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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Respected colleagues, welcome to the seventh meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[*English*]

Pursuant to the orders of reference from the House on April 20, 2020 and September 30, 2020, as well as the order of reference of the committee on October 13, 2020, the committee is meeting to resume consideration of votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, L25 and L30 under Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, vote 1 under International Development Research Centre, and vote 1 under International Joint Commission, Canadian Section.

To ensure an orderly meeting, as always, I would encourage participants to mute their microphones when they are not speaking, and address comments through the chair. When you have 30 seconds remaining in your questioning time, I will signal you with this yellow sheet of paper. Interpretation is available through the globe icon at the bottom of your screen.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to introduce the witness panel.

We first have the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Welcome, Minister.

He is joined by members of this team, including Marta Morgan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Anick Ouellette, Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Planning, Finance and Information Technology.

[*English*]

We are also joined by Elissa Golberg, assistant deputy minister, strategic policy; and Bruce Christie, associate assistant deputy minister, trade policy and negotiations.

[*Translation*]

Minister, I give you the floor for your opening remarks.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Allow me to congratulate you on your election as chair. It's great to have you here as someone who knows the world well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for this invitation to appear before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Mr. Chair, you have introduced the officials joining me. I would like to thank them for their work, as well as all the diplomats in Ottawa and abroad serving Canadians with pride and professionalism.

My last appearance before the committee goes back to March 12, the day after the WHO declared the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the virus has increased international instability and amplified trends leading to the erosion of the world order.

[*English*]

We live in a time of great challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic is still causing loss of lives and uncertainty across the globe. Rapid change and ever-increasing humanitarian needs are challenging and pressuring the international system. Disregard of international law, including human rights, combined with a lack of accountability is threatening the rules-based international order, and the world is still faced with the ever-evolving fundamental threat of climate change.

With these great challenges come great responsibilities, and Canada is willing and ready to do its part and to lead. This is why we have been deeply engaged with our partners and friends around the world to develop solutions that work for the benefit of all and that advance Canada's interests and values. In March, it was difficult for all of us to imagine that in a matter of days Canada would undertake the repatriation of tens of thousands of Canadians from every corner of the globe, the largest such operation in Canada's history in peacetime.

There, Mr. Chair, I think I can speak on behalf of all parliamentarians. The work that has been done by our diplomats around the world and our staff here in Ottawa is just extraordinary. People have spent countless hours to help Canadians. This was one of the best things. Everyone worked hard, but I think Canadians are grateful to have the diplomats in a time of great need.

However, we must not forget that, beyond our borders, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted the world's most vulnerable populations and has exacerbated inequality. As you heard from my colleague Minister Gould last week, that is why we have been working to alleviate suffering through humanitarian relief. This is not only the right thing to do but also the smart thing to do. Much is still unknown about this virus, but what we know for certain is that no one will be safe from the pandemic until everyone is safe.

Let me move on to our feminist foreign policy. We also need to ensure that our institutions work for everyone. A free press is essential to the protection of human rights, democracy and good governance. That is why I was so proud to co-host the 2020 media freedom conference with Botswana just a few days ago. Our feminist approach to foreign affairs also means promoting rights-based, open and inclusive societies where all people, regardless of their backgrounds or identities, can fully benefit from equal and meaningful participation in economic, political, social and cultural life.

Canadians know that this is the only way to build a safer and more prosperous world. We cannot take the rights of women for granted. In too many places around the world, women still find themselves fighting for their basic human rights. Just a few weeks ago, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325 at the United Nations. Canada is proud to support and advance the women, peace and security agenda hand in hand with dedicated actors from around the world. Our feminist foreign policy white paper will anchor our core foreign policy conviction that all people should enjoy the same human rights and the same opportunities to succeed and fulfill their potential.

As Canadians, we have always understood that our influence is greatest when we work closely with our partners. Canada sits at the table of the world's most important international institutions, whether it's the G7, the G20, NATO, the OECD, the OSCE, La Francophonie or the Commonwealth. In all of those forums, we are resolved to advance Canadian values and interests while bringing about a more just and equitable world.

