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# **Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, December 5, 2013**

**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**



## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, December 5, 2013

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** This is meeting number seven of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study on the situation in Syria. We'll start.

I want to once again welcome our witnesses to the table. With us is Mark Gwozdecky, who is a director general. Welcome, sir. I'm glad you could be here.

We also have with us, Sabine Nolke, who is no stranger to us. She has been hanging out with us for the last couple of weeks. She is a director general. Welcome back again.

We have Stephen Salewicz, who is the director of the humanitarian assistance division. Thank you for being here.

We're going to start with Mr. Gwozdecky. Then we're going to move to Mr. Salewicz and finish off with Ms. Nolke.

Welcome, sir. We'll turn the microphone over to you.

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky (Director General, Middle East and Maghreb Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

[Translation]

My focus today will be on the political and security aspects of the situation in Syria. Detail on the humanitarian situation will be given by my colleague Stephen Salewicz. My other colleague, Sabine Nolke, will update you on the international community's response to Assad's use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The situation in Syria has evolved considerably over the last few years and now presents a dire conundrum for the international community. The conflict began in March 2011, when the Assad regime responded with sustained, indiscriminate and brutal repression to pro-democracy demonstrations. From the starting point of a purely domestic conflict, the crisis has since evolved to have multiple regional and global players and implications. These additional players and agendas further complicate the search for a solution.

[English]

Following the regime's crackdown, a variety of armed opposition groups emerged. The armed opposition is a collection of actors existing along a wide spectrum, from the secular elements of defected Syrian security services personnel, through domestic

Islamist groups, to al-Qaeda affiliated militia with significant foreign membership and support.

A number of groups in the opposition draw support from gulf states and from western countries such as Turkey and others, while the Assad regime draws support from Iran, the Hezbollah, based in Lebanon, and Russia.

The opposition groups are not united, and they will occasionally alternate between loose cooperation on the battlefield and elsewhere and clashing militarily. At present, the parties to the conflict have largely reached a military stalemate, although tactical momentum does shift to one side or the other from time to time.

The intervention and support of Hezbollah and Iran has worked in favour of the regime of late, but a decisive victory by one side or the other remains highly unlikely. The involvement of external supporters with a religious agenda has ignited strong sectarian forces in what was and has been a traditionally non-sectarian society.

Further, the conflict has been seen by some in Syria's Kurdish population as an opportunity to pursue nationalist aspirations. This complicates the delicate relations between the neighbouring Kurdish populations in Turkey and Iraq and their respective governments.

As a result of all these factors, any solution for serious conflict must reconcile the various interests of multiple regional powers and domestic groups, all vying for pre-eminence, as well as foreign countries protecting their regional interests.

• (1540)

[Translation]

Canadian interests are heightened by the fact that Syria's neighbours are either struggling with the economic, security, and political pressures related to hosting large and ever-growing refugee populations and/or are concerned about the security implications of extremist groups operating freely on their frontier. This in turn has served to heighten concerns about regional stability, and particularly the political stability of Jordan and Lebanon.

[English]

Against this backdrop, allow me to outline Canada's approach to the crisis.

Our response has five main elements: one, providing humanitarian assistance to address the needs of the many hundreds of thousands affected in Syria and in refugee host communities; two, responding to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats; three, increasing pressure on the Assad regime and its allies through sanctions and diplomatic engagement; four, providing bilateral development and security assistance to regional countries to assist them in responding to Syrian refugees; and five, carefully calibrated support to the Syrian opposition's efforts to become a viable alternative to the Assad regime by providing training in key fields, including communications, documentation of human rights abuses, and local governance.

[Translation]

On this last point, it should be noted that Canada has not recognized the Syrian Opposition Coalition, or the SOC, as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people, as we are not persuaded that the SOC is sufficiently representative, has reassured Syria's minority communities that their rights will be protected or has unequivocally condemned extremism. We have gone to great lengths to ensure that any support provided to opposition actors is directed at the democratic, secular, progressive elements of the opposition and is not diverted to extremist groups.

[English]

Canada continues to believe that the only way to end the crisis is through a Syrian-led political transition leading to the emergence of a free, democratic, and pluralist Syria.

Over the past months, considerable diplomatic effort with the parties to the conflict and regional players has been brought to bear with the aim of holding a second Geneva-style peace conference. This conference is currently confirmed for January 22, 2014. Postponement remains, however, an ever-present possibility, given the fractious nature of the opposition, disagreements over pre-conditions to negotiations between the regime and the opposition, and continued debate about who can attend the negotiations.

Fragile though they may be, these talks represent the current best chance for a negotiated solution through the emergence of a transitional governing body.

In the run-up to Geneva II, however, it is likely that we will see concerted efforts by both sides to gain advantage on the ground in order to increase their leverage at the negotiating table.

