage of transportation infrastructure and communications networks in Lebanon, particularly in the South, and the capacity shortages of Lebanon's port infrastructure. The Committee was informed that the first ship carrying Canadians to Cyprus was stopped twice by Israeli authorities, delaying its arrival at the port by hours.⁽¹⁵⁾ There was also "high international demand for the limited commercial maritime and airlift capabilities capable for immediate use."⁽¹⁶⁾ Finally, there is no Canadian embassy in Cyprus where many Canadians were transported on route to returning to Canada, and there is only an honorary Canadian consul in Mersin and Adana, Turkey, which is a considerable distance from the embassy in Ankara.

⁽¹³⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 1 November 2006.

⁽¹⁴⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 13 February 2007.

⁽¹⁵⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽¹⁶⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 1 November 2006.

ANALYSIS OF THE EVACUATION

The Committee heard compelling testimony of the cooperation between the Government of Canada and the governments in Turkey and Cyprus and the ease with which Canadian officials were able to establish reception areas for Canadians in those countries on their return route to Canada. In the case of the Lebanon evacuation, the efforts of the Government of Canada to assist and transport Canadians were facilitated by positive bilateral relations and Canadian access to the countries in question.

However, it is important to consider that there are countries where Canada does not enjoy the same level of access to its citizens or possess much diplomatic or strategic leverage with the relevant government. Indeed, witnesses warned the Committee that “this operation [Lebanon] was carried out in a theatre of operations which was positively influenced by the status of bilateral relations with the countries involved in the crisis, and those who provided authority to establish safe haven destinations in their countries [Turkey and Cyprus].”⁽¹⁷⁾ Future crises may not occur in such a favourable climate.

B. The Costs of the Evacuation

Reports of the total cost of the evacuation vary. There were suggestions in the Canadian media that the total cost for the Government of Canada could be as much as \$85 100 million.⁽¹⁸⁾ The DFAIT Director General of the Consular Affairs Bureau, Robert Desjardins, informed the Committee that the total cost of the evacuation, which includes the involvement of all government departments and agencies and all additional transportation, resource, equipment and personnel costs, was approximately \$75 76 million.⁽¹⁹⁾ Approximately \$65 million of this figure was spent by DFAIT. However, in its November 2006 *Economic and Fiscal Update*, the Department of Finance listed total costs for the evacuation of Lebanon at \$94 million.⁽²⁰⁾

C. International Comparisons

The United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and France were able to begin the initial evacuation of their nationals from Lebanon approximately 48 hours before the first Canadians were evacuated from Lebanon. Susan Ormiston, a CBC correspondent who was deployed in Cyprus, informed the Committee: “Regarding a comparison, when I arrived in Larnaca, other countries had already started their evacuation. There were huge ships coming in. [...] There did not seem to be the same type of confusion, from my observation.”⁽²¹⁾

⁽¹⁷⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006.

⁽¹⁸⁾ CTV, “Canadian Evacuation from Lebanon Cost \$85M,” *CTV.ca*, updated 20 September 2006, www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060919/evacuation_tab_060919/20060920?hub=TopStories; see also, “Ottawa paid \$31M for part of Lebanon Evacuation: Documents,” *CBC.ca*, 30 October 2006, www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2006/10/30/lebanon-evacuation.html

⁽¹⁹⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006.

⁽²⁰⁾ Department of Finance, *The Economic and Fiscal Update*, November 2006, www.fin.gc.ca/ec2006/pdf/ec2006e.pdf, p. 37.

⁽²¹⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 13 February 2007.