• (1540)

Now let me turn to the United States. We all know that Canada and the United States enjoy a truly unique relationship. Our shared geography, strong economic ties and deep personal connections have made us friends, partners and the closest of allies. Just as we work with the current administration and Mexico to renew the free trade agreement, we look forward to working closely with the new administration to tackle the major challenges of the day, such as keeping people safe throughout the pandemic, advancing peace and prosperity, and fighting climate change together.

Let me move on to China. Our relationship with China is a complex and multi-dimensional one, not just for Canada but for democracies around the world. Our approach is to be firm and smart. When dealing with China, we will be firmly guided by Canadian interests, our fundamental values and principles, including human rights, as well as by global rules and strategic partnerships. We will challenge China when it comes to human rights, compete with our innovative businesses and abundant natural resources that allow us

to do so, and co-operate on global challenges like climate change, because there is no easy path forward without China.

Let me be clear. The safety and security of Canadians at home and abroad will always be at the heart of our approach. It has been almost two years since the arbitrary detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, and we continue to call for their immediate release. I also want to acknowledge the resilience and support of their families at every step of the way. After many months, we recently secured on-site virtual consular access to Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor. This—

• (1545)

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry, Minister.

There's something wrong with the interpretation. It's coming out as French while he's speaking French.

The Chair: Okay.

Madam Clerk, can we have a look to see if that's something that's quickly solvable?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'll try to improve my French, Ruby, if it's coming in French when I speak French.

Mr. Chair, I'm at your disposal.

The Chair: Let's hear from the IT technicians for a moment to see if that's something that can be....

Should we just try to see if it's working now?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): Mr. Chair, it should be good to go.

The Chair: Okay.

Minister, let's see if it's working now. Please continue.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Okay.

After many months, we recently secured on-site virtual consular access to Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor. This is something that I personally raised in a meeting with my counterpart, State Councillor Wang Yi, in Rome in August of this year, and on which we worked tirelessly.

[*Translation*]

Like many Canadians, we are alarmed by the reports of flagrant human rights violations in Xinjiang. I discussed this issue directly with my Chinese counterpart just recently in Rome, this summer, at a meeting I called.

[*English*]

This is something I've also raised directly with Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The concerns we have are shared by many around the world. Multilateralism is key to ensuring global stability and security in a world in which China is a powerful actor. This is why we are working with like-minded countries to defend the rules-based international order and ensure that China abides by its international obligations.

We are committed to developing new international frameworks and conventions that respond to today's challenges. One example is the successful conclusion of talks for the Canada-United Kingdom Trade Continuity Agreement, which was led by my very able colleague Minister Ng. This agreement will provide stability and predictability for businesses, exporters and workers in Canada and the United Kingdom. The pandemic highlights the importance of ensuring that supply chains remain open and that air travel is not altered for essential goods and services.

Canada is also committed to strengthening the world's institutions in order to strengthen global stability and respond to emerging threats. We have continued to engage partners and allies on the critical situation in Venezuela through our work in the Lima Group and continued high-level engagement with President Guaidó. Over the last several months, we have also witnessed the eruption of multiple political crises around the world. I will not be able to name all of them, but let me mention several situations of concern.

In Lebanon, in the wake of August's tragedy in Beirut, Canada immediately provided \$30 million in humanitarian aid, and I personally travelled there. We continue to follow very closely the situation on the ground. We will continue to support the Lebanese people in the months to come.

When it comes to Belarus, we have rejected the results of the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus and continue to call for free and fair elections. Alongside allies, we have imposed three sets of sanctions against government officials of Belarus, and urge the government of Belarus to find a negotiated solution that respects the will of the people.

Now let me move to Nagorno-Karabakh.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

We continue to work with our allies within the OSCE Minsk Group on finding a sustainable resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh.

[*English*]

I know that this committee has been briefed by my departmental officials on the region and on export permits. As you know, we have suspended a number of export permits to Turkey following the allegations that equipment sold by a Canadian company is being used in Nagorno-Karabakh. The export permits have been suspended in line with Canada's robust export control regime, which is one of the world's more rigorous. We will continue to carefully scrutinize export permits to ensure that they are consistent with our legal obligations and the protection of human rights and international humanitarian laws.

Now let me move a bit further east, to Hong Kong.