With that, I conclude my statement, and I will hand the floor to my colleague, Stephen Salewicz.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Gwozdecky.

Mr. Salewicz.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz (Director, Humanitarian Assistance Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade):** Mr. Chair, honourable members, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to provide an overview of the humanitarian crisis in Syria, the impact on neighbouring countries, the challenges in providing assistance, and how Canada is responding to both the crisis and those challenges.

[Translation]

The situation in Syria and the region has rapidly evolved into a profound humanitarian crisis that is challenging the humanitarian community's ability to respond. In a little more than two years, over half of Syria's population is either in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria or seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Increasingly, refugees from Syria are also making their way to Europe.

[English]

Access to food, health care, water, housing, and education is severely affected by the cumulative effects of armed conflict. A middle-income country that once enjoyed a relatively modern level of health care, Syria is now facing an outbreak of polio, the first in 14 years.

Children are disproportionately affected by the crisis. If the conflict persists, we are facing what some are calling a lost generation. Children are victimized and traumatized by the conflict surrounding them. An entire generation is out of school and highly vulnerable to exploitation. In both Jordan and Lebanon, children as young as seven are working long hours for little pay, sometimes in dangerous or exploitative conditions. Over 3,700 refugee children are unaccompanied or separated from both parents.

Born from the Arab Spring that ushered in tremendous change in the Middle East, the conflict in Syria has resulted in a protracted and complicated humanitarian emergency that risks destabilizing the region.

The impact on neighbouring countries is immense. Syria's neighbours have generously received close to three million refugees. They have done so at great expense to themselves and in some cases at the risk of destabilizing their own country. Imagine the consequences in Canada if our population increased by 25% in just a few months, as is the case in Lebanon.

In both Lebanon and Jordan, which are hosting the largest number of refugees in the region, the impact on social services, infrastructure, and communities cannot be overstated. The unprecedented scale and complexity of the crisis requires a comprehensive approach to address the huge social and economic challenges it poses to those countries.

The humanitarian response to the crisis is beset with challenges. Reaching civilian populations during a conflict is always difficult. In Syria, where there are hundreds of different parties to the conflict, the security situation is highly unpredictable, creating a very difficult environment for those seeking to deliver humanitarian assistance.

The conflict has been deadly for humanitarian workers in Syria. Dozens have been killed, injured, kidnapped, or are missing. The tactic of besieging areas where there are civilian populations for extended periods of time and restricting the humanitarian access has worsened the humanitarian situation and compromised the delivery of life-saving supplies and services.

While restrictions have very recently loosened, the Assad regime continues to impose administrative and bureaucratic impediments to the delivery of humanitarian assistance by limiting visas, delaying NGO registration, and restricting the movement of aid agencies on the ground.

On October 7, the United Nations Security Council issued a unanimously endorsed statement urging Syria to grant immediate access to humanitarian agencies seeking to deliver life-saving assistance to those affected by the crisis. Minister of International Development Christian Paradis has indicated the Government of Canada's strong support for this statement.

In all relevant international forums, Canada continues to call on all parties to the conflict to take immediate steps to facilitate the expansion of humanitarian relief operations and lift bureaucratic impediments and other obstacles. We know that the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is working closely with those countries that carry the most influence with parties to address these challenges.

The international community has mobilized on a massive scale. In 2013, the United Nations and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have sought more than \$4.5 billion U.S.

As the humanitarian crisis worsened and the international community mobilized, Canada expanded its response as needs increased. In 2012 Canada contributed \$23.5 million to the humanitarian endeavours. We have increased our humanitarian contributions almost eightfold to \$180 million in 2013. This brings Canada's contribution to date to \$203.5 million in humanitarian funding. Canada is also providing \$110 million in development assistance to Jordan and Lebanon. Canada is currently among the leading donors to the Syrian response.

Canada's approach has been to target key needs, particularly food, health, shelter, protection, education, water, and sanitation. As we move into the winter months, Canada is supporting the rollout of winterization activities throughout the region. We have taken a geographically balanced approach by supporting activities in the region and inside Syria. We are also supporting host communities in neighbouring countries to cope with the influx of refugees.

Our support has been delivered through experienced humanitarian partners and has achieved significant results. As an example, in 2013, partners have provided over 1.5 million refugees with food assistance, provided 1.25 million with hygiene support, supported a million visits to primary health care facilities, and enrolled 175,000 children in formal education.

In addition to calling for improved access for humanitarian actors in Syria and the protection of humanitarian space, the government has emphasized Canada's commitment to humanitarian principles. Minister Paradis was unequivocal in his speech at the Canadian Humanitarian Conference in October that Canada will continue to stress the impartiality, neutrality, and independence of its humanitarian partners.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Going forward, there will be a continuing need for large-scale humanitarian assistance. The United Nations appeals for the response inside Syria and in the region are set to be launched in mid-December. A significant increase in the resources requested is expected. The international community will gather in Kuwait on January 15, as it did last year, to pledge funds to support the response.

