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• (1530)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

[Translation]

I must inform you that the clerk of the committee can receive motions only for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, entertain points of order or participate in debate.

[English]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party. I am now ready to receive motions for the chair.

Go ahead, Mr. Miller.

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs, Lib.): I move to appoint Bob Nault as chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Marc Miller that Bob Nault be elected as the chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Are there any speeches?

We'll save those for later.

The Clerk: Are there any other motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried, and Robert Nault is duly elected as the chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I invite Mr. Nault to take the chair.

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.):

Colleagues, if the committee is in agreement, I'd invite the clerk to proceed with the election of the vice-chairs, but before we do that, perhaps everybody could just say hello, who they are and where they're from. I always like introductions; it kind of makes me feel as if I'm at home. Why don't we start with Dean, and then go around and say a few words. I don't want long speeches, though, about all the years you've been in Parliament and all the things you've done.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thanks, Bob.

I'm Dean Allison, member for Niagara West and former chair of the foreign affairs committee, for the last five years.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): I'm Peter Kent, member for Thornhill, former chair of the national defence committee, but it was a pleasure in the last Parliament to participate in a couple of joint sessions with foreign affairs. I'm delighted to be here, although I would have preferred the other side of the table.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I'm Garnett Genuis, member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan. I'm not ordinarily a member of the committee, but I believe I'll be substituting here for most of the month of February, and I look forward to working together with everyone here for that period.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Good afternoon.

My name is Hélène Laverdière, member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie. I had the pleasure of sitting on this committee in the previous Parliament, starting with my election in 2011. I must say I'm a bit sad to see that I am the only woman on this committee, but here we are. It's 2016!

I want to thank Dean Allison for all the work he did in the last Parliament.

[English]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): I am Pam Goldsmith-Jones, member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country. I'm the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): I am Omar Alhabra. I am member of Parliament for Mississauga Centre and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Consular Affairs.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): I am Peter Fragiskatos, MP for London North Centre. I am very much looking forward to getting to know all of you and working with you.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Miller: My name is Marc Miller, member for Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs. Ms. Laverdière, I just want to say that we are all feminists here. So you are in good company.

I also want to thank those who have come to participate in this meeting. I thank them for their commitment.

[English]

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): I am Michael Levitt, the member of Parliament for York Centre. I am honoured to serve with such an esteemed group of colleagues from across the Commons.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): I am Jati Sidhu, member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon. If you're wondering, it's in British Columbia.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): I am Raj Saini, member for Kitchener Centre.

Mr. Kent, there is a seat for you if you ever want to cross over to this side.

The Chair: Thank you very much to everyone. I very much appreciated that.

I am Bob Nault. I am from the riding of Kenora in northern Ontario.

I'm looking forward to working with all of you on making Canada a better place, and I will enjoy every minute of it in committee. Committees have always been my favourite thing.

Just for those who don't know, I was a member of Parliament from 1988 to 2004. I've sat in every particular role I could find, except they wouldn't let me be Prime Minister or Speaker, but I've tried everything else, so I'm looking forward to this challenge with you.

Again, thank you very much for introducing yourselves.

I'll turn it back to the clerk. Thank you.

Oh, one second...we were just introducing ourselves. Go ahead.

• (1535)

Ms. Karina Gould (Burlington, Lib.): I am Karina Gould, member of Parliament for Burlington. I am the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for International Development.

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition. I'm now prepared to receive motions for the position of the first vice-chair.

Hon. Peter Kent: I would like to nominate Dean Allison.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Peter Kent that Dean Allison be the first vice-chair.

Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Dean Allison duly elected as the first vice-chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition. I'm now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair.

Mr. Michael Levitt: I would like to nominate H el ene Laverdi ere.

The Clerk: It's been moved by Michael Levitt that Madame H el ene Laverdi ere be elected as the second vice-chair of the committee.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Madame Laverdi ere duly elected as second vice-chair.

The Chair: Colleagues, I assume there are other procedural motions we could get into. I wanted to get some feedback from you as to how far you want to go today. I was thinking we might want to get the subcommittee sorted out for the purposes of discussing how we will do our business and how we will operate as a committee. Once that discussion is had, then we could come back to full committee with some recommendations as to how we will proceed and then move some of those motions. We can do that or we can move on some of the motions that are already before us, depending on what your wishes are.

Dean.

Mr. Dean Allison: Why don't we work on the routine motions? We could get started on those and then maybe have some discussions, as you said, on the subcommittee and all those other things afterwards.