[*Translation*]

We were the first to suspend our extradition treaty with Hong Kong. We announced a series of other steps in reaction to China imposing the National Security Law on Hong Kong.

[*English*]

Finally, Mr. Chair, let me turn to the tragedy of PS752. As we get close to the first anniversary of the downing, our thoughts remain with the families and friends of the victims. Our commitment to supporting the families of the victims to get all the answers they deserve is a priority for me and our government. To that end, we continue to stand firm for transparency, accountability, justice and reparation for the families of the victims. We also continue to lead the work of the international coordination group, which Canada founded, that includes the U.K., Ukraine, Sweden and Afghanistan. We will not rest until we see justice served and those responsible held to account.

In conclusion, the events of 2020 have demonstrated the importance of Canada's foreign policy. Today COVID-19 shows us that our fate is deeply intertwined with that of the community of nations. Tomorrow we know that the defining challenges of our time will only be solved through collective action on a scale never witnessed before.

As some countries turn away from the world and retreat to nationalist self-interest, we instead hold on to a different belief—the conviction that co-operation, partnership and multilateralism will carry the day. These beliefs have always underpinned Canada's relationship to the world. They will be guiding us as we face the challenges in the months and years to come and work to reform and strengthen the international order for generations to follow, to ensure security, stability and prosperity for all.

Mr. Chair, I'm happy to take questions. If you will allow me just 30 seconds to solve a technical issue at our end, we'll be ready to go.

The Chair: Sure. Please do.

Our first round of questions will go to Mr. Chong.

Mr. Chong, we will ask you to stand by for 30 seconds to address that issue, and then we will turn it right over to you.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

How much time do I have on my opening remarks?

The Chair: You have six minutes in your opening round.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Is everything okay, Minister?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Yes, yes.

[*English*]

We had a bit of background noise at our end. We're fixing that now, and we will be duly ready to go.

I think we can start.

The Chair: Perfect.

Mr. Chong, the floor is yours for six minutes, sir.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing in front of our committee. Congratulations on the Canada-United Kingdom trade agreement. We look forward to reviewing that text in greater detail.

I would like to ask you about Canada-China relations, specifically with respect to Hong Kong.

As you know, Minister, Commonwealth judges sit on Hong Kong's top court, including a Canadian judge. It has been reported today that foreign secretary Dominic Raab said yesterday that the U.K. is considering pulling its judges out of Hong Kong's highest court in response to China's violation of international law in Hong Kong, including the expulsion of duly elected legislators from the legislative council, the silencing of dissent and many other violations of law.

Dominic Raab said he has begun consultations with Lord Reed, President of the United Kingdom Supreme Court, about whether or not it is appropriate for British judges to sit as non-permanent members of the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal.

As you know, in 2018, two years ago, the Honourable Beverley McLachlin was appointed to the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal, the first Canadian jurist to be nominated to the post. Are you undertaking consultations with respect to the Honourable Beverley McLachlin?

• (1555)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the Honourable Michael Chong for the question. That's part of a number of discussions that we have with our U.K. counterparts.

With respect to that, Mr. Chong, I am well aware of the issue. This is an issue that has been discussed, and views have been expressed. I have all the belief that Ms. McLachlin will make her own judgment and will take the right decision when it comes to her role on the court in Hong Kong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Are you consulting at all with any Canadian jurists on this issue?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We have been discussing this issue, I would say mainly on a bilateral basis, as we discuss all issues about Hong Kong. I think what people need to know is that, as with all the steps you have seen, Canada and the U.K. have been in lockstep. I don't think there is one step that has been taken that has not been in consultation between Canada and the United King-

dom. I think that's what you would expect from us, and these consultations will be ongoing.

Hon. Michael Chong: As you know, Australian Judge James Spigelman resigned from the high court in September, citing concerns over the national security law imposed on the region by Beijing. This is not just of concern to the United Kingdom.

I would like to move on to a second issue, which is Air Canada and China. As you know, Canada's airlines are failing. WestJet and Air Canada have laid off 30,000 people and are losing tens of millions of dollars a day. The government has yet to come forward with an aid package. The majority of our G7 allies—France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States—have created financial relief packages for their airline sectors.