[English]

As the conflict drags on, the importance of humanitarian development assistance will remain imperative to sustain lives and mitigate the impact of the influx of refugees on host communities in neighbouring countries.

Thank you.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Salewicz.

I'll now turn it over to Ms. Nolke.

**Ms. Sabine Nolke (Director General, Non-Proliferation and Security Threat Reduction Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade):** Mr. Chair and honourable members, I'm pleased to be before you today on a somewhat different matter than what I've been speaking to you about lately, namely, to talk about chemical weapons in Syria. It may be useful to provide you with a bit of a history of the issue.

As my colleagues have made clear in their statements, the security and humanitarian situation in Syria is grim, and has been ever since the start of the conflict in March 2011.

Syria has long been suspected of possessing a chemical weapons arsenal, believed to be a deterrent against Israel. In July 2012, Syria openly admitted that it possessed chemical and biological weapons, asserting that these could be used against "external aggression".

As the fighting in Syria continued to escalate, the international community became increasingly concerned that the Assad regime might resort to using these abhorrent weapons against its own population, or that the instability in the country might permit them to fall into the hands of extremist groups who are more and more present in Syria.

The U.S. and other allies laid down firm red lines in the summer of 2012, warning the regime against the use of chemical weapons. Canada consulted closely with allies on contingency planning regarding possible responses to an eventual chemical weapons attack, although this was still seen as only a remote possibility at the time.

Canada stepped up its efforts and played a key role, with significant contributions in response to the chemical weapons threat in Syria. Through the global partnership program, the stabilization and reconstruction task force and the counter-terrorism capacity building program, Canada has contributed \$47.5 million in security-related assistance to the region to address the conflict in Syria more broadly, including programs and equipment related to weapons of mass destruction threats, such as those posed to the region by a chemical or biological weapons attack in Syria.

Further, Canada contributed \$2 million to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the OPCW, to enable it to be ready immediately to investigate CW, chemical weapons, use in Syria, should the need arise.

In March of this year, and despite red lines being drawn, allegations of CW use by the Syrian regime started to emerge. Throughout the spring, we received uncorroborated reports of small-scale attacks against opposition areas, with minimal casualties. The regime in turn claimed chemical weapons use by the opposition.

[Translation]

In light of the small-scale attacks, the UN Secretary General triggered, on March 21, a rarely used mechanism permitting him to launch an investigation into the alleged use of CWs in Syria, despite the fact that Syria was not, at that time, a state party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction. The team was headed by the UN with participation by experts from the OPCW and the World Health Organization. Canada's financial contribution to the OPCW was key to the success of this UN-mandated investigation, a fact that was emphasized to us again just two days ago by the UN High Representative for Disarmament, Angela Kane, whom some of you may have met two nights ago.

The Syrian authorities initially blocked access to the UN investigation team on its territory, alleging difficult negotiations on the terms of reference of the mission. It was only on August 19 that the UN investigators were allowed into Syria. Two days after the team's arrival to investigate alleged CW use that had taken place in the spring, the mission was on the front lines to witness the deadliest of CW attacks in the Ghouta region on the outskirts of Damascus. According to U.S. estimates, this attack took the lives of over 1,400 people, including many women and children. The scale and abhorrent nature of the attack sparked tremendous outcry from the international community, and the UN investigation team immediately shifted its investigative focus to this attack. The availability of fresh evidence greatly assisted the team in its efforts.

• (1555)

The attack triggered a chain reaction of unprecedented diplomatic activity. The "red line" set by the U.S., Canada and other western allies having so obviously been crossed, the Syrian regime feared retribution and decided to surrender its CW arsenal. While the U.S. and Russia negotiated a framework agreement on the elimination of Syria's CW capability, the Syrian government submitted its letter of accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The U.S. and Russia joint framework agreement of September 14 laid out a detailed destruction plan for Syria's chemical weapons program, with very ambitious timelines. Unanimous decisions by the UN Security Council, in the form of Resolution 2118, on September 27, and by the OPCW Executive Council allowed an unprecedented joint UN-OPCW mission to eliminate the CW arsenal of Syria by June 30, 2014.

[English]

The ambition but also the risks associated with this initiative cannot be overstated. Never has the OPCW or any other body attempted to verify and inspect the destruction of chemical weapons in a conflict zone. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW next week is both timely and deserved.