The Chair: Colleagues, you'll see in front of you the first motion being proposed, which deals with analysts. For the sake of the committee I'll read it:

That the Committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Would you like to invite the analysts to come to the table now?

The Chair: Are they here?

• (1540)

The Clerk: They are.

The Chair: Come on over and we'll have you introduce yourselves.

Ms. Allison Goody (Analyst): Hello. My name is Allison Goody. I'm one of the analysts from the Library of Parliament. I have been working for the foreign affairs committee since September 2009 and am very much looking forward to working with all of you.

Mr. Brian Hermon (Analyst): Hi. My name is Brian Hermon. I'm also an analyst with the Library of Parliament. I worked with this committee during the second session of the last Parliament, and I'm very much looking forward to working with everyone as well.

The Chair: Welcome, and I'm looking forward to working with you.

The next motion is on the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. It may have to be changed as our party has changed the way we are going to approach this. It should read:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five (5) members: the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs and two government members.

Are we in favour of that?

Dean, do you want to speak to the motion?

Mr. Dean Allison: I guess my question is about the two other members. Would it make sense to have one from the opposition and one from the government? I'm just asking that question.

It can't hurt. If you don't try, it never happens, right?

The Chair: It might make sense to certain sides of the table, but we would prefer to have two members of the government, as was the case under the previous government. The two parliamentary secretaries were from the government, so there is no real difference, except in our view, because of our changes as a government, they will be committee members.

As you know, parliamentary secretaries are not official members of the committee, or voting members, but that was one of the reasons I wanted to talk to the agenda and procedure subcommittee. I think we could have a discussion about the role of parliamentary secretaries for our benefit as a committee. As you know, we can decide on our own how we want things to be done, so I would like to have that conversation with you as we work our way through. The parliamentary secretaries have a lot to offer. I'd hate to think they were just going to keep looking at the chairman the whole time over the next years.

The motion would read:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five (5) members: the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs and two government members

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thanks for trying, Dean. I appreciate that.

The next one is on reduced quorum:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three (3) members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after fifteen (15) minutes, regardless of members present.

That has been sort of standard practice for as long as I can remember. Are there any issues with that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On the questioning of witnesses, this is a discussion. Basically, I'm very interested in this discussion later on, but let me see if I can just break this down:

That witnesses be given ten (10) minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated—

—and if everyone here is willing, I'd like to defer this one and have a conversation about how you want to do the questioning. For example, if the committee is at all interested, there is nothing stopping us and I'd like to know what your views are if other members come to the committee on a specific topic on which they have interest, and even though they are not committee members, whether we will allow them to ask questions.

Hon. Peter Kent: Is that recognized parties?

The Chair: Yes, that's recognized parties and otherwise. That's the conversation I would like to have to see what people's views are of that, whether it's Elizabeth May or the Bloc. If no one is in favour of that right off the bat, then we won't spend a lot of time talking

about it, but I thought we would have a discussion about the allocation of time.

Obviously, the standard time for the parties will be adhered to, but there's also the opportunity for other members of Parliament. I include parliamentary secretaries when I say that.

• (1545)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, could I just ask a question on that? My understanding is, if other members come—from a recognized party at least, or even other members in general—that members who have existing allotments in terms of the rounds of questions could, without any problem, defer their time to those members, right?

The Chair: I am referring to others.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Members could defer their time if they wished in those cases as well, right?

The Chair: Well, what I was really talking about was, at the discretion of the chair, allowing people the opportunity to participate, but as long as it doesn't affect the time of the official parties.

Hon. Peter Kent: Wouldn't that necessitate one side or the other relinquishing one speaking position?

The Chair: Yes, it would.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to have that discussion another time, but I think it should be for the full committee to have that discussion. What I mean is not the subcommittee but the whole committee, so I'm happy to defer.

The Chair: This is just so people see what took place in PROC, the procedure and House affairs committee. These are the changes based on the changes to government and the parties, as far as their time goes. We can proceed with looking at it from this perspective or otherwise.

Let me read it for you:

That witnesses be given ten (10) minutes to make their opening statement; and that during the questioning of witnesses the time allocated to each questioner be as follows: for the first round of questioning, seven (7) minutes to a representative of each party in the following order: Liberal, Conservative, NDP and Liberal; for the second round, five (5) minutes be allocated in the following order: Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal; followed by NDP, three (3) minutes.

Peter.

