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Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

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

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• (1305)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): Order, please.

We are the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today is November 6, 2014, and this our 43rd meeting.

This meeting is televised.

[English]

We have with us today from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, DFATD, Henri-Paul Normandin, who is the director general of the Latin America and Caribbean bureau, and Johanne Forest, who is the director of Central America and Caribbean—something got left out. You surely can't be the director of the entirety of Central America and the Caribbean with no qualifier.

Ms. Johanne Forest (Director, Central America and Caribbean Relations Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Division.

The Chair: Okay, it's a typo.

All right, here we go. My understanding is that Mr. Normandin will make the presentation, then both of you will be available to answer questions.

Perhaps I could invite you to begin.

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin (Director General, Latin America and Caribbean Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and distinguished members of the committee.

I am very pleased to appear before you today to provide an update on the human rights situation in Honduras.

My predecessor appeared before you in February 2013. He highlighted the situation in Honduras at the time with respect to high levels of poverty and inequality, weak public institutions, including a weak judicial system, corruption, impunity, political instability, and the presence of organized crime and violence.

As of today, many of these problems persist. The justice and human rights system remains weak, and security and human rights conditions have yet to show much improvement. Reports of human

rights defenders, journalists, and justice sector workers being targeted for intimidation and violence, including murder, continue.

What I propose to do today is threefold: first, to identify some of the measures that the Government of Honduras is taking to address a number of these issues; second, to highlight what Canada does to support progress on human rights in this context; and third, to answer any specific questions the committee may have.

By way of context, let us mention that the political situation in Honduras is more stable than it has been for several years. President Hernández, who was democratically elected and took office in January of this year, has focused on reducing crime, violence, and corruption. The new administration has also adopted a series of measures to improve security that appear to be leading to positive results. A state secretary for human rights who comes from civil society and has strong credentials has been appointed and actively advocates for initiatives and interventions in support of human rights.

What are those measures that the government of Honduras has taken? I will highlight a few.

First of all, in direct response to the death of two prosecutors in October of this year, the Honduran Congress approved reforms to the penal code to increase the penalty for murdering judicial officials to life imprisonment. The penalty for convictions for threatening government officials in the exercise of their duties has also been increased to 20 years of imprisonment.

The Honduran Congress is also in the final stages of debating the national law for the protection of journalists and human rights defenders. This is an idea that was first proposed in the national human rights policy and action plan that was adopted last year. If approved, the law is expected to further help improve the security of human rights defenders and journalists.

The national human rights commissioner, also known as CONADEH, has recently put in place a phone line, 132, which all residents can call to make a human rights complaint, and there is some follow-up to these complaints.

A technical agency for crime investigation has been created within the prosecutor's office to examine high-profile cases and increase the monitoring of the police and judiciary.

I would also note that the government has pledged to deliver human rights training to the military, police, air force, and correctional staff, and for the first time to the president and his cabinet.

[*Translation*]

In addition, the Honduran government is working closely with civil society, for example, through the establishment of a government-civil society working group, to evaluate solutions for land reform in the troubled Bajo Aguán region of the country.

The Honduran government has also expressed its willingness to work with multilateral organizations, including the UN Human Rights Council and the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. As you know, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has requested that Honduras adopt precautionary measures to protect certain human rights activists.

The Office of the Inspector General of Honduras is currently administering 39 sets of protective measures ordered by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, in this context, the Government of Canada has been taking a number of steps to further encourage progress on human rights and strengthen institutions.

First, Canada engages in an ongoing dialogue with the Honduran government and civil society on key human rights issues in bilateral meetings as well as through several other ways. For instance, as a member of the group of donors and international representatives in Honduras, Canada raises human rights, security, and development issues with the Government of Honduras at the highest levels. We also maintain regular and close contact with civil society organizations. We are also active in expressing our concerns through multilateral institutions such as the UN Human Rights Council.