The UN-OPCW mission in Syria has made considerable progress thus far in implementing the U.S.-Russian framework agreement. Two of the three major phases of the destruction plan have been

completed. The first and second phase consisted of the OPCW inspecting all 23 CW sites declared by the Syrian government and the destruction of all critical equipment in the production of chemical weapons at declared mixing and filling facilities, both by November 1. Only one facility remains uninspected due to the local security situation, but it is believed to have been previously abandoned and emptied of CW components by the regime who had moved those to the now declared sites.

The third phase will be the most difficult. It consists of removing the chemical agents from Syrian territory, despite and because of the ongoing civil war there, for destruction elsewhere. This will be done in two waves.

It is intended that the more critical CW agents be removed from Syria by December 31. These will be subject to a destruction process, known as hydrolysis, aboard a U.S.-commanded modified vessel outside Syrian territorial waters.

A second wave of chemical precursors of a less sensitive nature will be removed from Syria by February 5 and destroyed in a commercial facility at a location to be determined.

The OPCW has called on companies with the requisite expertise to submit an expression of interest in destroying the second wave of chemicals as well as the hydrolysate residues from the first wave.

At the closing of the submission period, 41 companies from around the world expressed an interest, including, to our knowledge, two Canadian companies. Evaluation of the proposals, selection, and follow-up with the chosen companies will be done, or has been done, by the OPCW technical secretariat.

Time is of the essence. The international community must act quickly if we are to meet the successive timelines necessary to destroy, once and for all, Syria's chemical weapons program.

The OPCW and the UN made pleas to the international community in October for more and necessary contributions. In October Canada responded to an urgent request to airlift 10 U.S. armoured vehicles for the secure transportation of the inspection teams. An Air Force Globemaster III did two trips from Maryland to Beirut to deliver those vehicles. Numerous other countries have also stepped up and made significant contributions.

However, the UN and the OPCW are in need of much more. The trust fund established to finance the complex operations is quickly depleting. There is a need as well for a large amount of in-kind contributions to complete the destruction phase. My department is currently considering options on how Canada could further contribute to the joint mission.

There is a risk perceived by some that by funding the destruction of CW in Syria, the international community may be aiding, if not legitimizing, the Assad regime. We disagree.

• (1600)

It is in the best interest of the Syrian people, the region, and the entire world to ensure that these weapons cannot be used again against anyone. This is particularly the case when these weapons are being held by a state that has already demonstrated its willingness to use them.

Canada, along with the international community, is working to ensure that the Assad regime, or its potential successors, no longer have access to chemical weapons. That does not exculpate the Assad regime from having used such abhorrent weapons, and a variety of conventional weapons, against its own people.

Finally, once the immediate priority of dismantling and eliminating the CW program has been addressed, the international community will need to deal with the issue of accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the use of weapons long outlawed by civilized nations.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Nolke.

We're going to start with Madame Laverdière, please.

You have seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If I may, I'd like to take a moment to say hello to an old colleague I probably hadn't seen in about 15 to 20 years until last week. Hello and welcome, Sabine.

The numbers corresponding to the humanitarian assistance contributions can lead to a bit of confusion. I looked at the numbers provided by the UN, which obviously include Canada's contributions to agencies such as Handicap International and so forth. According to the UN's information, Canada paid out or committed somewhere around \$131 million in 2013, and yet the figure you gave us was \$180 million. Why the difference?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Thank you for the question.

The difference between the numbers the UN has and the numbers that I shared with you is the difference between what's been announced and what's actually been allocated and reported to the UN. It takes the UN some time to collect the numbers and put them into their database. We're in this cycle right now, where they're collecting our numbers again for the balance of the programming and putting those into the database. The programming for the entire \$180 million has been approved and the programming is going forward. Our partners have been notified that those grants are coming their way.

[Translation]

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you.

I have another question. You highlighted, and rightfully so, the fact that we should be concerned about an entire Syrian generation being lost. If that were to happen, it would severely undermine the country's reconstruction, which we hope will happen as quickly as possible.

What specifically is being done to help the children? I'm going to mention a wide range of issues, because I know there are numerous needs. What about outside education and education in the refugee camps? Is it at all possible to support those efforts inside Syria? What kind of psychological support is being provided? Are the children, who are so often traumatized, receiving any psychological counselling? I could ask you about nutrition and I will come back to polio if I have time. But in response to what I've mentioned so far, could you tell us about the programming aimed specifically at the children?

Thank you.

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Indeed, I think the impact on children has been tremendous and is really a tragedy. I'll just quote some numbers.

Eleven thousand children have been reported as killed. These are identified children. These are children who have been killed by explosive devices and by weapons.

Five thousand of 22,000 schools in Syria are closed or damaged. Refugees leaving Syria have a challenge to access education, as you rightly point out, and 1.9 million of the 5.4 million children in Syria are out of school.

As you've suggested, there is a real possibility of a lost generation here. We're really concerned about that from the programming side, because we want to make sure our programming actually targets the special needs of this generation. We do that through a variety of approaches.