Hon. Peter Kent: PROC generally doesn't follow the same meeting time frames that we occasionally do in foreign affairs, in terms of one-hour or two-hour blocks. Would the second round simply be repeated as many times as necessary? For example, the last time the rotation did change certainly on some committees depending on how many rounds were necessary.

The Chair: I think the objective of the exercise is to reflect the majority on the government side, so we want to make sure we get a fair number of questions or the ability to ask questions, based on the percentages. That's the idea of this motion.

I'm at your disposal as far as what you might think goes.

Michael.

Mr. Michael Levitt: I'd like to propose that we do six minutes in rounds one, two, three, and four, so it would be Conservative, Liberal, NDP, and then Liberal. Then in round two it would be six, six, six, five, and three, for Liberal, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, and NDP, for a total of 50 minutes.

The Chair: Are you following that, Madame?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I would need to make some calculations.

[*Translation*]

I would like to comment on Mr. Kent's last question. It seems to me that, if any time is left, we should repeat the order from the first round. That is how I understood his question.

[*English*]

After round one and round two, when there's still time left, then we should go back to round one, it seems to me, but I would have to calculate this. I have no comment on this one yet.

The Chair: Dean.

Mr. Dean Allison: I don't think we have a problem with it in terms of that thought process. It should be fair and representative of what's in the House. I think that our biggest concern, when we start talking about other parties, is to make sure that everyone on the committee who was present would get a chance to speak first, before anyone else would.

I don't know if it would be that much of a problem. We could talk about that later. I think that's what you're getting at.

At the very least, all of the members or their equivalents, their fill-ins, should have a chance to speak before we open it up.

• (1550)

The Chair: That's very much in line with my thinking. Obviously, regular committee members will get the first opportunity, before anybody else who's not on the committee does.

Hélène.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: This is on Mr. Levitt's proposal.

[*Translation*]

That gives us a total of 50 minutes instead of 51 minutes. That is one less minute for the NDP. That is not really acceptable for us.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Raj Saini: I didn't understand that. The total time is 50 minutes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Yes, and in the current proposal the total time is 51 minutes. In Mr. Levitt's proposal the total time is 50 minutes. However, in the current proposal, in what we have in front of us, the NDP is entitled to 10 minutes. As you'll see, I talk a lot. I'm rather talkative. With Mr. Levitt's proposal, I lose a minute. It may be a gain for your own mental health, but it's a loss for me, so I can't agree to that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your comment.

To make this formal, Mr. Levitt is putting a motion forward. If he would read it one more time, we'll move to put the question.

Mr. Michael Levitt: The rotation by time would be the following: in rounds one, two, three, and four, in the order Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Liberal, it would be six, six, six, six. In round two, in the order Liberal, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, NDP, it would be six, six, six, five, three. This would total 50 minutes, which I believe is representative of the proportion in the House as well.

The Chair: You've heard the motion. I'll put the question.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: There's an amendment to the motion.

The Chair: Well, it's a little late for that. I've already put the question.

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

The Chair: Keep in mind that we'll be very flexible on these kinds of things, as we should be.

Thank you for that, Michael. I appreciate it.

The next procedural motion is on document distribution. The motion reads:

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the Committee only when the documents are available in both official languages and that witnesses be advised accordingly.

I would like to make an amendment to this document. I'd like to include the parliamentary secretaries for the sake of the distribution of documents. As you may imagine, they'll be here the whole time, and it would be useful for the clerk to distribute the documents to the parliamentary secretaries for their information. I'm sure you'll also distribute it to everybody that you want to anyway, but I think it just makes good common sense.

If people are in favour of that, I would make that small amendment.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I don't object to that in principle, but I would suggest that if this provision is made for parliamentary secretaries, then we allow members who wish to come to this committee on a regular basis to request that they receive documents distributed to them directly as well, regardless of the party. That seems like a fair way to operate.

The Chair: The clerk has brought it to my attention that when we are in the process of doing reports that are considered to be not for public consumption before they are completed, there would not be a distribution of documents to people who are not on the committee. That is, of course, the standard procedure of how we have operated in committees for many years.

I think I may have to forgo what I was trying to accomplish—allowing documents to go to the parliamentary secretaries because they will be here—because it has to be members of the committee.

If you'll allow me, we'll go back to the standard motion:

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the Committee only when the documents are available in both official languages and that witnesses be advised accordingly.

Mr. Kent.