- The U.S. Government evacuated approximately 15,000 Americans from Lebanon from 16 July through 2 August 2006. The evacuees departed “Lebanon via Cyprus and Turkey on U.S. government-chartered vessels and aircraft.”⁽²²⁾ It should be noted that the United States had substantial military assets nearby, including the US Navy and Army helicopters, and a large consular presence in the region. “They had tremendous capacity to transport people.”⁽²³⁾
- The United Kingdom benefited from having a naval base in Cyprus. The UK-assisted evacuations began on 17 July with helicopter lifts. In total, 4,600 people were evacuated by the UK through various means, including Royal Navy vessels, by 22 July.⁽²⁴⁾
- Sweden’s evacuation effort was hailed by many commentators. Sweden’s efforts were facilitated by the government’s use of text messages (SMS technology) distributed to Swedish cell phone subscribers who were registered with a Swedish mobile network. The messages included information about the impending evacuation plan, gathering points, and updates of the situation, a practice adopted by the Swedish government during the 2004 2005 tsunami in Asia.⁽²⁵⁾ In total, nearly 7,500 Swedish citizens were evacuated by the Swedish government between 17 and 24 July.⁽²⁶⁾
- Australia experienced similar difficulties with the evacuation of its nationals. There was a significant number of Australians in Lebanon at the time of the crisis, approximately 20,000 25,000. Australia had some difficulties securing transportation assets for the evacuation, and requested some assistance from Canada.
- Overall, Canada assisted 699 foreign nationals from 32 countries in evacuating from Lebanon; 943 Canadians were evacuated by other countries.

⁽²²⁾ U.S. Department of State, “Lebanon Situation Update,” Bureau of Consular Affairs, 3 August 2006, www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/69225.htm

⁽²³⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006.

⁽²⁴⁾ The United Kingdom Parliament, *Minutes of Evidence*, “Letter to the Chairman of the Committee from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,” Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, 7 September 2006,

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmffaff/1583/6091303.htm

⁽²⁵⁾ Gloria Galloway, “As criticism grows at home, other countries turn to Canada for help in Lebanon,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 July 2006, A13; see also: “Mobile Technology Aids Swedish Evacuation,” *The Local*, 20 July 2006, www.thelocal.se/article.php?ID=4384

⁽²⁶⁾ Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, “Largest Evacuation Ever”, Press Release, 1 August 2006.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Emergencies

A. The Changing International Landscape

The events that transpired in Lebanon in July 2006 brought the concept of globalization into tangible focus. The number of Canadian citizens and permanent residents travelling and living abroad for short and longer terms has increased significantly. In his appearance before the Committee, Minister MacKay estimated that two million Canadians currently live outside Canada. A report by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada estimates that 2.7 million Canadians live overseas, 1.7 of those on a permanent basis.⁽²⁷⁾ The number of Canadians travelling to areas other than the United States and Western Europe increased by 37% in the 1990s.⁽²⁸⁾

This phenomenon raises a wide range of issues in terms of how the Government of Canada should manage this large number of Canadians located overseas and whether new contingency planning, resources, and guidelines are required in order for Canada to have the consular tools required to address their needs. And as was stated previously in this report, it also points to the need for all Canadians living, travelling, and working outside of Canada to closely appraise themselves of the risks associated with the area that they are choosing to live or travel in, the presence of Canadian consular officials in those areas, and their rights to consular and travel assistance from the Government of Canada when overseas. In reality, the ability or capacity of the Government of Canada to come to their assistance – whether that is in consular, diplomatic, or logistical terms – may be limited in many instances. These limitations are most pertinent when Canadians choose to live in dangerous areas.

Therefore, the increase in the number of Canadians located overseas raises two very important questions for the Government of Canada and Canadian citizens to consider: what responsibilities does the Government of Canada have towards Canadians living abroad? Also, what expectations do Canadians abroad have of the Government of Canada in terms of assistance in times of crisis?

The potential need for the evacuation of Canadians in crises situations abroad, whether or not it is on the same scale as that of the effort in Lebanon, will not disappear. Considering recent sectarian tensions in Lebanon, challenges against the central government, and massive demonstrations in the streets, the possibility

⁽²⁷⁾ Kenny Zhang, "Recognizing the Canadian Diaspora," *Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada Commentary*, No. 41, March 2006,

www.asiapacific.ca/analysis/pubs/listing.cfm?ID_Publication=518

⁽²⁸⁾ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Review of Consular Affairs: Final Report*, Office of the Inspector General, Evaluation Division, November 2004, p. 9. This report also estimated that there are approximately 250,000 Canadian citizens living in Hong Kong and 10,000 dual-national Canadians residing in Egypt, pp. 60-62.