Beyond dialogue, Canada concretely supports a number of projects and cooperation undertakings in the fields of human rights, development, democratic governance, and security. All of these, of course, are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. For instance, recognizing that high rates of impunity in Honduras are a key factor affecting the human rights situation, Canada supports projects that help increase the investigative capacity of police, prosecutors, and judges to investigate, prosecute, and manage trials.

Mr. Chair, in the written statement that we have provided, you will find more details of some of these projects. I won't go through all those details, but I will mention that following a number of these projects, Honduran crime scene technicians have informed us that, thanks to the training they received from Canada, they have been able to resolve seven murder cases to date and continue to make progress on a number of pending cases.

In another area, the Canada fund for local initiatives has supported Honduran NGOs involved in human rights. Specific projects include training for human rights promoters, informing women about their rights, and protecting vulnerable populations such as youth and the LGBTI community.

Honduras has also benefited from Canadian support in the field of labour rights through a program implemented by Employment and Social Development Canada. In 2012, four workshops were held in Honduras for leaders and members of workers' organizations to strengthen their capacity on incorporating international standards on occupational safety and health.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

In closing, as we have mentioned, Honduras still faces many human rights challenges. This is in a broader context of challenges relating to development, insecurity and weak institutions. The Government of Honduras acknowledges the need to improve human rights, and it has taken a number of initiatives in this regard. Further, the Government of Honduras maintains an open dialogue with Canada and the international community on human rights issues, and it welcomes Canadian and international cooperation in this field.

Canada engages and works with Honduras accordingly. We cooperate on human rights issues, as well as on development, democratic governance and security.

Honduras clearly needs broad-based economic growth to address the basic needs and rights of its population, particularly the most vulnerable, and provide employment opportunities and alternatives to criminal activity. That is why Honduras is a country of focus for Canada's development cooperation program. Last year, Canada provided over \$30 million to promote sustainable economic growth, improve food security, and address social inequalities and exclusion.

The recent coming into force of the Canada-Honduras free trade agreement will also help increase the country's prosperity by creating new economic and employment opportunities.

In short, while recognizing that Honduras is still facing many challenges, we continue to work on several fronts to help Hondurans reform their institutions and address human rights, development and security challenges.

Mr. Chair, I would like to thank you and the members of the committee for giving us an opportunity to share with you the most recent developments in Honduras and to briefly discuss what Canada does in this respect.

It goes without saying that we are available to answer any questions the committee members may have. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for being so succinct. We appreciate that.

We can definitely get away with six-minute rounds of questions and answers. This may go quickly, in which case we'll have time for anyone who has a supplemental question to come back and ask it.

We'll start with Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

The chair is right: you were not only succinct, but your opening remarks were very helpful. We're trying to make sure we fill any gaps between the time we did previous witness testimony for our study and what's transpired between then and now.

There's no doubt in my mind, and I think my colleagues will agree, that Honduras is in a very tough situation on many levels. They need not only good leadership there, but lots of help from the international community.

I was glad you pointed out the two different investments that Canada had made. I think with the kind of economy they have, they're going to need some help for some time until they have the capacity to get to the point where they have an international standard, a first world standard as regards the rule of law and human rights.

I'm going to ask you some detailed questions. I don't want to put you on the spot. You've already given us lots. If you need to send some of the information later, then I'm fine with that.

There was one thing I was very happy to hear about. You mentioned results in regard to the technical forensic training, and the fact that they had made some significant progress on seven high-level murder cases. I think they actually resolved these cases. That's very good news.

You mentioned earlier in your remarks a program that provides 39 sets of protective measures and three sets of provisional measures to protect those who are at a high risk.

Again, because I like results, do we have any evidence that those measures have to date thwarted any kinds of threats or intentions to cause those individuals bodily harm?

• (1315)

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Thank you very much for your question.

Mr. Chair, on the specific issue of measures, following the recommendations of the Inter-American Commission, what we know is that some of these measures have included, for instance, police protection for the individuals who are affected. We also know that they have provided the beneficiaries of these measures with information, for instance, emergency phone numbers in case something happens. This I can confirm.