What we look for in our programming are organizations like UNICEF and Save the Children, which have a special mandate for that response and look at education as one element of the response, but also look at psychological counselling and support for unaccompanied children. As I mentioned, the number of unaccompanied children is quite large. We look to organizations that have these kinds of mandates and can put in place the psychological and medical services, and so on, the whole package of services that we would expect in Canada when we're dealing with children who are traumatized by violence, and so on.

There has been a study and there's an initiative under way right now by UNICEF that we're really following closely. We are speaking to them on a regular basis to try to understand how we can actually expand and respond to this lost generation issue. UNICEF has come out with a strategy that looks at the regional response and the regional issue and is trying to identify all the intervention points, be it education, be it medical services, and so on, that would allow the international community to come together and respond.

A lot of this, as I've mentioned, and as you've asked about, is in the region, as well as in Syria. In the region, much of the effort is being managed by UNHCR, which is the agency responsible for dealing with a refugee crisis. They of course are working with a range of actors, as well as the governments that are there. I should mention that they have been tremendously generous in their support and have been opening up their schools to children in the region, but of course they were already hard-pressed to respond to the needs of their own citizens, and to have this added pressure has certainly challenged them.

I think this UNICEF initiative that's looking at the lost generation and is coming up with quite a comprehensive plan is something that we're going to look at very closely. As we go forward in the coming weeks, that's how we're going to try to determine how to calibrate our response.

● (1605)

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much.

We have very little time, so if I may ask you, if any written information on this UNICEF initiative is available, it would be appreciated, as well as statistics, the statistics on the amount of money we give specifically for children.

I have another question, although I could ask questions for half an hour. This one is very brief and maybe my colleague will come back to it. Access for humanitarian assistance is a huge problem. What can we do? Do you see any progress, or is it going backward?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I'll speak to some of the challenges around access, and I think there is a diplomatic engagement that is quite important around that.

**The Chair:** A very quick response, please.

Maybe we'll hear from Mr. Dewar first.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Maybe we could go to the diplomatic—

**The Chair:** Please do. Thanks.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** —because we know what the challenges are.

**The Chair:** Very quickly, please.

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** There have been some signs of improvement of late. Visas are being issued at a greater rate and more rapidly. Of late, we have been told that three or four shipments were actually permitted to enter the country.

There's speculation as to why the Assad regime is more cooperative of late. One theory is they see that it's working and that it has a legitimizing effect. The other theory is that of late they've watched their partner and ally, Iran, strike a nuclear agreement with the international community, and they're following suit, in some sense, to see if it will protect their interests.

In terms of diplomatic engagement, the pressure remains on the regime to continue to provide this access, but it's complicated, because the regime doesn't control all parts of the territory. Great parts of the territory, including some border crossings, are not in the hands of the regime. Rather, they're in the hands of different opposition groups, and as I've indicated, the opposition is not a monolith.

● (1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Anderson, for seven minutes, please.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** I'd like to follow up on that a little bit. What percentage of the aid is going into Syria, and what percentage is going into areas external to Syria's borders? Do you know roughly how that would be broken down?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** If we look at what the UN is appealing for, I think that's a good proxy of the balance between regional and internal to Syria. It's around two to one, with the bulk of it in the region and into neighbouring countries where access is possible. The UN requested close to \$1 billion inside Syria for assistance last year, 2013. So quite a large proportion of it is inside Syria.

**Mr. David Anderson:** When you are finding aid being delivered, is it getting through? There have been some huge concerns that, even though the government is opening up there, aid is scooped up, and the next thing you know it is somewhere else. I'm just wondering if you are seeing effective delivery of aid both inside the country and then into those refugee camps external to Syria.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** That's an important question and one which we track very closely, given the concerns about the aid actually reaching the affected population. Of course, that's at the heart of what we're trying to achieve.

We are seeing the restrictions on aid delivery loosening. In November of this year, the UN managed seven cross-line convoys of assistance. Those cross-line convoys go into contested areas and opposition areas. That's an increase over previous times. Our assistance goes through experienced partners that have local community networks. Much as we would see assistance delivered throughout Canadian communities, there are Syrian community groups that have long-standing relationships with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. They are working to identify which is the most vulnerable of those communities and how to get assistance to them.

There is banditry; there is looting of supplies. That happens in a conflict situation. What we've noticed and what we hear from our partners, which is really interesting, is that when this happens, community pressure often leads to a negotiated release of those supplies back to the communities. So we are seeing the efforts that are being made by the international community but also by Syrians themselves to make sure that assistance is getting to those who need it.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I want to talk a little bit about foreign fighters and their impact in the present and in the future. There is some concern that there are people coming from all over the globe and taking their training in this area. We can expect that they will be as enthusiastic in some other areas with their new-found knowledge and experience. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about how you see that.