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of further destabilization in Lebanon is ever-present. The Committee feels that a clear risk analysis and the anticipation of crises involving Canadian nationals abroad must begin with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. In its 2006 *Report on Plans and Priorities*, however, the department did not list consular issues or the security of Canadians overseas as a strategic risk for the department.⁽²⁹⁾ In order to contribute to the management of large-scale crises in the future, the department should undertake a thorough risk assessment of these issues and identify these risks in its strategic and corporate planning.

On the other hand, the Committee reiterates that the potential for rapid destabilization in other countries has also heightened the need for Canadian citizens to be mindful of the conditions where they are travelling and residing and to be responsible for closely monitoring the advisories provided by the Government. In other words, this discussion cannot focus solely on the rights of Canadians abroad; it must also focus on their responsibilities. It was brought to the Committee's attention that many Canadians in Lebanon had not registered with the Canadian embassy through the Registration of Canadians Abroad (ROCA) program, which significantly complicated efforts to locate and secure Canadians after conflict broke out. CBC correspondent Susan Ormiston suggested to the Committee that "there was very little known about the rights of Canadians in another country when a crisis happens, and I am not sure that we have clarified that, yet."⁽³⁰⁾ Indeed, a 2004 *Review of Consular Affairs* by the Evaluation Division of DFAIT noted that overall only 30% of those surveyed were aware of government travel information services. The review suggested that "... in many cases, travellers fail to take on the responsibility to ensure that all necessary measures are taken to avoid problems abroad. Instead, they adopt a passive conduct toward eventual problems that might be encountered."⁽³¹⁾

It was also brought to the attention of the Committee that some Canadians in Lebanon and at home experienced difficulties in obtaining timely information on the crisis situation and the Canadian Government's evacuation plans. Information is not available as to how many Canadians in Lebanon were aware of and used DFAIT's travel advisory Web site, which was the principal repository of updates and contact information during the crisis for Canadians at home and in Lebanon. DFAIT could broaden its modes of communication to include direct advertising in newspaper and local publications, communication via television and radio, and use of mobile technologies where possible. The Committee feels that DFAIT should examine its current system of travel warnings and overseas alerts to determine if they are a sufficient means of contacting Canadians living and travelling abroad.

⁽²⁹⁾ Government of Canada, *Report on Plan and Priorities 2006-2007 Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade* (Part III Estimates), September 2006,

www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/0607/fait-aeci/fait-aeci03_e.asp

⁽³⁰⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 13 February 2007.

⁽³¹⁾ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Review of Consular Affairs: Final Report*, Office of the Inspector General, Evaluation Division, November 2004, p. 28.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

To improve Canada's response to large-scale crises overseas,

- **The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should develop comprehensive communication plans for use in Canada and overseas in the event of future emergencies such as the case of Lebanon in 2006;**
- **DFAIT should consider adopting new strategies for communication that go beyond regular updates to its travel advisories Web site, including the use of text messaging to mobile phones, to make it easier to contact Canadians during large-scale overseas emergencies.**

It is also important to note that the government's current system of travel advisories seems to present a wide range of countries as high-risk areas, highlighting every possibility for violence and political destabilization even if such risks are relatively remote. It can be reasonably assumed that Government travel advisories would be more effective at communicating immediate risks, and their warnings would be more likely to be adhered to by Canadian citizens, if the risk assessment that is carried out would incorporate a more realistic analysis of the nature of the risks involved.

B. Contingency Planning and Resources of Canadian Missions Abroad

Overall, the Committee has concluded that the contingency planning and preparation of Canadian missions abroad, logistical or otherwise, must be strengthened.