Beyond this, it would be a bit difficult for me to say.

Mr. David Sweet: You did answer part of it in the sense that for the very high-risk individuals, they actually have police surveillance with them.

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Yes, for a number of them, at least.

Mr. David Sweet: For a number of them, okay.

Can you give me an idea about how much we are involved down there? The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have some personnel there. Are there any other law enforcement agencies from this country that are helping them? Do we have people who are advising them, such as crown prosecutors, judiciary, etc.?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: There is a whole set of Canadians who provide technical assistance and support through various projects.

For instance, there is the Justice Education Society, which is a Vancouver-based organization. They are there, present on the ground. They provide technical assistance to train police, to train investigative units in special methods of investigation, including very specialized techniques, such as ballistic forensics and wiretapping. They have also been training crime scene technicians. The Justice Education Society of BC is one example.

In a broader context, I should also mention that Canada is part of the Group of Friends of Central America, which has a specific unit dedicated to security. Canada provides assistance to this group at the regional level, which in turn conducts a number of activities in Honduras.

This is some of the information that I can provide to you right away.

Mr. David Sweet: Great. We will have them coming as a witness as well for a follow-up. They testified before. I'm looking forward to that to see whether they've expanded their scope since the last time we talked with them.

This is a little bit political, but I think you can answer this one. Since the election of President Juan Orlando Hernández, can we confidently say that there is more openness to accepting help and improving the human rights situation of his own citizens, as compared with the situation in our relationship before?

• (1320)

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: I will give two indications. I've already mentioned in my statement a number of measures that have been taken, but I will point to one more in particular.

First, the appointment of a state secretary who comes from civil society is, I think, a good indication that there is some will in the new administration to pursue progress on human rights issues.

Another example is that they have invited the office of the human rights commissioner of the United Nations to open an office in Tegucigalpa.

These are some of the indications that there is movement forward and that there is a desire to move forward.

Also, in terms of dialogue, the vice minister for human rights has made herself available to engage directly with us on those issues. In particular, she was here in Canada a number of months ago, and we had occasion to have a fulsome exchange with her on the measures that her government was taking. One thing she recommended and that we expect will take place is human rights training for military, police, and so on, which is scheduled to take place.

Also, maybe one last indicator is that the police have created a human rights unit within the police service to better address human rights issues that can arise from the work of police.

These are some of the examples we can provide that give indications that the current administration is taking steps to try to address those issues.

Mr. David Sweet: Have they taken steps in regard to private security? I know that was one issue that came up. Have they taken steps to rein in or at least hold to account those private security entities that are within Honduras?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: I would not have specific information on this issue, Mr. Chair.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sweet.

Mr. Marston, please.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Normandin, I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you.

I'm sure that the Canadian government is proceeding in a way to best influence the situation in Honduras. In fact, we receive some grassroots information. You may even know that Craig Scott, the member for Toronto—Danforth, was part of the alternative truth and reconciliation commission. My legislative assistant was an observer in their elections. We've had a number of people come to us with concerns.

I don't know whether you're aware of this, and I'm not really seeking commentary on what I'm about to say because it is political, but apparently Hillary Clinton spoke recently about how they had supported the coup. The things we're hearing are not as on track.

Obviously the efforts of the Canadian government seem to be fairly broad in what they're trying to accomplish, but we're certainly hearing that the optimism we hear from you today isn't quite supported on the ground.

I'd be glad to offer you some of the sources we have; we can send them to you. We have reports that come in from the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, even *The Guardian* newspaper. There are a number of areas that seem to contradict the sense we're getting from your report to us today. They're claiming that journalists, indigenous leaders, and human rights defenders are threatened and murdered. The words I hear is that it is the murder capital of the world.

One area we hear about too is the war on drugs being used to displace people from their land. I see you are acknowledging that.