I'm also interested in where they're getting their funding. There is funding being supplied to the opposition, but some of the funding is going to these extremist groups as well. Could you talk about that?



Finally, I'd like you to talk about our comfort level in providing training and communications to folks and making sure they are not going to be the ones who are coming back and visiting us later.

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** I'm going to start with the last point first. We are extremely concerned about money being diverted to the wrong places and the wrong forces, so there is an incredible amount of scrutiny of every possible project that we consider and everything that would go up for approval.

I think that in part explains why there has not been more Canadian assistance provided to these groups. It's very difficult to find those and it's very difficult to demonstrate, because we're not on the ground and we don't have eyes and ears on the ground. It's difficult to demonstrate to yourself that you have a high degree of assurance that there's no diversion.

As to foreign fighters, there isn't a lot I can share with you other than to say it's a big concern, not just for Canada but for our allies as well. We know there are Canadians who get on planes and find their way into Syria. We know that some of them are engaged with the opposition, and some of those are engaged with the more extremist elements of the opposition. We're trying to work with our partners, intelligence agencies, and security agencies in the neighbouring countries to identify them.

●(1615)

**Mr. David Anderson:** I'd like you to continue, but I want to ask you about yesterday, when we saw the Syrian opposition offering to join with the government to battle some of these groups.

Do you have a comment on that?

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** We've seen these kinds of statements before. We haven't seen a concerted effort on the ground that would suggest this is taking place, and that would suggest almost a three-front war. We've seen occasional clashes, and I mentioned that in my statement, but to date, it looks like those clashes are less ideological, in the sense of a concerted attempt to go after the extremists, and more about opposition groups staking their claim over their territory.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Are you willing to talk about funding for some of these outside groups?

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** I can talk a bit about it, but I can't talk more than that because, in part, we don't know, and in part, some of what we might say would be classified.

There are two different streams. There's funding going to, let's say, the Muslim Brotherhood type of groups from places like Qatar. There's other funding going to other forms of Islamists from countries like Saudi Arabia. Now, it's very difficult to determine from where that money is coming because those countries are not publicly acknowledging these flows.

Also, it's very important to note that money comes from non-state sources, and there are wealthy individuals who choose, by their own decision, to lend support, and those are very difficult to track.

**The Chair:** We're going to finish the first round with Mr. Garneau, for seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Gwozdecky, you said Canada continues to believe the only way to

end the crisis in Syria is through a Syrian-led political transition leading to the emergence of a free and democratic and pluralist Syria.

Has Canada said whether it also insists on Assad's leaving the leadership of the country, or have we not taken a position there?

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** Mr. Baird has stated clearly that Assad has lost his legitimacy, that Assad should be held accountable for the crimes he's committed, including the use of chemical weapons. However, ultimately, I think our position would be that parties around the table are going to need to define their future, and that future, as far as we would like to see, must include protections for the various minorities in the country that form a rather spectacularly interesting society, very diverse, very multi-ethnic, multi-religious. We want to see that protected inside a secular and democratic next government.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Okay.

The Geneva II conference that is planned for the 22nd of January, are there rules on how the opposition, because there are so many factions...is it up to them to somehow come together and decide who's going to speak for that side of the table? It strikes me as being a bit of a Tower of Babel here.

Is there any hope that the opposition will somehow coordinate to be there, or are they all insisting they each have a right to be at the table?

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** Well, you're pointing at some of the complexity around this particular conference.

In short, I could say that we're not yet there. The major players, the Russians, the Americans, and the UN, are working very intensely to try to bring that about. Now, we have problems on both sides. We have problems in the regime's staking out positions, including the fact that Assad would remain in a transition. That is not acceptable to the opposition.

You have some in the opposition effectively saying that the purpose of Geneva would be not to negotiate but to simply hand over power from the regime to the opposition. That's also on the extreme end of the spectrum.

The parties are trying to narrow down those differences, trying to, in particular, bring the opposition together around key principles. I'm not sure they're there yet, but we're not privy to the private consultations taking place at the moment.

●(1620)

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Presumably there was a Geneva I conference. Was this at a simpler time, when there weren't so many factions?

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** Yes, indeed.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Okay, so it was essentially the regime versus the Syrian opposition.

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** Its principal outcome was a set of agreed-to principles to guide these future rounds. So far, those principles are meant to be the price of admission to this next round. At a minimum, parties around the table, be they Syrian or be they international partners, would have to agree to these basic principles as the price of admission.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** I'd like to turn to refugees. How many refugees have been accepted by Canada? How many are under way through sponsorship from families or organizations?

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** We have not set up a resettlement program for Syrian refugees. This is in large part at the request of neighbouring countries and the UN itself, which doesn't want to set up a dynamic where Syrians will find themselves incentivized to leave the country.

