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

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Monday, January 31, 2022



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#### • (1835)

#### [English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): Members of the subcommittee, I see that now we have quorum, so I will go ahead and proceed with the election of the chair.

#### [Translation]

I must inform members that the clerk of the subcommittee can only receive motions for the election of the Chair.

#### [English]

We can proceed.

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on December 13, the chair must be a member of the government party.

Are there any motions for the position of chair?

I have Mr. Zuberi.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Madam Clerk, I'd like to put forth a motion to have our colleague on this committee, Ali Ehsassi, be the chair for this subcommittee.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

Are there any further motions?

Seeing no further motions, is it the pleasure of the subcommittee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** Thank you. I declare that the motion has been carried and Mr. Ehsassi is duly elected as chair of the subcommittee.

Mr. Ehsassi, I will give you the floor for a moment, and I'm also sending you a quick email.

**The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)):** Yes, absolutely. It's great to hear that you will be sending me an email, because I will look to you for guidance throughout this process.

I just want to thank all the members—especially Mr. Zuberi, the person who nominated me—and everyone else on this committee. I certainly look very much forward to working with each and every single member of this committee.

I have always been impressed by the work that this committee has undertaken and, for the most part, it has been collegial. I have no doubt that every member is passionate about a number of different issues, so I look forward to making sure that we can continue to work together to focus on issues that are of concern to all members of this committee.

Thank you.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Ehsassi.

If you would like to seek the consent of the subcommittee, I could then proceed with the elections of the vice-chairs.

The Chair: Yes.

Do we have consent for the subcommittee to proceed with vicechairs?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll proceed.

I am now prepared to receive motions for the position of first vice-chair. Are there any motions to that effect?

I see a hand in the room. I believe it's Mr. Viersen's.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you.

I would like to nominate Mr. John Williamson for first vice-chair.

The Clerk: Are there any other motions?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Thank you.

I declare the motion carried and Mr. Williamson duly elected first vice-chair.

#### [Translation]

I am now prepared to receive motions for the First Vice-Chair.

Mr. Zuberi, you have the floor.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Madam Clerk, I would like to nominate Denis Trudel for second vice-chair.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mr. Zuberi that Denis Trudel be elected as second vice-chair of the subcommittee.

Are there any other motions?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Denis Trudel duly elected second vice-chair of the subcommittee.

[English]

Mr. Chair, I turn the meeting back to you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have not had a chance to look at your email yet, but as I understand it-and I've had some opportunity to speak to various members-there are a number of different issues that are of interest to the members as to what we should be focusing on.

That having been said, perhaps we should get that discussion going as to what those general issues are, even though, should members agree, perhaps we should give ourselves an opportunity after this committee to speak to each other and make sure that there is consensus and that we can accommodate as many of the members as possible to focus on the issues as they so desire.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): I think, as a point of order, Mr. Chair, we need to do the routine motions. It's a pretty important piece of work for us to get done before we can advance the committee's work.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West-Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would be happy to put some routine motions forward at this time if you think that would be appropriate.

The Chair: Yes. Absolutely. By all means.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a number of routine motions. I understand these have been agreed upon, so I will go through them one by one.

I would move, under "Analyst Services":

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.

The Chair: Unanimous.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Maybe, Mr. Chair, I will read them all, and if there's a problem with any of them-

The Chair: Absolutely. That makes eminent sense for sure.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Okay.

The next one is "Meeting Without a Quorum":

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence published when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including two members of the opposition parties and two members of the government party, but when travelling outside the Parliamentary Precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.

The next one is "Time for Opening Remarks and Questioning of Witnesses":

That, at the discretion of the Chair, witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated seven minutes for the first questioner of each party; and that thereafter five minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner in the following order: Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party; and that wherever possible the witnesses provide their statement to the subcommittee 72 hours in advance.

The next one is "Document Distribution":

That only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the Committee provided the documents are in both official languages, and that the witnesses be advised accordingly.

Next is "Working Meals":

That the clerk of the ... committee, at the discretion of the Chair, be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the [committee and its subcommittees.]