It's almost as if the government is giving responses.... For instance, the laws you have referenced that have been passed are almost a form of appeasement, when you look at it from the ground level and see their lack of impact. That may well be because they don't have the resources, training, and all the things we're working on. Or is it that the corruption is so endemic there that it's hard to get past it?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Thank you very much for your comments and your questions, sir.

Mr. Chair, for sure we do recognize and acknowledge that there are serious issues in Honduras. I think I mentioned that very explicitly in our statement. There is cause for concern, and yes, human rights defenders and journalists are the subject of human rights violations.

In terms of where this is going, again, the one thing we can state for fact is that the current government is taking some measures. If we go one step beyond that, is an impact of all of these measures being felt on the ground in reality? There are some, and I will give you a few indicators in a moment, but I think that we all recognize that the impact of the total sum of these measures will probably be felt only gradually over time. Building institutions, whether it's human rights specific institutions or improving the way the police conducts its business, takes some time and it is difficult to expect results in the very short term. I think the results will be gradual over time and we will have to keep monitoring the real progress or the absence thereof on the ground.

This being said, some of the measures already taken do have a certain impact. I will offer one example. In the Bajo Aguan region where there's a lot of violence related to land rights issues, as I mentioned before, the government decided to engage in a collaborative capacity with civil society to address this issue. As a concrete result, the number of homicides in this particular region related to land rights issues has dropped from 40 in 2012 to 20 in 2013, so the number has dropped by half. Of course, this is still 20 homicides too many, but it is an indicator that shows there has been some progress.

In one other area, which may be a little less tangible but is nevertheless meaningful, as a consequence of all of the work that has been done to strengthen the capacity and the approach of security forces in dealing with violence and human rights issues, the authorities are telling us that there are now more witnesses and more community leaders who are prepared to work with security forces to investigate crimes and human rights violations.

If this is happening, then the odds of resolving cases and pursuing cases and reducing impunity over time are higher.

I use those two examples, but again acknowledging that the real meaningful impact of all of this we will have to monitor over time.

•(1325)

Mr. Wayne Marston: I'm pleased to see your response to that, because there are at times, when governmental organizations from outside a country like that tend to delude themselves. You seem to be paying pretty strict attention to the efforts.

In the Aguan there has been over 100 murders since 2009. One of the concerns that people have raised with us is the way the president has militarized the police. He seems to have taken it up a notch and made it more like the armed forces. There are accusations of abuses by them and private security—I see you're well aware of it—to the point where the International Finance Corporation, the private arm of the World Bank, was reassessing a \$30-million loan to a corporation.

It's troubling, but your sense of some optimism is probably a good thing for us to hear. The hard part for me is balancing it against what people have told us from on the ground. There were a number of things I was going to ask about. With respect to the efforts of the Canadian government, in recent times we've been under certain constraints here financially. Have they been fully funded? Is there anything lacking from the sense of financial stability people need for the long-term planning? You're referencing the fact that this is going to take years.

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: The current level of funding for Honduras from the Government of Canada in terms of development as well as security-related and human rights-related cooperation initiatives stood at \$38 million in financial year 2012-13. Again, Honduras is a country of focus, so \$38 million for a country like Honduras by Canadian standards generally is a substantial amount of money. It makes Honduras one of the priority countries for cooperation.

•(1330)

Mr. Wayne Marston: How's my time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Your time was over two minutes ago.

Mr. Wayne Marston: I guess I asked two minutes too late, then.

Thank you, sir. I appreciate that.

The Chair: It's always bad to ask, because the answer is rarely good.

Ms. Grewal, it's your turn.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you for being here today to follow up with the committee about issues in Honduras.

First, I would like one or both of you to elaborate on the changes in Honduras since the 2013 election. Has there been an increase or decrease in crime, general violence, and attacks on journalists? Whatever your answer is, please describe why you think that's the case and include any statistics you might have.

Have the police and justice systems been reformed at all since Hernández was elected president?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Thank you very much for your question.