There are 12 flights a week from Chinese carriers into Canada. There are only two flights a week from Canadian air carriers, specifically Air Canada, into China. We are facing an unbalanced approach and a lack of reciprocity in the relationship.

When our allies faced the same situation, they took action. France and Germany faced a similar situation, and they took diplomatic action to ensure the reciprocity of flights, in both directions, in order to protect their air carriers. The United States took action under the treaty and under regulation to effect similar action to protect its air carriers.

What is the Canadian government doing to protect Air Canada and ensure there is a balance in the relationship, ensuring that Air Canada has a fighting chance of survival?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you, again, for the question.

I can assure you, Mr. Chong, having contributed to the repatriation of probably more than 100,000 Canadians on 500 flights, I probably spoke with the CEO of Air Canada more often than many people would imagine. We are in close contact.

I have always lent myself, with the Minister of Transport, to support any of our airlines in Canada that fly internationally, whether it's Air Canada or WestJet, and will continue to do so. If there was a specific request, we would certainly do so.

I think there's—

Hon. Michael Chong: The request by Air Canada is for the Canadian government to take diplomatic action to address this imbalance. There are only two Air Canada flights a week from Canada to China. We are allowing 12 flights a week from China into Canada. There is a lack of reciprocity here and it's hurting Air Canada's bottom line and they're losing tens of millions of dollars a day. They're asking for what has been done in places like France, Germany and the United States, where governments have insisted on reciprocity, such that if China is going to have 12 flights a week coming into Canada, then there should be 12 flights a week by Air Canada into China.

What actions has your government taken on that?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I will be fighting at every step of the way, but I have not received any such requests and I speak to the CEO of Air Canada on an almost weekly basis.

Hon. Michael Chong: You ought to talk to your—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I speak to the CEO, and the CEO has not made that request to me. I spoke to him just last week. You can ask him, but if I have a question from Air Canada, I'll fight for them on that.

Hon. Michael Chong: They have requested that of your government, so I suggest maybe you talk to your colleagues.

Is Canada continuing to pursue a trade and services agreement with Hong Kong?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: It is not, at this time.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. We'll have to leave it there.

The next round goes to Mr. Fonseca for six minutes.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

Minister, we here in Canada are so proud of our multiculturalism. In my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville we have a large Ukrainian diaspora community. As you know, this upcoming Friday, the 27th, is Holodomor Memorial Day.

In March, you had the opportunity to visit Ukraine. I'd like you to update our committee on the bilateral relations that Canada has with this region, with the country of Ukraine, and state how Canada is working with the Minister of National Defence to ensure that any deployment of Canadian Armed Forces aligns with Canada's national interests, such as Operation Unifier in Ukraine.

• (1600)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm happy that you mentioned that because I think the relationship between Canada and Ukraine has never been as good. As you suggested, our relationship is deep, with people-to-people ties. I think we have more than one million Canadians of Ukrainian origin. I was very proud to be one of the first to be in Ukraine. Actually, I'm probably one of the very few ministers who have met two foreign ministers within 24 hours, because I was there when the previous minister was there, and then the morning after there was another minister.

We have a very close collaboration, not only in our bilateral relationship but also, as you mentioned, when it comes to training a police force, when it comes to a military presence. I think there has never been a better time for all of us to show solidarity with the people of Ukraine in their reform.

I must say, I've been talking to the foreign minister of Ukraine. We do now what I would call text diplomacy. We've been texting each other regularly. As you know, Ukraine is a key partner when it comes to fighting for the families of the victims of PS752. We have been in close co-operation. We're going to continue to be working, helping in the reform, maintaining our presence in Ukraine, which is very meaningful, and maintaining the financial assistance that

has been provided over a long time to Ukraine. I think Ukraine is at the forefront of fighting for democracy, for liberty and for freedom. We need to support it.

Mr. Fonseca, you and all of your constituents of Ukrainian origin—and for that matter, all Canadians—can rest assured that we're going to step up and be there and speak up. I think we'll continue to be the very close partner that we have shown ourselves to be since the beginning.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you.