•(1555)

Hon. Peter Kent: Just for clarification, given that we've already begun the transition to paperless committee work, should there be some reference here to the fact that it would be electronically distributed to members' iPads, for instance? Somehow we need to recognize, I think, the fact that much of the document distribution is intended to be digital in the future.

The Clerk: The distribution of documents involves either hard copies or electronic copies. Sometimes only paper copies may be available, if they're something that the witnesses provide.

Hon. Peter Kent: Sure.

The Clerk: Distribution can mean electronic format as well. It's included.

Hon. Peter Kent: Understood.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, before we move to the next item, I'd like to move a motion that, following the proposal from Mr. Levitt, an extra minute be added to the NDP talking time in the second round, bringing it from three to four.

The Chair: Okay, you've heard the motion, so we're going to have a discussion to make an amendment, which is a little unusual since we've moved beyond that, but for the sake of being fair, let's have that discussion.

Garnett, do you want to touch that?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I want to say I support that. I think it's reasonable based on the original time to the new proposal. I think the new proposal flows a bit better in terms of having equal time throughout, but I wouldn't want to shortchange the NDP from something they had in a previous version.

Mr. Dean Allison: I want extra minutes.

The Chair: Now Dean wants 10 extra minutes.

Mr. Dean Allison: Just one is all right.

The Chair: Just one.

I don't have any problems with it personally as the chair, and if my colleagues don't have any problems with it, then we'll make the small amendment and we'll move on.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: We can vote on it.

The Chair: Yes.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: The next motion is on working meals:

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the Committee and its Subcommittees.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next is on witnesses' expenses:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two (2) representatives per organization; provided that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: This next motion deals with staff at in camera meetings:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each Committee member be allowed to have one staff at an in camera meeting and that one additional person from each party be allowed to be present.

I guess that was the standard motion last time. I don't see any problem with that.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is on transcripts of in camera meetings:

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the Committee Clerk's office for consultation by members of the Committee or by their staff.

It's a standard motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is on notice of motions:

That forty-eight (48) hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice of motion be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed to members in both official languages;

That, for motions requiring forty-eight (48) hours' notice, the Chair be authorized to defer consideration until fifteen (15) minutes prior to the adjournment time for the meeting as indicated in the notice of meeting and that these motions be received no later than 4:00 p.m.

That sounds reasonable.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is on gifts:

That the Committee be authorized to purchase gifts to be presented to foreign hosts and visiting delegations.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is on purchase of documents:

That the Committee be authorized to purchase documents for the use of the Committee.

This is another standard process.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one is on the subcommittee:

That, pursuant to Standing Orders 108(1) and 108(2), a Subcommittee on International Human Rights be chaired by a member elected by the Subcommittee, and be established to inquire into matters relating to the promotion of respect for international human rights, as may be referred to it by the Committee;

That the Subcommittee be composed of seven (7) members or associate members of which four (4) shall be government members, two (2) shall be from the Conservative Party, and one (1) from the New Democratic Party, to be named following the usual consultations with the Whips;

That the Subcommittee be empowered to send for persons, papers, and records, to receive evidence, to sit during a time when the Committee is not sitting in Ottawa, to sit when the Committee is sitting outside the Parliamentary Precinct and to sit during periods when the House stands adjourned; and

That the Chair of the Subcommittee meet with the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure of the Committee at their mutual discretion.

•(1600)

The Chair: Peter.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Chair, should we specify that one of the government four should be designated chair?

The Chair: I would suspect so.

Just to reflect the change to the second paragraph, “That the Subcommittee be chaired by a government member; That the membership be composed of seven (7) members or associate members of which four (4) shall be government members, two (2) shall be from the Conservative Party, and one (1) shall be from the New Democratic Party, to be named following the usual consultations with the Whips”.

All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Those are all the procedural motions.

Before we adjourn, I think we should have a discussion about process down the road, and I'll hear from all the members about where they want to take this.

I wanted to make a few suggestions for all the members of the committee. The first would be to invite the officials to start to brief us as a committee. I think that's standard procedure. I also think it's a good idea for new members to have people from Global Affairs and international affairs come and talk to us, to get a sense of what the issues were in the previous Parliament, and of course, the issues of the day. That would be our agenda going forward, but obviously, we'd like to have a meeting of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure before that. I thought I would throw that into the discussion so we could invite them sooner rather than later, because I understand it takes a little while to get people to come to the committee.

Hélène.

• (1605)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I'm sorry. I hope my timing is not too far off again.