Mr. Chair, we do not have very specific statistics that would cover the specific period since the new administration took office in January of this year until now, so I would not be in a position to

provide you with hard and reliable statistics on that. The only thing I can report for a fact though, is some of the measures that have been taken by the government, some of which I outlined before. For the concrete impact and statistics, it would be a little early to have reliable statistics on that. As members of the committee have mentioned and as we recognize, definitely there are issues with respect to human rights defenders and journalists. We're well aware of that and we recognize that.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Obviously, as you said, there are major issues in Honduras, with the law sometimes not being enforced and certain crimes not being investigated. Where do you think change needs to take place, and how does that change actually happen? What's the next realistic step in improving the police force and the justice system as a whole?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Changes definitely need to take place to ensure progress on human rights. I think that is certain. In terms of what steps need to be taken writ large, the capacity of the justice institutions has to be improved. I think we're well aware that the impunity rate in Honduras is extremely high. In short, somebody who commits a human rights violation or a crime as of now is most likely to get away with it. This is simply because the institutions are extremely weak. There are not enough qualified people to investigate and enough qualified people to prosecute and so on.

One of the things that needs to be done writ large is a strengthening of institutions. How is this done? Through training, technical assistance, and the provision of equipment. The Honduran institutions over time will need to absorb this and put this into practice.

Again, I highlighted a number of cooperation undertakings that we have been doing specifically in this respect. For instance, we have been providing some specialized equipment for the investigation of crimes. Of course, a number of these crimes are related to human rights; some others are not. It's the strengthening of institutions which is the key challenge for Honduras.

In a broader context, it's not only the human rights institutions and the justice sector institutions. As a general proposition, Honduras is challenged in terms of development and the institutions which do not function the way that Hondurans and we would hope they would.

•(1335)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Could you please give our committee an update on the initiatives of the Hernández government regarding access to justice? Do people feel like they can complain about human rights abuses, labour issues, environmental matters, etc.? Has the government legitimately acted in their defence?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Mr. Chair, I highlighted a number of initiatives in my opening statements. One in particular in terms of access of citizens to complaints and redress mechanism, is this 132 hotline that they have put in place, which is quite significant. It's a little bit like an ombudsman or a human rights commission, where people can call and report human rights violations. They can complain. What we hear is that follow-up is done, at least to a certain extent, to some of these complaints.

I think that this also sends a message more generally within Honduras that human rights violations cannot simply happen and go unreported. There are some mechanisms that are in place to address and to redress. There is also, beyond the 132 line, an institution. The national human rights commissioner, CONADEH, is the broader institution within which this hotline has been set up. I will not go as far as to tell you that this institution functions very well; I cannot say that. But at least, again, there are some new steps that are taken to provide citizens with access to complaints mechanisms and follow-up.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you.

The Chair: We go now to Mr. Vaughan, please.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Thank you for the opportunity to ask some questions today.

What difficulty does the justice system have? If it's a failing justice system or an incomplete justice system, how does that defend Canadian interests when investments are made? In other words, for Canadian companies, corporations, NGOs working in a country with an ineffective justice system, how does that impact Canadian interests on the ground in Honduras, in terms of their protection, but also their ability to pursue fair treatment under Honduran law?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: It is challenged. I think that first and foremost the weakness of the institutions affects the Hondurans themselves, that is for sure. In terms of Canadian interests specifically, nothing specifically comes to mind in terms of instances where Canadian organizations or enterprises would have been affected, but for sure it makes it a more difficult environment to operate in.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Do we track the interaction of Canadian institutions and the law in Honduras as a measuring stick?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: We do not do so systematically. However, as a matter of fact, when there are issues that arise between a Canadian organization or a Canadian enterprise and local authorities in Honduras or elsewhere, usually the Canadian organizations or enterprises report to us and they ask for our support.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Particularly inside the mining sector, do we also track the other side of that shadow? For example, mining interests quite often come into conflict over local land disputes and come into conflict with people protesting and therefore those protestors have their human rights challenged by a failing justice system. Do we track the impact that Canadian investment might have in generating the problem not just in terms of the impact on those Canadian companies but to make sure they live up to their obligations to be responsible investors?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: As a general proposition, in Honduras and elsewhere we follow the activities of Canadian organizations, including Canadian companies. When there are issues