In assessing the overall response of the Government of Canada to the need to evacuate Canadians from Lebanon, Minister MacKay observed that the Canadian response was "timely" and "effective," given that "these circumstances were difficult and unexpected."⁽³²⁾ The Minister also indicated to the Committee that "there was no accurate number" available of Canadians with passports inside Lebanon. However, these circumstances were not entirely unexpected and good estimates regarding the number of Canadians living in Lebanon were available prior to July 2006.

An audit of the Canadian Embassy in Beirut was completed by the Audit Division of DFAIT in March 2002. This audit did not provide a detailed analysis of the contingency planning and emergency-preparedness of the embassy. The audit did note, however, that:

⁽³²⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 1 November 2006.

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It is estimated, based on passport renewals, that up to 50,000 Canadian citizens are resident in Lebanon. Demands on the Consular staff are high ... given this large resident community in Lebanon...

[...]

The Mission does not have an active warden network but this is a top priority for the new Consular Program Manager. Work is underway to recruit a number of people willing to commit to this important task. With such a large resident community, however, to meet the requirement of one warden per 15 families, there would be a need for over 100 wardens, which may be unrealistic. The Mission is aware of this and is planning to recruit as many as possible as part of an effective contingency plan.⁽³³⁾

The audit in March 2002 is the last one completed for the Canadian embassy in Beirut. Its findings covered the period from October 30 to 3 November 2000.

Minister MacKay told the Committee that "There was no file folder sitting in an antiquated filing cabinet somewhere in the Pearson building that outlines the evacuation plan of 15,000 Canadians from Lebanon. It did not exist."⁽³⁴⁾ The Committee feels that such contingency plans and preparation should exist to the greatest extent possible and that they should be an operational component of all Canadian missions overseas, particularly those in areas identified as potential risks for destabilization or violent conflict. The December 2004 tsunami in South Asia demonstrated how quickly a crisis can arise and overwhelm local authorities and capacity, and also how quickly Canadian government authorities must react to assist Canadian nationals. Political tensions had been palpable in Lebanon following the assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri, in February 2005, which exacerbated the political fissures in Lebanon.

The need for improved planning and preparation can be partly addressed through DFAIT's auditing system of Canadian missions. These audits should be completed more frequently and in greater detail so as to identify potential risks, contingency planning for emergencies, and required resources. The Committee is of the opinion that the necessary transportation assets to evacuate Canadians overseas – air, sea, and land transport – and the contracting relationships with relevant parties to secure such transportation should be identified so that contracts can be activated quickly following the outbreak of large-scale crisis, thus expediting the process of evacuation. Moreover, Canadian missions should regularly review

⁽³³⁾ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Audit of the Canadian Embassy: Beirut*, Audit Division, March 2002, Accessed 26 October 2006, pp. 12-13, international.gc.ca/department/auditreports/2002/beirut02-en.asp. In his appearance before the Affairs Committee, Minister MacKay noted that: "wardens were volunteers living in various parts of the country that had been identified as contact persons for contingency purposes, such as an evacuation," *Evidence*, Meeting, 1 November 2006.

⁽³⁴⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 1 November 2006.

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and identify possible gathering points for Canadian nationals, transportation routes and options (land, sea, and air) for their transportation and evacuation, and neighbouring countries (i.e., Turkey and Cyprus) where Canadians can be quickly relocated prior to their return to Canada.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should conduct more frequent assessments of its missions abroad, particularly those situated in areas with large Canadian resident populations and areas where the potential for destabilization is high, to ensure updated risk assessments of the region and the risks to Canadians, thorough contingency planning and logistical preparation for large-scale emergencies, and assessments of resources required for that mission.