[Translation]

I would like to know whether I could file notices of motion before today's meeting is adjourned. I'm not talking about discussing the motions, of course. I just wanted to file them.

[English]

The Chair: I would prefer we didn't start off that way.

What I'd like to do is have a good discussion with the committee about the work ahead. There will be plenty of time for notices of motion and the like. I don't necessarily think it makes much sense to start that process, but I can't stop the committee members from moving a notice of motion. It's perfectly legitimate for anyone to do that at this stage.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: So, could I read the two notices of motion I have before me? We could discuss them at a later date.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, you can.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have two notices of motion I would like to....

[English]

The Chair: Before we start, do we have copies of these motions for the members?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Yes.

The Chair: Just so the committee is aware, these are notices of motion. An NDP member will read them out, and they will be tabled. Then we'll go to further discussion on committee business.

Hélène, go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to give notice of the following motion:

That, pursuant to standing orders 108(1) and 108(2), a Subcommittee on Arms Control to be chaired by a member elected by the Subcommittee, be established to inquire into matters relating to Canadian arms exports and arms export permits;

that the Subcommittee be composed of seven (7) members or associate members of which four (4) shall be government members, two (2) shall be Conservative Party members, and one (1) from the New Democratic Party, to be named following the usual consultations with the Whips;

that the Subcommittee be empowered to send for persons, papers and records, to receive evidence, to sit during a time when the Committee is not sitting in Ottawa, to sit when the Committee is sitting outside the Parliamentary Precinct and to sit during periods when the House stands adjourned;

and that the Chair of the Subcommittee meet with the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure of the Committee at their mutual discretion.

I also want to give notice of the following motion:

That, pursuant to standing order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development undertake a study on Women, Peace and Security; including an examination of the efforts of the Government of Canada to implement and support the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security (including resolutions 1325 and 1889 on the participation of women in peace processes; resolutions 1820, 1888 and 1960 on sexual violence in conflict; and resolution 2122 on women's leadership in conflict resolution and peacebuilding); and report its findings back to the House.

Thank you.

• (1610)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. It is noted that these notices of motion have been submitted to the committee.

Before that, I think, Garnett, you wanted to speak to some other matter.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, I did, Mr. Chair.

I'm the vice-chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet. The foreign minister from Tibet is going to be here in Ottawa in various meetings on Parliament Hill on February 16, which is the scheduled date of our next committee.

I know this is moving rather quickly, and the chair may be able to tell me whether this requires a simple majority or unanimous consent to move forward on, but I think it would be very worthwhile if the committee were to take advantage of the opportunity and try to schedule a visit to this committee by the minister from the Tibetan government in exile. It would give us an opportunity to ask some important questions about that government and about the upcoming election in March for the Tibetan government in exile. It would also give us an opportunity to explore some broader questions about human rights issues in the region.

As much as it might be nice to have a bit more time to fit this into a broader study, because the minister is going to be here on February 16, we probably need to decide today if we're going to do it or not in order to make it happen.

The Chair: You've put the chair in a pretty difficult spot. On the one hand, we've just spoken to the process and procedure of giving notice, and you're basically coming forward without notice and asking the committee to make a decision.

Unless we decide as a committee to change our process, I'll have to rule that as not admissible and not debatable, simply because you're not giving us notice and/or giving us written notice. That's the procedure we have decided to follow. Until we have had the chance to sit down and talk about these things as a committee as a whole, I think we'll have to leave it at that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Could I have the opportunity to ask the committee, then, for unanimous consent? If we have unanimous consent, my understanding is that we can move forward in spite of those rules. Right?

The Chair: I don't think so, but I'm at the disposal of the committee.

Does anyone want to speak to this request, colleagues? No?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chairman, I'm a bit confused, because you said it's up to the committee, if I understand that correctly.

Can I ask if there is agreement by the committee to move forward to do this?

If anyone objects, then we won't do it, but if there is a consensus that this is something worth doing, then let's seize the moment and do it.

The Chair: Before we go down that road, Garnett, you're basically asking for a motion to move beyond the rules of procedure that we've agreed to and to allow the committee, which is their right, to approve your request to have the ambassador come to this committee.

Which date are you proposing?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just to clarify, it's not the ambassador; it's the foreign minister. It would be February 16.

The Chair: All right, colleagues, you've heard the motion by our colleague who wants to forgo our procedures and move it.

(Motion negatived)

Mr. Marc Miller: Just to make sure we're on the same page, there is a process we want to respect. Obviously, that is a very important meeting, and if we have the time, we should meet. Madam

Laverdière wants to form two committees. They are equally important. I think we have to have ground rules.