that arise in terms of social conflict and the various claims that are made, these come to our attention either by the organizations themselves or we do proactively monitor them. Again, as I presume you are well aware, the Government of Canada has put in place a number of activities to support and encourage Canadian companies to abide by corporate social responsibility standards. We're very proactive in the sense of reaching out to Canadian companies and making them aware of these standards and these expectations.

I know, for instance, that in a number of countries in Latin America we have conducted specific seminars for the attention of Canadian companies and also for the local civil society organizations to have dialogue and discussions on best practices in the extractive sector, in mining in particular, so that companies and civil society organizations can be better aware of what the norms are out there and what the expectations are. This, as a matter of fact, we conduct in a number of countries in Latin America.

The last point I will mention here is that we have also helped establish what we call *mesa de diálogo*, tables of consultation between government, civil society, and enterprises in many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean specifically on mining issues.

● (1340)

Mr. Adam Vaughan: That being said, often the first alert that we get as Canadians and the first alert that we get in our ridings is from the activities of church groups or NGOs that are on the ground as well as inside Honduras and countries like that, where they are supporting civil society to pursue and protect human rights. That may stand in contrast to political or economic objectives of Canadian companies. We're currently in a climate where the charitable and political activities of charities are being called into question by Canada Revenue Agency.

Is there any threat to the important role that charities in Canada play in protecting human rights in Honduras, which may be in direct conflict with Canadian investments in Honduras? Is there any worry that the policy of auditing charities that do political work may in fact inhibit our ability to provide protection for human rights in Honduras as a result?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Mr. Chair, I would believe that this is an area that is a little bit beyond my expertise. The treatment of charities in Canada is not.... I think there are probably people better than I to answer that question.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Let's try to focus it clearly to where I think it is one of your areas of responsibility. If part of your mission in Honduras is to protect human rights and to speak out on that as part of the international treaties we're signatories to, if Canadian organizations, NGOs, charities, and church groups are acting in concert with your mandate but are in conflict with the Canada Revenue Agency's mandate to not be political, how do we make sure that the activities that cooperate with one wing of the government are not being undermined by the policy of another wing of the government and as a result human rights are put in harm's way?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: I can attest that our diplomatic missions, our embassies abroad, interact very regularly and often with civil society organizations, local civil society organizations and Canadian ones as well. This I can attest to as a fact.

On the issue of how Revenue Canada manages charities in Canada, again, Mr. Chair, with due respect I think that this is an issue that is beyond my area of expertise.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

We'll go now to Mr. Schellenberger, please.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Through the partnerships for development innovation program, the Justice Education Society has also worked with Honduran law enforcement and justice institutions to reduce the impunity by providing training and tools such as crime scene kits. This interests me very much. When Rick Craig was here, he said that law enforcement didn't have the tools or didn't know how to investigate a crime scene. You have said that 570 justice professionals have been trained. Is this recently, or has this been over some time, and does the program still go on?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: The program ran for a number of years and was completed at the end of 2013. That being said, training that is provided in the context of institutional strengthening projects is useful, but the challenge of enhancing the capacity of an institution is ongoing. You may have trained so many people in one field, but there's always more training needed in other fields.

We can look at how many years it takes to train people for Canadian police forces or security forces. It takes years. So in the context of Honduras, again, there are steps and progress that are being made, but it takes time.

• (1345)

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Would some of these people who have already been trained train people to follow them or to increase this so the training is always growing? Is this being done?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Often in our cooperation projects we conduct what we call train-the-trainers activities which specifically enable what you suggest. However, I would be hard-pressed to provide you the specific information on that specific project. I'm sorry.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Okay.