Syria needs to be rebuilt by Syrians. Most Syrians who are in refugee camps in the bordering states want to return. To my knowledge, there is no—

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** There is no government plan, but what about on the sponsorship side? The government said it would accept a certain number. What has happened there so far?

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** I don't have that number, but I think it's a small number. I wouldn't want to mislead you by guessing, but we can get you that information.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** I'd like to know where we are on that, because I think the government agreed to.... What was the exact figure?

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** It was 1,200.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you. Yes, I think it was 1,200.

But you're saying it's a small number, so not much has—

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** It's a small number by comparison with our biggest resettlement program in the world, which is for Iraqi refugees in Syria. That is upwards of 20,000. That program is pushing towards completion. So by comparison, 1,200 is what I would characterize as a small number.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Okay.

The humanitarian aid of up to \$200 million which the government has...and we've said that's great. Trace how that money gets to the refugee. Do you have organizations on the ground who come to you and say, "Give us some, give us some", and you have to make some kind of decision about whom it goes to?

How does it make its way to the refugees? I'm interested in that chain.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** On a refugee issue, UNHCR is legally mandated, has the international mandate, to respond to refugee crises like this. They are one of our main partners, but we look at a range of partners that have expertise in these kinds of situations and that are tried and tested over time.

Within the UN family, we have the WFP, to which we have provided \$50 million in food aid. Food aid is one of the main components of the response. UNHCR has received upwards of \$27 million from us this current calendar year.

Perhaps I could walk you through the types of services they provide. I'm sure that you, having been in Jordan, have witnessed the support that Syrian refugees received in Jordan. I'm happy to share the response with you. The UNHCR will come in and register all refugees. They have a registration process. They will have a case management approach where they look at the requirements of each refugee and his or her family to determine how best to respond to

them, looking at vulnerability criteria, for instance, to determine what is required, for example, education, food, income support, and those types of things. We take a social safety net approach to try to ensure that an adequate response is being shared with them.

There will also be a series of other local community groups, international NGOs, and the Red Cross. It's a concerted effort. Given the scope of the crisis and the fast pace of the crisis, we have actually broadened our support. Typically we look towards the UNHCR as our focal point for these kinds of responses.

In this case, because it was such a fast pace and the scope was so great, we had to broaden our support to a range of international NGOs, such as Save the Children, World Vision, CARE Canada, and Handicap International. They bring certain capacities to bear, certain special capacities.

● (1625)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Garneau, that's all the time we have.

We will start our second round. I believe Ms. Brown is going to share her time with Mr. Komarnicki.

**Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will try to bundle my questions together so that Mr. Komarnicki gets his time.

The first thing I would like to do, though, is to publicly thank our humanitarian aid workers who are doing an enormous job on the ground. You've all spoken about the dangerous situations in which they find themselves. As Canadians, we thank them for the work they're doing. They are people who are real heroes.

Mr. Salewicz, you and I spoke earlier about the situation with the children. The one thing we didn't get to was the problem of polio. We know there has been an outbreak in Syria. I wonder if you could speak a little bit about that.

Last January, there was a funding conference in Addis Ababa which our minister attended. Canada made its pledge. We made our contribution, but we know that other countries have not come to the table. We believe that people need to pay what they pledge. If I understand correctly, about 27% of the money that was pledged is what the international organizations have to work with. This means essentially only one in four refugees is being funded. Can you speak to that and tell us where that is? What do we expect at this conference in January?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Thank you for the questions.

First, let me agree with you and recognize the toll on humanitarian workers. The numbers are pretty stark: 12 UN staff have been killed; 32 Syrian Arab Red Crescent staff volunteers have been killed; 12 UN staff have been abducted; 9 staff have gone missing. In addition, 68 public health workers have been killed; 104 have been injured; and 21 have been kidnapped. The scope of the crisis is huge.

The first case of polio was identified on October 29, 2013. It's the first case since 1999. Unfortunately, there are 78 cases confirmed now. The UN, through WHO, UNICEF, and other partners, has launched an aggressive campaign to respond targeting 22 million children in the region through a vaccination program. We provide significant support to UNICEF and WHO, and that is having an impact. To date, they estimate that 19 million children have received vaccinations.

They have taken an approach that initially targets Syria first and then expands to neighbouring countries. They have given vaccinations to 2.2 million children. As with the humanitarian assistance, access remains the challenge. They are working with organizations on the ground to get that access.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** I know I'm taking your time, but we need to thank Rotary International, because they've been very engaged.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Yes, indeed.