Minister, I understand that there is a COVID-19 foreign ministers committee or working group on these international efforts. What are we seeing in terms of combatting the COVID-19 pandemic globally, and how does Canada's response rank amongst those of G7 and G20 countries? Can you tell me more about this COVID-19 foreign ministers committee or working group?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for asking the question.

You know, it started from a very simple idea. When COVID hit all of us, many were asking, how can we do better? How can we coordinate? How can we come together? It's a very simple thing. I took my Rolodex, basically, and invited about 15 to 20 of our colleagues around the world to join a call, which we had at the height of the COVID pandemic and I think was almost weekly. I have called a good portion of the G20 countries, but also other countries such as Morocco and Peru, where, you will recall, when we were trying to repatriate, we had a lot of issues. I invited a number of countries, and it was extremely beneficial. Actually, it's continuing. We have had 13 calls.

This is one of the examples of Canada leading in the world. We've not talked much about it, but we've done a lot of work when it comes to transit hubs and when it comes to air bridges. You may recall that I said we needed to maintain—to Mr. Chong's point—air bridges, because at the beginning of the pandemic I was saying that there was a risk, as we saw during the last war, of losing some air-bridge connectivity between Canada and Europe and other regions.

We talk about supply chains and we talk about what we can do together to alleviate and to make sure that we're sharing best practices. It's really amazing, because it's one of the groups where there are no prepared statements. It lasts for an hour; Canada is chairing, and whoever can come, with countries that have been...whether it's France, whether it's Germany. We had India recently join. We have countries such as Brazil, South Korea and Singapore. It's a number of countries that just came together. Italy comes to mind. We just want to share best practices and make sure that we're creating an informal forum for foreign ministers to coordinate the response on COVID-19.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Minister, COVID-19 has been a challenge for countries all over the world, but what unique challenges have your global counterparts reported? How is Canada seen on that global scale in terms of our response to the pandemic?

• (1605)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: From the beginning of the pandemic, the Prime Minister and I wanted to make sure that the voice of the most vulnerable would be amplified. I think, for example, of our Caribbean colleagues, where, as you can imagine, when the pandemic hit, their three sources of revenue—whether it's tourism, whether it's remittances or whether it's natural resources—have all gone down, so what started as a health crisis could easily turn into a financial crisis or a food crisis in some parts of the world, which could lead to a humanitarian crisis.

That's why we have invested, and that's why we have been present, whether it's in Latin America, whether it's in Africa or whether it's in the Caribbean, to help our closest friends to make sure that they can get through this pandemic. I think Canada has shown itself to be a very trustworthy and reliable partner.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you Mr. Fonseca.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for joining us. It's a pleasure to see you before the members of a parliamentary committee for the second time in less than 24 hours. That is very generous of you. We really appreciate it.

I would like to talk to you about something that has been the focus of attention for this committee's members, as you know, as it accounts for a large portion of the study we are undertaking. I am talking about the pandemic's impact on a number of vulnerable populations around the world and the World Health Organization's role in preventing this pandemic and other potential pandemics the WHO has already warned us about.

Do you feel that the WHO has played its role in properly warning the international community about the danger we were facing? Do you think some things should be adjusted, especially in light of information that the WHO is subject to pressures some may refer to as undue from the People's Republic of China, among others?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for your question, Mr. Bergeron. I am happy to see the committee taking an interest in this issue.

Clearly, the WHO could have done better. Considering that millions of people have been affected by the virus around the world, it is obvious that the WHO could have done better.

That is why Canada has joined a number of countries in saying that, although the WHO has been doing very important work during the pandemic, a time will come when we will have to question that organization's leadership and funding streams, as well as think about the warning systems that should be implemented.

It is clear that things could have been done better. As you said so well, Mr. Bergeron, we must prepare for the next pandemic. Humanity must better prepare for next time. I even said so at my last meeting with the WHO director general.

Canada and a number of other countries will continue to advocate for this, as we must better prepare for next time.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Something we have noted during the health crisis that began a few months ago is that all the international solidarity mechanisms have failed. We have seen this with the European Union, as well as with the World Health Organization. Countries have literally been competing for access to the scarce resources in order to deal with the pandemic.