After it arbitrarily dismissed four supreme court judges in 2012, Congress passed legislation empowering itself to remove justices and the attorney general. To your knowledge, does the current Government of Honduras continue to stand by this decision?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: To my knowledge, nothing has changed on this front since the arrival of the new administration.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Okay.

According to a report by the National Autonomous University of Honduras, between January 2011 and November 2012 police killed 149 civilians, including 18 individuals under the age of 19. The government did not respond to calls by the university to provide information on how many of those killings have been subject to investigations or have resulted in criminal convictions.

Under President Hernández, has there been any increase in the complete lack of police transparency?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Again, what I can point to are some of the measures that have been taken, particularly since the arrival of the new administration. There are a number of them, including specifically the aim of the police to strengthen the capacity of the police to better handle human rights challenges and issues, including the specific unit on human rights that has been created within the police.

Whether that will in practice allow them to correct some of the abuses that have taken place in Honduras, including those in the recent few years, we will have to see.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: What steps have been taken by the Honduran government to combat the high level of drug trafficking and drug-related violence?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: The main initiatives we are aware of are those that have to do with the strengthening of investigative capacities and all the related judicial officials. Those have been the main initiatives.

Of course, those initiatives, in strengthening the capacity of the prosecution and the performance of the justice sector, if they are brought to success, are useful to combat crime generally, including of course drug trafficking, which is a very serious issue in Honduras. They are useful as well to better protect human rights. They can be useful as well in matters of economic crimes. The way I look at it, it is a generic approach to try to combat crime.

You have pointed out, sir, the specific problem of drugs, which I think we cannot underestimate, because it does undermine economic development; it undermines the justice system, and it also feeds corruption. It has a very serious effect on all of the functioning of Honduran institutions, so fighting crime generally, and fighting drugs in particular, is of course high on the agenda of President Hernández. He made that clear from the moment he took office.

•(1350)

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Thank you.

Do I have any more time?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: One of the Canadian companies in Honduras I think is Silvan....

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Gildan?

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Yes, Gildan. I was told that they employed about 40,000 in Honduras. Am I close on that?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: I thought the last number I heard was 24,000.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Okay. If it's around 24,000, how do you look at their record on human rights in Honduras?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: They have certainly put in place a number of measures towards the treatment of their staff. I am not an expert in labour conditions or textile factories; however, I can say as a layperson that I visited their factory and, compared to a number of other factories I have seen around the world, this one is certainly a state-of-the-art one. Again, I simply report this here as a layman, because I'm not an expert on labour conditions. I think that if some of us were to go there and see their plant, we would at least say that it certainly looks state of the art. That's what I would report.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Now we'll turn to our last questioner. Mr. Benskin, please.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Welcome. Thank you for your comments. As my colleague expressed earlier, your comments and positive view of the progress in Honduras is something we can think about.

A couple of times you've mentioned this 132 access number. My thoughts are in terms of what kind of effort is going into acclimatizing the public to the changes. A lot of times there are things that happen within a government, and a government says that it's going to do this and it's going to do that, but the people take a little longer to be convinced because they've lived under certain conditions for so long.

What kind of effort is being made to assure people that when they call this 132 number they're not actually giving up information on themselves and there's not going to be a door kicked in at some point later in the evening and they're going to be dragged away?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Thank you very much for your question, sir.

The only thing I can attest to is that at least so far we have not heard reports of people who have called in or reported human rights situations and have been subjected to specific harassment. I can only say this: we have not heard reports that this has happened.

More generally, it is certain that Honduras is an environment where it is difficult for human rights defenders to advocate for people's rights. That's why, as many of you have referred to, there are murders and harassment and so on, unfortunately. There are two ways that Canada works to try to improve the situation.