On your question of support to the international appeals, I think we are in better shape than we were previously. We have close to 61% of the appeals funded, \$2.7 billion. That is still far from the \$4.5 billion that's required. A lot was put on the table in Kuwait. Canada came with a strong contribution that we subsequently ratcheted up as the needs became apparent. It's hard to track some of the donations. We have a reporting system through the UN that is self-reported. A lot of the aid that goes in is bilateralized, and we don't have a good picture of that.

We continue to urge all contributors to the humanitarian response to report it through the UN so we can get a better picture of what's going on and things can be coordinated. I think we should applaud Kuwait for hosting the conference last year. They put in \$300 million, pledged it, and disbursed it through the UN and the Red Cross.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** I've been listening and I've heard you describe the situation on the ground leading up to the Geneva II conference as very grim. I think somebody described it as beset with challenges, and somebody else said it was a dire conundrum, which to me would indicate that it is difficult to resolve.

Do you see any positive aspects which would lead you to believe that at this conference something might be achieved, notwithstanding how you've described the situation on the ground?

**The Chair:** Please answer very quickly, if you could.

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** I'd say three things give one hope. One is that there's been diplomatic progress of late in the Middle East. The Iran nuclear agreement and the agreement to destroy Syria's chemical weapons shows that these parties can get to a deal under certain circumstances.

Finally, I can say, as someone who served in Syria many years ago, that Syrian people are fantastic people. It's a very secular society, and I don't believe they want what they currently have. I think they really want to get to a different state, and that would be a stable, democratic, pluralistic society.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Dewar, sir, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Just a quick follow-up on the OPCW. I'm hearing that maybe the government is contemplating providing more funding for the program. Is that correct?

**Ms. Sabine Nolke:** We are considering options at this point.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I think we'd probably get a consensus here that it would be a good thing. We'll wait for us to write some recommendations on that, but I'm glad to hear it.

The follow-up to that, though, is there are some who put out the idea that somehow the opposition was using chemical weapons. With the evidence that's available, I think most people would be certain it was the government, but whatever. Put that aside for a second.

Would Canada be supportive of an ICC follow-up on this? It's clear that it needs to be the next step. Notwithstanding that Syria is not, I believe, a signatory to the Rome Statute, if the Security Council does support the investigators' going in, that could happen. Is that something we'd support?

**Ms. Sabine Nolke:** I'll be responding to this using my old hat as the lawyer responsible for the ICC and related institutions.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Sure. I'm glad you're here.

**Ms. Sabine Nolke:** Minister Baird has made it very clear that accountability for the crimes committed in Syria against the civilian population need to be accounted for and that the perpetrators need to be brought to justice.

Now, how that works in practice.... You said very correctly that Syria is not a party to the Rome Statute. However, the situation is contemplated in the Rome Statute. The Security Council would have the power to refer the situation in Syria, as they did with the situation in Libya, to the ICC and to the prosecutor for consideration, so that is an option. Whether or not that will happen is obviously a matter for the Security Council to determine.

The other alternative, of course, is that individual countries such as Canada have on their books legislation that permits prosecution for war crimes committed extraterritorially. Should Mr. Assad find himself in Britain or in Canada, for example, a jurisdiction could be taken by individual states, so that is a possibility. It's probably not a likely possibility, but it is out there.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I'm sure that, as a member state, we would want to support that application to the Security Council.

Coming up to the conference in Geneva, it's important to note that many have said what's on the agenda for Geneva II is what was on the agenda for Geneva I, which is to start to look at what some people call transitional government, but there needs to be confidence building to understand what that looks like.

I just want to understand this from the department's thinking. I've read the crisis group report, which is very good by the way, and they're recommending the release of some prisoners and access for humanitarian assistance. What are some of the other confidence-building initiatives that you would think would be important to see goodwill from certainly the opposition side to attend the conference?

•(1635)

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** I think both sides can build confidence through various measures, including outside players stopping providing military support to one side or the other. That would be very, very important. A ceasefire would be a very big confidence-building measure. My statement also alluded to the strong possibility that we might see the opposite in the run-up to Geneva II. We might see an increase in violence on the ground as the sides try to increase their leverage.

We're talking in the realm here of maybe an ideal world, but certainly a ceasefire and a reduction or cessation of external support would be important and an opening up of the corridors. Full access to humanitarian organizations to deliver their assistance would be a third one. In that case both sides have something they can do to make that happen.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I don't have time, but could you get back to us on the numbers of refugees? Have there been interdepartmental

meetings with CIC around refugees? If so, how many times have you met? I'm just curious about that coordination piece.

**Mr. Mark Gwozdecky:** We meet regularly, but I can't say we've had a specific meeting around whether or not to have a resettlement program. That's something where they've already established clear direction. That hasn't been something we've chosen to meet on, because we haven't been directed to do so.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

To our witnesses, thank you very much for taking the time to be here today.

We're going to suspend for a minute to go in camera so we can look at our OAS report.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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