Then there is "Travel, Accommodation and Living Expenses of Witnesses":

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

#### On "Access to In Camera Meetings":

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff member at in camera meetings and that one additional person from each House officer's office-

• (1840)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil-Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Chair, we've had an issue with interpretation from English to French for about 40 seconds now.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Do all parties have the routine motions in both languages?

#### [English]

I understood that everyone had these written in both languages.

I will slow down.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: It doesn't matter, we need access to the interpretation. Maybe there is a sound issue or a problem with my headset. We can't hear the interpretation.

The Clerk: Give me a second to fix the problem.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I can read them the routine motions in both languages because I have them in front of me.

An hon. member: No need for that.

Mr. Denis Trudel: In any case, the interpretation problem remains.

#### [English]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I believe it is working now.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I'll go back to the beginning of the most recent one.

Regarding "Access to In Camera Meetings", I move:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff member at in camera meetings and that one additional person from each House officer's office be allowed to be present.

Regarding "Transcripts of In Camera Meetings", I move:

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; and that the analysts assigned to the committee also have access to the in camera transcripts.

Regarding "Notice of Motion", I move:

That a 48-hour notice, interpreted as two nights, be required for any substantive motion to be moved in committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that: (a) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday; (b) the motion be distributed to members and the offices of the whips of each recognized party in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said no-tice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour; (c) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day; and that when the committee is holding meetings outside the Parliamentary Precinct, no substantive motion may be moved.

## Regarding "Orders of Reference from the House Respecting Bills", I move:

That in relation to orders of reference from the House respecting Bills, (a) The clerk of the subcommittee shall, upon the subcommittee receiving such an order of reference, write to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the subcommittee to invite those members to file with the clerk of the subcommittee, in both official languages, any amendments to the bill, which is the subject of the said Order, which they would suggest that the subcommittee consider; (b) Suggested amendments filed, pursuant to paragraph (a), at least 48 hours prior to the start of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill to which the amendments relate shall be deemed to be proposed during the said consideration, provided that the subcommittee may, by motion, vary this deadline in respect of a given bill; and (c) During the clause-by-clause consideration of a bill, the Chair shall allow a member who filed suggested amendments, pursuant to paragraph (a), an opportunity to make brief representations in support of them.

#### Regarding "Technical tests for witnesses", I move:

That the clerk inform each witness who is to appear before the committee that the House administration support team must conduct technical tests to check the connectivity and the equipment used to ensure the best possible sound quality; and that the chair advises the committee at the start of each meeting of any witness who did not perform the required technical tests.

Finally, regarding "Linguistic Review", I move:

That all documents submitted for committee business that do not come from a federal department or Member's offices, or that have not been translated by the Translation Bureau be sent for prior linguistic review by the Translation Bureau before being distributed to members.

That's it.

• (1845)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Vandenbeld.

I take it that there's unanimous consent to all of those routine motions.

(Motions agreed to)

**The Chair:** I guess we should turn to the clerk. How would you like us to proceed?

The Clerk: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, it is up to you and the members of the subcommittee to decide. You're currently under the rubric of committee business, or subcommittee business in this case, so if members have other things they would like to bring forward at this time, this would be appropriate, but I leave it in your hands.

The Chair: I understand that Mr. Viersen was first.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** This is my first time on this committee. I see that there are folks who have been on this committee before.

It would be interesting to start out with a bit of a history of the committee and bring in some of the influential people who have been here, the legends of this committee, to hear their thoughts. That would help bring together what we would like to pursue and how to pursue it, some of the things that have been studied in the past and work that may have been left undone that might need to be followed up or looked at. That's the direction that I was hoping for in our first meeting.

#### Thanks, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Viersen. It's good to know that there's someone else who is new to this committee, given that a few of the members have previously served on this subcommittee.

I guess we can now open it to members who might want to speak to that.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, if I may, I have Mr. Oliphant, followed by Monsieur Trudel, who is followed by Ms. Vandenbeld.

The Chair: Also, Mr. Williamson is after Ms. Vandenbeld.

Please proceed, Mr. Oliphant.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** We may at one point want to have a discussion about bringing in studies that were discussed at an in camera meeting in the previous session. That could be helpful, but I'd like to build a bit on Mr. Viersen's thought.