First of all, we're working with the government, and I've already talked enough about that, but also, we work with civil society. There are civil society organizations in Honduras. A number of them are active. A number of them are capable. We do provide them some support, so that in turn those civil society organizations can feel better equipped and better empowered to do what they want to do, and also so they can be comforted to some extent by the fact that they do have the visibility of Canada and the international community. We also do this work with the civil organizations.

The last time I was in Honduras, I met with one organization that specializes simply in criminal statistics. They monitor the statistics of the government and they report publicly. The kind of work they do brings the issue of human rights to the broader attention of the public. This is happening and we're supporting them, but again, I think we all realize that it is a difficult environment for civil society organizations to work in.

•(1355)

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Thank you.

In a changing world or a changing environment in any country that's gone through this type of upheaval, a healthy judiciary is key.

As an anecdote, I went to Kenya. I think it was the year before last. It was the second trip I made. In the first trip, we spoke with the chief justice, who had committed that within the year leading up to the elections to come, he would clean up the judiciary to the point where people would have faith in it, enough faith to use that process as opposed to the violence that occurred in the elections prior to that.

When we went back that year, he had actually managed to instill that faith through re-interviewing many of the judges and dismissing a significant number of them. This interview process was not done internally. Judges were brought in from other countries, from African nations, to make up that tribunal.

I know from my colleagues' questions that the judiciary there is not in a healthy state. Is there any kind of work being done to strengthen the judiciary and to rebuild or build faith in the process of law as an alternative to other means of retribution?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Thank you very much, sir, for your question.

Mr. Chair, with respect to the judiciary, again, we do a lot of training in various ways with the judiciary. I will not pretend that this is specifically aimed at, writ large, having the ambition of suddenly changing the image of the judiciary, but some training is taking place.

However, I can point to one other initiative that has been undertaken in another justice-related organization, the police. One of the tasks of the human rights unit that has been created within the police is supposed to be the vetting of the police. I don't think they are there yet, but it is on their agenda. I think that if this takes place and if there is a serious mechanism in place that actually vets policemen and policewomen, that might contribute to increasing not only the performance but the image of the police.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Has the relationship improved at all overall, do you know, in regard to the relationship between the police and the general public? I guess statistics are the only way we can measure that. Has there been a significant drop in the types of human rights abuses that were in place before the election of Hernández? Has there been a significant drop in those types of activities such as unwarranted searches, unwarranted arrests, and so forth?

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: I would not be in a position to provide reliable data on this specific issue. However, one thing we can point to relates both to the issue of the performance of the police and to the issue of confidence from the public vis-à-vis the police. What we hear, as I mentioned before, is that there tends to be better cooperation by witnesses in police investigations. I think that's an encouraging sign. If this is happening, it might be—it might be—because people have a bit more confidence in the police. That's all that I could report specifically on that.

The Chair: Do you have another question?

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: No, I don't.

The Chair: All right. We are just about at the end. I did say that if we had any final questions arising.... Given the fact that we have about a minute to go, I'll just go around the table. Does anyone want to pursue anything else? All right.

In that case, to our two witnesses, thank you very much. We are very grateful that you were able to come and provide testimony.

Mr. Henri-Paul Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the distinguished members of the committee for this conversation today. It was a pleasure.

The Chair: Thank you. You're free to go.

Members of the committee, you are not free to go because we have an item of business. I've circulated two motions that have been drafted by our analysts. One relates to organ harvesting. The other relates to Iran. Representatives from each of the parties have seen them. Am I correct in assuming that there is a consensus to adopt each of these two motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Agreed? Okay. Then—

• (1400)

Mr. David Sweet: The one on organ harvesting I remember. Can I quickly see the one on Iran?

The Chair: Yes.

Let's say we've adopted the organ harvesting one. The one on Iran we'll hold until we—

Mr. David Sweet: I probably saw it. I just can't—

The Chair: All right. Both are adopted.

Thank you very much, colleagues.

Is there any other business?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Could we go in camera for a moment?

The Chair: Let's go in camera just for a moment.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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