I get it, Garnett. It's a great idea and it conveys our respect to him, but I think we need a process and ground rules.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's just that this particular issue is time-sensitive. She's not going to be here on February 18 or in March. She'll be here on February 16.

I'm sorry. I wouldn't have brought it forward if it weren't time-sensitive in this way. I would be happy to follow the normal procedure. It's just that this is our first meeting, and that will be our second meeting. Either we do it or we don't. We voted and that's where we are.

•(1615)

The Chair: Hélène is next.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: First to clarify, I understand it's a foreign minister of the government in exile, of course.

Of course, I would be in agreement with meeting with that person. I think it could be a great opportunity for us. If it's not possible, at least it has happened in the past that the chair would organize a less formal meeting or a lunch at the parliamentary restaurant, or something like that, so that the committee could meet those representatives.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just on that, for the committee's information, I believe there will be a reception after question period in any event, so members will have an opportunity to meet more informally. I would still see some value in having the opportunity for a more formal presentation, but that would be at the will of the committee.

The Chair: Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: I just wanted to correct the protocol. My friend Garnett was asking members questions directly. Any question a member has must be funnelled through the chair. Then it's up to the chair, if he is comfortable putting that motion forward, to ask the members if it's appropriate. That's all.

Thank you.

The Chair: Dean, you're next.

Mr. Dean Allison: Very quickly, I was going to mention what Hélène said. In the past, we've met informally, even around the table, but just not recorded it. That is another option. I'll just leave it at that, because this is time-sensitive.

The Chair: Peter.

Hon. Peter Kent: I would just say that circumstances have placed the chair and the committee in a difficult situation given that we've just approved routine motions. But just as a reminder, should similar circumstances present themselves in the future, the committee is the master of its own domain. I think Hélène and Dean have suggested some good alternatives in this particular case.

The Chair: Why don't you let the chair explore those alternatives and see what we can come up with, and we will stick with the orders of the day?

Would it be acceptable for the chair to ask the committee to allow a motion requesting that Global Affairs, the appropriate officials, come to the committee at their earliest convenience so that we can all be briefed? That would give us an opportunity to start talking in our subcommittee about the agenda, and obviously we'll also deal with the motions that have been presented by the NDP.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, I think that's a very good idea and I understand that will also be to go over the issues that are hot right now. I was just wondering what kind of level you were thinking of. Did you mean ADM or deputy minister, or should we let the department decide who they're going to send to talk about the hot issues?

The Chair: It certainly is my intention to get someone as high up as we can get, who knows what the issues are in the department. I'll leave it to the officials to find out who's available and in what time frame. I'd like to get the committee up and running. If the department is not really seized with or ready to get into that discussion, then we'll have to come back to the committee and inform you of that.

Peter.

Hon. Peter Kent: Chair, a number of other committees have moved forward by offering an invitation to the minister to discuss his mandate letter.

The Chair: Yes. Well, without going too far down the road, that was obviously going to be my second discussion with you, with a motion to request that the minister come at his convenience to brief us. I also think that makes good sense, Peter, so that was certainly my intent to get the committee off on the right foot.

Can we start with the motion, though, to request our officials to approach Global Affairs and the appropriate officials to come to this committee as soon as possible? Could I make that motion? All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Okay. Let's leave it at that. It is my intention as well to pursue the discussion with the minister about coming as soon as possible, which would make good sense for all of us. There are two ministers, as you know, so I would want you to keep that in mind. We will request that and see where we go with it. I'll report back to the committee on those matters.

Mr. Allison.

● (1620)

Mr. Dean Allison: I promise to keep this short. I want the committee members to consider this.

I believe that as the foreign affairs committee we should be in New York and in Washington from time to time. We don't always get to it because studies and things show up, and we don't get a chance to build those relationships. With what we do—and we're going to talk about what we're going to move forward on—that should be part of the thought process as well, that we have a chance to reach out to our counterparts in both those places.

I'll leave it at that. I'll address the rest of these things at subcommittee.

The Chair: That sounds good.

There is no further business, so I will bring this meeting to a close.

I think we have a regular slot, right?

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: The next official date is February 16. I'd like to see if we could get the subcommittee to meet before that. I'll attempt to do that. I'll reach out to you.

Thank you very much, colleagues. It was a very good meeting. I hope to see you bright and chipper here after the week of constituency work.

The meeting is adjourned.

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