We could come up with a shopping list. We all have our areas of concern. There are geographical areas. There are always gender issues. There are demographic issues. There are a lot of areas of human rights, and they could be about freedom of religion or beliefs.

What I was wondering about, though, maybe in addition to having in some of the luminaries who have been on the committee before—I've sat on the committee, not as a luminary, but many years ago as a permanent sub, and was involved in a lot of studies—is getting some expertise from some of the leading human rights people or organizations in the country. I was wondering about maybe having a meeting to get some flags from Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, or even from UN organizations that deal with human rights, domestic and international, and to give them a chance to help to build our agenda.

It sort of builds on Mr. Viersen's comment to say that if we could take even one or two meetings where we invite some people—and we could invite them to do something in writing too—it also builds our rapport with the expert witnesses who we'll be calling on throughout the life of the committee. There's hardly ever a study we do where we won't want to bring in Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Latin American Working Group or various groups that we know of in the field. This would just help us, as new members of the committee, to build some relationships with them so that we could have a very good working relationship first, as opposed to tonight coming up with a shopping list and voting on each of them. I'd like to step back for at least one or two meetings to say, "Help us." We build an agenda, we hear the flags and then we're able to do some pretty intensive work. That would be my suggestion.

• (1850)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

I have Mr. Trudel.

[Translation]

#### Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would tend to agree with my colleague as well. We did do some research and looked at the topics we wanted to discuss. We even sent two motions to Madam Clerk, which I could read to you. I don't know if she received them. In my opinion, subcommittee members will reach a consensus on these two topics.

Have you received what we sent you, Madam Clerk? May I read them out? I imagine it's all right.

With respect to the topic of the first motion, I believe the subcommittee addressed this in the last Parliament. It concerns the situation in Tigray Province, Ethiopia. It's getting a lot of media coverage.

I would therefore like to move that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the humanitarian crisis and human rights situation in Ethiopia with particular attention to the situation in Tigray Province, that the committee hold two meetings on this issue; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

This is a serious humanitarian crisis. About 91% of the population in Ethiopia's Tigray Province is on the verge of starvation, and the United Nations is reporting egregious human rights violations. This is a worthwhile and important topic that we could discuss. We could also refer to the studies already carried out by the subcommittee in the last Parliament.

The second topic is timeless and significant. It concerns Haiti, a country whose people have a hard life. Since I was a child, every time we have heard about Haiti, it was because of a problem and it was always difficult. Here is the motion:

I therefore move that, pursuant toStanding Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the humanitarian, social, political and economic crisis currently facing Haiti and the human rights situation in that country, that the committee hold two meetings on this issue, and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

Haiti was already grappling with earthquakes and an economic crisis, and now it's street gangs who have literally taken the Haitian government hostage. That's made life harder for those most in need in an already struggling country. Then another earthquake hit. I feel there has to be a way for us to look into this and hear from some interesting witnesses.

So those are the two interesting topics that the subcommittee could discuss over the next few weeks and months.

#### • (1855)

#### [English]

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Could I just make a point of order, Mr. Chair?

The committee was not formed. We do not have those motions. They are appropriate to be presented at a business meeting. We're now in committee business, and we just don't have them in front of us. I don't disagree with either of them, but I also, you know, could come up with 32 areas. That's what I was trying to avoid.

I just wanted to say that we don't have those in front of us in writing.

The Chair: I'm not even sure whether the clerk has received those motions.

Has the clerk received those motions?

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have received them, and I have flipped them all to your personal accounts.

The Chair: Okay.

But yes, we weren't aware of this and did not receive ample notice, even though, as Mr. Oliphant indicated, they are obviously serious issues that may very well be of interest.

#### Let's go to Ms. Vandenbeld.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** Thank you. I think this may also help with the issue about the motions.

First, Mr. Chair, thank you so much for recognizing some of us who've been on the committee for some time. This is now my third Parliament being on this committee, including chairing it for some time in 2018-19. It is a very special committee. Throughout the time this committee has existed, through many decades and many chairs, it has always operated on a consensus basis, in my experience, and much less formally than other committees. As long as I've been on the committee, I've never actually seen a vote. It has been very much that we will discuss amongst us as individuals, most of us with very strong backgrounds in human rights, and try to come to an agreement on things where we all have a consensus.