The Committee is also of the opinion that some of these issues can be addressed through the appropriate matching of resources to relevant missions. The Committee was told that the Embassy in Beirut has a total of 26 staff (9 staff are Canadian-based, 17 are locally-engaged), while the Canadian Embassy in Damascus, Syria, has 78 staff. The Committee does not feel that the resources allocated for the Embassy in Beirut are commensurate with the estimates of Canadians residing in Lebanon – approximately 40,000.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should review its allocation of personnel and other resources to missions abroad, in order to place greater emphasis on countries where the size of the resident Canadian population is high and/or where there are risks for regional destabilization.

C. The Coordination of Government Departments and Agencies: the Expertise of the Department of National Defence

The Committee is of the view that the Canadian Government's response to future crises like the evacuation of Lebanon must be a quick and seamless exercise (i.e., click into motion). Susan Ormiston informed the Committee that 3 to 4 to 5 days after the initial evacuation of Canadians, things began to click in place. By the end of the evacuation, the effort was described as "a very well-oiled procedure." However, the first boat carrying Canadians from Beirut to Cyprus on 19 July was scheduled to arrive in the port at midnight, but did not actually arrive until 1 PM the following day and there was confusion throughout over the ship's location and expected time of arrival. Ms. Ormiston recalled how DFAIT officials on the ground "were open and frank about the fact that there were some serious problems with

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the coordination efforts that first day.”⁽³⁵⁾ The Committee is of the opinion that the government’s response to Canadians’ need for emergency assistance and evacuation from crisis areas overseas should not take five days to become effective and well-coordinated. This delayed response could be improved upon if relevant government departments did not assemble response teams after the outbreak of an international emergency, but rather had designated teams of personnel and intergovernmental mechanisms already in place, with specific training and crisis management skills, ready to respond quickly and efficiently to potential emergencies overseas.

Improved planning and preparation, in line with the statements and observations in the above sections, are imperative to avoid any confusion over roles, responses, and coordinating mechanisms within and between Canada’s various government departments and agencies responsible for international issues. DFAIT must assume that future emergencies involving Canadians overseas can and will occur, and therefore, provide planning and training for relevant officials within DFAIT and other government departments, and provide leadership in establishing intergovernmental mechanisms and teams that are ready to be activated immediately to deal with crises overseas, instead of being assembled *ad hoc* following the outbreak of a crisis. This preparation could be facilitated by the regular training and deployment of Foreign Service officers who are equipped and prepared to operate in crisis areas.

The Committee is also of the view that DND and Canadian Forces personnel played a critical role on the ground in moving the evacuation process forward. As one witness told the Committee, “there was quite a bit of discussion about how [DND], perhaps, were a bit more versed in moving large groups of people in crisis.”⁽³⁶⁾ DND personnel established a hotel-based command centre that had not been in place before their arrival. However, the initial deployment of 30 Canadian Forces personnel to Larnaca, did not reach Cyprus until 19th July, at a point when the implementation of Canada’s evacuation plan was already underway.

Therefore, the Committee feels that while DFAIT is the most appropriate department to handle consular and diplomatic matters, large-scale evacuations that require the movement and control of large numbers of people, logistical and communications expertise, and expertise in dealing with evolving security situations, would be coordinated more effectively, particularly in the immediate term, under the leadership of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces. DND has responded to the needs of people caught in natural disasters in Canada (floods and forest fires) and abroad (the 2004 tsunami in South Asia), and in humanitarian emergencies and violent conflict. The department has long-standing logistical and communications expertise and experience operating in complex and insecure environments, and its personnel are trained specifically for these roles. The Government of Canada should further capitalize on these existing skill sets and knowledge to improve their response to emergencies of this kind. The question of the departmental leadership becomes much more critical in a non

⁽³⁵⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 13 February 2007.

⁽³⁶⁾ *Ibid.*

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permissive environment. For example, what would have happened if any of the armed combatants in this conflict had begun to attack Canadian citizens directly or the areas where they were waiting to be evacuated?