Have you started thinking about what should be implemented for the future, so that international solidarity mechanisms would not disappear if another pandemic hit? As I was saying a few moments ago, the WHO has already warned us about the possibility of future pandemics. I assume that, next time, we won't be caught with our pants down like this time.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: No, I agree with you. That is why Canada has started this discussion with other countries on reforms we will need.

As you know, an investigation is currently underway on the causes of COVID-19. More generally, I was talking earlier about the committee of foreign affairs ministers on COVID-19, which was created sort of in the spirit of what you raised, Mr. Bergeron. That is one example of Canada taking the lead and deciding to create this roundtable. Some good things have come out of it. This is a good example of us taking spontaneous action. We may be able to turn this group of foreign affairs ministers on COVID-19 into a permanent entity. I would like that. I have actually already said so.

As you say, we must already prepare for the next time. If it's not a pandemic, it will be something else. As you have clearly stated, existing organizations and groups have failed. That is why took the lead in joining forces to do things better and especially in trying to better coordinate when the world really needed it.

• (1610)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: We agree that coordination was lacking last time and that we must definitely do better next time.

Regarding the WHO's funding, first, do you think the newly elected administration in Washington will question the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the WHO?

Second, if the United States decided to stay away from the WHO, at least for a time, what should the international community do to try to make up for that important player's absence from its ranks?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: You will understand that I cannot speak on behalf of President-elect Biden's new administration. However, according to what I'm hearing and what I have been able to read just like you, I sense a strong desire to revive multilateralism, to revive that cohesion. There has also been talk of a summit of democracies. That is what I have read. So I feel there is a will to do more together. So much the better, as that is fully in line with this will in Canada. We know that multiculturalism is important for Canada, but also for all other countries. For example, we saw this concerning the vaccine. Canada participated with others in what was called the COVAX Facility.

As I said in my opening remarks, we will be safe at home when everyone is safe. It is to our advantage to see what can be done. Will it be done through the WHO? Perhaps so. And perhaps something else will be put forward. What is certain is that Canada wants to be at the forefront because we are aware that the well-being of Canadians will also depend on the global response to this COVID-19 crisis.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister and Mr. Bergeron.

It is now Mr. Harris's turn to speak.

[English]

You have six minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us again today. I was at the Canada-China committee meeting last night and probably won't ask very much about China today, because we have a variety of issues that are important for us to discuss today.

You mentioned, of course, the activity of your department in repatriating Canadians. I think that was a success story for Canada and for the officials, your government and of course with the co-operation of yourself and the parliamentary secretary in particular, and I want to compliment you for that effort. A lot of people's lives were helped by that, so thank you for that.

I want to ask first of all about the most recent international crisis, between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which has resulted, at least, in a ceasefire and a potential settlement and resolution of these long-standing issues between the two parties.

One of the issues that came up was the failure, or rather, the lack of any real knowledge of what was going on in this situation and in these two countries because of Canada's lack of a mission in either Armenia or Azerbaijan, Armenia being looked after through Moscow and Azerbaijan through Ankara in Turkey.

I'm wondering if Canada is prepared to revisit that and ensure that it can actually play some positive role on the ground in assisting these parties to resolve some of the major outstanding issues that still arise as a result of the ceasefire.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for the very thoughtful question, Mr. Harris. Yes, we spent a bit of time yesterday on China. Thank you for your good words for our diplomats around the world. Hopefully your message will be conveyed to them to thank them for the repatriation. All of us became consular officers, I can tell you.

To your question about Nagorno-Karabakh, Mr. Harris, you know I've spent an enormous amount of time. This is a tragedy. I've been in touch with the Armenian community on numerous occasions.

To your point about information, I feel that I have been very much informed about what is going on. I think I spoke every other day with the foreign minister of Armenia. We texted almost every day about this situation. You know that I went on a visit about security in Europe. I met with the OSCE leadership; I met with the ambassador of France, the ambassador of the United States. I also went to meet NATO and I met with the EU high representative for foreign affairs and colleagues in the region.

I would say yes to your question. We're always looking at our posture in different countries, how we can make sure that we have a more appropriate network to cover all areas. You know we have a number of missions around the world, but certainly in terms of information, I would say to the committee and to Canadians that I think I was pretty much on top of what was going on, talking to—

• (1615)

Mr. Jack Harris: That's not my particular concern. Obviously being there on the ground on an ongoing basis, our diplomats and our people would know more, but we'd also be in a position to assist the parties if that was possible.