#### [Translation]

Mr. Trudel, the two topics you mentioned, Haiti and Tigray, Ethiopia, are both on my list too.

#### [English]

It's been the practice of the committee to go in camera and discuss.... Usually, with something like that, we are very quick to come to an agreement.

There have been three ways in which I've seen the committee operate with studies. Usually, we've had thematic studies that we've done over a longer term. For instance, media freedom was one. Women human rights defenders was another, which led to some changes in the government in the human rights defenders stream of immigration. Many of our recommendations have been implemented. We have typically interspersed those with country-specific short studies, particularly on emerging countries. Right now, we may have a plan set up for a month or two and then something happens like Burkina Faso, which is very urgent. There are people who need voice given.... We may interrupt what we were planning in our longer study to do a short study and air some of the human rights defenders in that region. Usually, we do this in a very informal way.

Let me emphasize why this committee is so vitally important. I have had witnesses who have come before this committee to tell me the only reason they believe they are not in jail today is because of the platform we gave them and the international recognition and safety that comes with that. I've had other witnesses who have said that it's given such a boost to their movement. They've been able to re-engage with young people at a time when their movement may have been waning. It's a very powerful committee.

Might I suggest that we go in camera and throw out some of these ideas that we have? They could be some of the geographic, but also thematic ideas. We could come up with what we want to do for the next few meetings.

I very much like Mr. Oliphant's idea of hearing from some of the key organizations. I think many of us are also members of the Raoul Wallenberg parliamentary group. There have been some suggestions there.

Perhaps we should go in camera and we could have a more informal discussion. We would probably find agreement about which areas we want to do first.

• (1900)

The Chair: Absolutely. Thank you, Ms. Vandenbeld.

Go ahead, Mr. Williamson.

**Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC):** I know I was up next to speak, so I was motioning to that, but I am happy to second that we move to in camera, if members would like to do that.

I would assume my speaking spot as well.

**The Chair:** Do we want to take a vote as to whether we go in camera? Is there anyone who does not agree to go in camera?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Chair, could I speak before we go to any vote?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm here on behalf of Ms. McPherson and I've been in touch with her office.

I'll accept Mr. Trudel's motions as notices, because we just passed routine proceedings saying that 48 hours' notice has to be given for substantive motions.

Mr. Oliphant's suggestion is a good one. Having briefings, whether it's in one meeting or two, from very well-respected individuals and institutions to bring everyone up to speed on the world situation is great. Members of this committee, maybe through their P9s, can chat offline with some of their ideas and come up with formal notices of motions, which can then be considered at a future in camera meeting.

I'm worried that if we go to an in camera meeting now, we're not giving Ms. McPherson the opportunity to fully participate in that conversation, when she is going to be the permanent member of this committee. I want to make sure that she has that courtesy to share some of her ideas for a study.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Go ahead, Mr. Zuberi.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** What Mr. MacGregor just mentioned—that we wait for one of our permanent members—is very reasonable. That doesn't preclude us from accepting what Mr. Oliphant said could start us off. I don't know if we're meeting next week. If we are, that might be a way to start.

I'm also personally partial to Mr. Trudel's motions. I'm not against hearing other people's motions, but I'm definitely partial to his motions.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I know that this committee runs a little bit more informally than others, but we have a motion on the floor that is not debatable with respect to going in camera. We should follow our procedure and do that, because if we get into a long debate, I think that becomes unfair to others. If you have another chance with a dilatory motion, we would set a precedent that you could debate them. I think that's nervous-making.

The second thing is that I wasn't clear whether Mr. Trudel moved those motions or was giving notice of them. I believe that because we're in committee business, he can move them, even without 48 hours' notice, because it is committee business. He has the right to move them, but I would hope that maybe he might just hold back because we haven't been able to see them.

I think they're important motions. I don't think anybody disagrees that we should study Haiti and the Tigray region of Ethiopia. I think we're going to be all 100% in agreement with that. It's just trying to get us into a position where we can do that in good form and good work so that we can continue to build the momentum of the committee.