RECOMMENDATION 4:

- **The Government of Canada should ensure that there are trained and designated personnel within DFAIT and other relevant departments and agencies, as well as intergovernmental mechanisms, which can be activated immediately to respond to crisis overseas.**
- **In undertaking large-scale evacuations like the case of Lebanon in 2006, the Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces should coordinate and lead the government's evacuation effort, particularly so that DND personnel can oversee the security and logistics of the operation and the movement of large numbers of Canadians.**

D. Resources Available for Future Evacuations

The Committee was told by departmental officials of the challenges they faced in securing air and naval transport for Canadian evacuees. This situation was compounded by the fact that many countries were attempting to secure the same resources to evacuate their respective nationals. In cases where the number of Canadians in a crisis area is small or where Canada is the only, or one of a few, states seeking to conduct such operations, the chartering of transport is likely sufficient. However, in a rapidly-deteriorating situation in the future, similar to the one facing many countries attempting to evacuate their nationals from Lebanon in 2006, the Committee believes that Canada's heavy reliance on the chartering of commercial transport may not be prudent. In response to this question, Brigadier-General J.Y.R.A. Viens, Director General, Plans, Strategic Joint Staff (DND) told the Committee: "Can we envision some scenario that could potentially exceed our capabilities? I guess it could happen" ⁽³⁷⁾

Out of a total of 65 flights returning Canadians to Canada, 4 aircraft belonged to the Department of National Defence. Naval transport was contracted. By comparison, the United States and United Kingdom possess aircraft carriers and helicopters that were in a position to evacuate a significant number of people at one time. However, the Committee is also cognizant of the fact that Canada is a medium-sized country with relatively small standing military capabilities, and that maintaining a constant level of increased air and naval resources would be very costly. The Government of Canada should review whether its military and governmental personnel and resources are sufficient to address the need for evacuations overseas, whether these resources need to be augmented, and whether the chartering of relevant resources in times of crisis is sufficient.

⁽³⁷⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006.

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The issue of available resources also highlights the need for greater coordination between Canada and its international allies, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and France. The attempt by many countries to unilaterally secure the necessary transport resources for evacuating their nationals created a situation of competition amongst countries for available resources, whether this competition was intended or not. Countries with greater military resources than Canada were able to begin the evacuation of those in greatest need at an earlier time than Canada. There was also a subsequent event where a vessel chartered by Canada for evacuation from the port of Tyre left at half capacity. To improve effectiveness and efficiency, Canada should work with officials bilaterally and through the G8 and NATO to devise strategies to ensure that in future cases of mass evacuation, Canada and its allies cooperate to the maximum extent possible to secure and evacuate their respective nationals.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

The Government of Canada should clarify and strengthen existing agreements with like-minded countries for mutual assistance in times of crisis, and Canada should enact new agreements and understandings for mutual assistance with like minded countries where they do not already exist, in order to ensure the quick and safe evacuation of Canadian nationals overseas.

E. The Need for a Rapid Reaction Capability?

The preceding sections of this report have identified a variety of issues including the increasing number of Canadians residing and travelling overseas, the need for greater contingency planning and preparation, the need to designate officials and resources within the federal government to handle such crises, and Canada's limitations in terms of civilian and military resources. All of these factors have highlighted the potential need for Canada to create rapid reaction teams that are trained and prepared specifically for these scenarios and are placed on standby to activate and respond quickly to emergencies involving Canadians abroad. The response time and efficiency of Canada's evacuation effort could be improved upon with a rapid reaction capability. DFAIT's Director General for Consular Affairs, Robert Desjardins, told the Committee that "Departments were able to provide the required resources, but there is room for improvement in terms of time limits of response and bringing together quickly all the various competencies required to respond to a crisis."⁽³⁸⁾ He also noted that the department requires secure and mobile communication technology to respond to evolving crises overseas, especially for use in areas where Canada does not have a permanent consular presence.

Moreover, DFAIT's Assistant Deputy Minister for North America and Consular Affairs, Peter Boehm, informed the Committee of the challenges involved in relocating Canadian evacuees to points in Cyprus and Turkey before their return to

⁽³⁸⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006.