The Minsk group, as part of the OSCE, which we are members of, had a notable lack of success over the 16 or 20 years that it was involved in trying to resolve this dispute. By being there, you would have perhaps a role to play in assisting the parties to work together.

That was the point of my question. I'll leave you to answer that another time.

The other issue where we are perhaps lacking in support on the ground is in Africa. Over the course of the previous government's regime, a number of missions were closed. You mentioned last night the great role that China is playing in having relationships with many countries in Africa.

What is Canada doing to revive its presence in Africa, to maintain its connections with the African nations?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As you know, Africa is close to my heart. I think that was my first official trip, to Africa. I think it was with the Aswan Forum, and then I went to Senegal; I went to Ethiopia; I went to Mali to talk about the MINUSMA and our troops there. For me, Africa is very important.

Often I say demography is destiny. If you look at the demographic trend in Africa, clearly it is a place where Canada has a special role to play in my view. We have deep historical relationships, and you know I've said many times that we should also be looking at the African continental free trade area, which I've been talking about. I spoke almost regularly to the president of the African Union and a number of foreign ministers in Africa.

In terms of our posture, as I said, Mr. Harris, we are always looking at ways we can complement our posture in Africa. I think the future is certainly very much in Africa and our presence is significant to make sure we can promote Canadian interests, values and principles.

Mr. Jack Harris: Can you tell me why Canada—I know you're not the Minister of International Development, but as foreign minister, it's obviously very important to our position in the world—is so persistently low in terms of its official international development aid? It is worse now than under the Harper years, on a per capita basis and as a percentage of GDP. Why is that, and what are we going to do about it?

The Chair: Mr. Harris, I'm sorry. We have to leave it there. Maybe there will be a chance to return to that question in a subsequent round.

We will now go to round number two.

Mr. Diotte, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Thank you.

Thanks to the minister for being here.

Minister, in October Russia used a chemical weapon to poison opposition leader Alexei Navalny. My colleague raised it in the House, but I just wanted to give you an opportunity to speak about it today. I'm wondering if Canada will join our allies and impose the Magnitsky sanctions on the government officials responsible for poisoning the opposition leader.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Diotte, thank you for asking that question. You probably remember that Canada was one of the countries, with Germany, that asked for a G7 statement very strongly when novichok was used. Certainly I've been at the forefront. You know as well that we're looking to amend the chemical weapons treaty to make sure that novichok will be part of that, and we will continue. I think our colleagues in Germany have said that they don't want to make that a bilateral issue. They want that to be a multilateral issue.

I think we should all be concerned. It is abhorrent to see that states would be using chemical weapons against civilians. That is why at the time, in conjunction with our German colleagues, I did call for the G7 to stand up and speak up, which we did. I think you've seen throughout the year that Canada is doing a bit more, consistently, whether with the European Union, whether with the G7, or whether with the Five Eyes. Certainly we'll continue to do so and speak with one strong voice when we see egregious violations like that of international law.

• (1620)

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Thanks for that.

It was interesting; in your opening remarks you talked about the free press being essential to a free society. I appreciate that, because I was a journalist for 30 years myself. Increasingly, we're seeing the threat against free society and freedom of information coming from big tech companies via the Internet, whether it's search engine results or outright blocking of news stories. There has been a lot of discussion about that and a lot of potential for foreign interference in elections, etc.

What is Canada doing to fight against that threat?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would agree with you that democracy and its values and processes and institutions are under threat in many, many parts of the world. That's why, with the United Kingdom, you see that we were there for the media freedom conference, of which we were co-chair.

I can tell you, Mr. Diotte, that the issue of state and non-state actor interference in our democratic societies—with disinformation, with an infodemic or whatever you want to call it, with cyber-threats—is always top of mind when I talk to my colleagues. It is clearly top of mind when I talk with the Five Eyes. We talk with colleagues in Europe as well.