**The Chair:** Given that we do have a motion, should we proceed with the motion first, because it is a dilatory motion?

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** May I speak, as I'm the one who put the motion?

In fairness to Ms. McPherson, we could perhaps have these discussions informally in the course of the week if we know that the committee is in agreement to have some of the key human rights organizations brief us for the first meeting or two. I think it probably would be okay that we not have the in camera discussion today but rather adjourn. Then we could have these discussions informally amongst ourselves and come back at a later date so that Ms. McPherson would have a chance to participate.

That would be okay with me, if that was the will of the committee.

• (1905)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson: I would agree with that, Ms. Vandenbeld.

First of all, I want to say that I'm excited to join this committee. Like my colleague Mr. Viersen, I'm new to the committee. I like some of the ideas that have been suggested so far about informal briefings to give us the overview of the landscape. My understanding, having spoken to a number of former parliamentarians who have sat on this committee, is that this committee works best when, as one member said, it operates on the basis of consensus. I'm excited about this committee in part because I understand that this tends to be its operating mantra. It's less partisan than some of the other committees on the Hill.

There are other benchmarks of this committee that I think have made it strong. Typically, the topics that it studies seek to be focused and narrow. Mr. Oliphant and I were on the Canada-China committee in the last Parliament. Of course, big topics take a long time to study. At times we attempted to break down the work so that we could get through it by staying focused. I think that's a good rule for this committee to follow.

Number two is that issues aren't used as proxies. They're for studying an issue in a specific location or country. We stick to that and try not to deviate with proxies so that, again, we are focused on the topic at hand.

The third point, which actually comes from experience, is that this committee should focus on topics where Canada can have an influence. We're not just putting out studies that are important; they also have an impact as well.

I'm going to try to be guided by those ideas. I'll reiterate what my colleague Mr. Viersen said. I would like to see us invite Mario Silva, a former parliamentarian who sat on this committee. I believe he would be able to enlighten us, as someone who was on the committee and was well regarded, I think, across partisan lines. The other is our colleague Scott Reid. Mr. Reid continues to be a member of Parliament, but I think he too is well regarded in this field. He was a long-time member of this committee.

If I could maybe twin this suggestion with Mr. Oliphant's, we could begin by hearing from these two, one former and one current parliamentarian, to come in and brief us at our next meeting for 30 minutes and some questions—45 minutes or whatever members here think is appropriate. That would kind of set the table as to how we can operate to be effective, to work together in a constructive

manner and to find topics that we think this committee and perhaps this country can influence.

Those are my suggestions. They are presented to allow us to work well together.

Thank you.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** Mr. Chair, on a point of order, if we are going to continue the discussion, then I actually—

**The Chair:** Ms. Vandenbeld, perhaps we could just, for one second, defer to the clerk as to whether or not we do have a motion and we have to proceed with a vote.

If she could clarify that, it would be very much appreciated.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At this point, we may not actually have the capacity to go in camera. We would need a separate link, at this point. I'm not sure there's anyone around who can actually create that meeting. It may be a moot point. We've been kind of looking for someone to be able to create that meeting, but so far, no luck.

I'm not sure what the committee would like to do. I'll put it back in your hands at this point.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** Mr. Chair, I have put forward my motion on going in camera. It was on the predication that we would just adjourn and have these discussions more informally. Now that the discussion has continued, there are, in fact, other proposals that I would love to put. One, for instance, is to have Irwin Cotler, but that gets us into a whole discussion while we're not in camera. I think it would be better, as this committee has always done, to hold off then, to adjourn and to have this meeting in camera where we can discuss a little bit more informally and freely the different ideas being proposed.

**The Chair:** Is it your intention to bring a motion to adjourn the committee, Ms. Vandenbeld?

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: It is not-

Mr. John Williamson: I'll bring the motion forward.

I move to adjourn.

The Chair: Do we now proceed to a vote?

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, you can simply see if there's consent.

The Chair: Is there anyone against the motion to adjourn?

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Trudel might have a comment.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Yes. If I may-

#### [English]

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Chair, a point of order is not debatable.

The Chair: Yes, I know.

Is there anyone against the adjournment, at this point?

<sup>• (1910)</sup> 

I see no one against it, so this meeting is adjourned.

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