Canada. "Canada does not have a diplomatic presence in Cyprus – only an honorary consul office – the challenges to create something from nothing in a short time frame were enormous."⁽³⁹⁾ However, Canada does not have the resources to maintain missions in every region of the world. Moreover, the high resource and staffing levels that would be necessary to anticipate and prepare for every possible international crisis would be extremely costly. The costs associated with increased military resources were addressed in a previous section. The associated costs do not, however, negate the potential need for support. Therefore, the Government of Canada should study its options for responding to large-scale crises overseas and future evacuations, including rapid deployment teams, to determine the most cost-efficient and effective policy tools to address these issues.

F. Citizenship

At the time of the crisis, many Canadian citizens and permanent residents were vacationing in or travelling through Lebanon and the surrounding area, as well as being on work assignments in the area, and were caught in a crisis in need of assistance from the Government of Canada. This was compounded by the fact that the summer months are the busiest time of the year for Canadians to visit Lebanon.

However, during the Lebanon evacuation, some commentators raised difficult issues pertaining to sensitive questions regarding the citizenship status of a number of those being evacuated by Canada.

These questions were raised in particular in the context of the reported costs of the evacuation, which were born entirely by the Government of Canada, and anecdotal evidence suggesting that a large number of dual citizens who were evacuated by Canada subsequently returned to Lebanon. In response to a question concerning how many evacuees returned to Lebanon, the Minister of Foreign Affairs told the Committee that "The evacuees are under no obligation to tell us what their plans were upon arrival back in Canada. We have no demand that they tell us of their whereabouts."⁽⁴⁰⁾ Canada does not have exit controls.

At the time of the evacuation, some critics argued that Canada cannot be relied upon for assistance during times of crisis overseas, by Canadian passport holders who have not resided or paid taxes in Canada for quite some time, as a 'port in a storm.' On the other hand, it is important to reflect upon a commentary made by members of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada who suggested that the debates surrounding dual citizenship are "long on emotion and short on facts."⁽⁴¹⁾ Indeed, the Committee recognizes that questions pertaining to citizenship are complex and difficult to answer. The Committee did not study these issues in depth, mindful of the arguments that any measures or proposals to alter Canada's existing immigration and citizenship policies should be approached with caution. The ability

⁽³⁹⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽⁴⁰⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 1 November 2006.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Don J. DeVoretz and Yuen Pau Woo, "Dual Citizenship and Canada's new Diaspora," *Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada*, October 2006,

www.asiapacific.ca/analysis/pubs/listing.cfm?ID_Publication=558

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to retain a foreign passport is an attractive incentive to many skilled immigrants; and, revoking that right could deter certain people from applying for Canadian citizenship as well as introducing complications for Canadians wishing to work abroad. As a DFAIT official responsible for consular affairs told the Committee: "Until further notice, within the framework of the consular service, a Canadian is a Canadian; the rule is very clear. However, you are right, the debate has been launched and the discussion will take place. The challenge before us concerns how to frame that debate."⁽⁴²⁾

Therefore, the Committee does not recommend a set course of action or policy proposal to address these questions of citizenship and government responsibilities, but rather urges a careful examination of these issues by the Government of Canada. The Committee also urges that these issues be studied in greater detail by the Senate of Canada.

⁽⁴²⁾ *Evidence*, Meeting, 6 December 2006.

List of Witnesses

November 1, 2006

The Honourable Peter MacKay, P.C., M.P., Minister of Foreign Affairs

November 1 and December 6, 2006

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Peter Boehm, Assistant Deputy Minister, North America (and Consular Affairs);

Robert Desjardins, Director General, Consular Affairs Bureau.

December 6 2006

Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Daniel Jean, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations.

National Defence

Brigadier-General J.Y.R.A. Viens, Director General, Plans, Strategic Joint Staff;

Major-General J.P.Y.D. Gosselin, Director General, International Security Policy.

February, 13, 2006

As an individual

Susan Ormiston, CBC Correspondent.