I would say that Canada is very much engaged. You will remember the G7 quick response mechanism that was put in place in Charlevoix to deal with that. We're looking with the Baltic countries. As you know, there's a NATO centre. A number of things are being looked at to make sure we can face that threat together. That's also something NATO is looking at, because we know that the work you did before is essential to maintain democracy.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: I appreciate that answer, but again, the threat is not so much coming from secret actors; it's very much out in the open. It's the power of the tech giants. Some officials and some critics seem to be saying that maybe it's time to break them up, because they have too much power. Is that something Canada would consider pushing for?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think as part of international discussions, there are different.... You referred to the big tech companies. At the OECD, as you know, there are a number of discussions going on with respect to the taxation of digital giants. There are other discussions going on in the world. What I was referring to were the ones we're also very much concerned with, as you've seen. Even CSE in Canada has been referring to that in its latest reports—when it singled out Russia, for example.

This is a threat we take very, very seriously. If this committee has a study to do, I'd certainly be willing to listen to you and your colleagues on that.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: I have just a very quick question.

Congrats on getting so many people back when they were forced, obviously, to come back in the pandemic. I did have a lot of trouble trying to get through to Global Affairs at one point. I'm just wondering what you would do to prevent that from happening if we came to a situation where it's "Come on back to Canada; we have another lockdown."

The Chair: Give a very brief answer, please, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would just say that I apologize if you had trouble. As you know, we staffed our watch centre, and I think at peak we had 600 people. In normal times, I think it's about 10. We had about two million emails and one million phone calls—or the reverse, I can't remember which one. That is just to say that the volumes we had, Mr. Diotte, were unprecedented.

The good thing is that we've learned from that. We trained many more consular officials and, with the deputy, who has been doing an amazing job, I think if it ever comes to that again we have trained far more employees of Global Affairs to all jump in to be consular officials to provide the best possible service to Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Next we have Ms. Dabrusin for five minutes, please.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for coming and speaking with us today and talking about the importance of multilateralism. It's been good to hear about all the work you're doing.

One of the things I want to talk with you about today is something that has been coming up in question period a lot, and that is our recent vote on Israel and actually on Palestine. I'm raising it because I'm Jewish and have been to Israel a couple of times myself. I am a strong supporter of Israel, and yet I am concerned that there has been a bit of a perspective put out there that says there is a unilateral Jewish point of view on this, instead of the fact that it's a community that in fact has many different points of view on things.

While our community might support Israel wholeheartedly, stand as an ally to Israel and believe very much in the importance of Israel's peace and security, it's not true that everyone would oppose the position that Canada has taken on that vote.

I just wanted to ask you some questions. My first one is pretty basic. Is this the same resolution, essentially, that our country supported in 2019?

• (1625)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Yes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: All right. Just as a matter of clarity, was this resolution supported by 163 other countries?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I believe so. You may have the count in front of you, Ms. Dabrusin. I think it's about that, out of my memory.

Just to add to what you said, I think the frame is that no one should question that Canada, as you said, has been a steadfast ally and is and will be a friend of Israel and a friend of the Palestinian people. Canada voted in support of this particular resolution as it addresses the core of the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Canada strongly supports, as you said, the international consensus of a two-state solution so that both sides can have a secure and prosperous future.

In that, I think Canada made a principled vote. I have been in touch with Jewish communities across Canada. We have to remember that this particular resolution was to reaffirm the right of the

Palestinian people to self-determination. I have explained that to Jewish communities across Canada. I have been in touch with my Israeli counterpart to explain Canada's position. I think that as a friend of Israel we all want a lasting peace and we all want a two-state solution. I think we've been able to explain that, and we will continue to be the steadfast ally that we have always been.

As every member of this committee knows, overwhelmingly Canada supports Israel, not just at the United Nations, but at all international organizations. In my discussions with my counterpart, I can tell you that we have many bilateral projects that we're pursuing. We talk almost every other week or we exchange...because as I said, now you do diplomacy by text messages. We are probably as close as two ministers of foreign affairs have ever been between Canada and Israel, and it will continue.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: That's great to hear, because I think it is important to have that strong relationship.

I want to also, though, go to a point, because when I hear some of the questions, it gives the impression that there has been a tremendous change. But the view that Palestinians have a right to self-determination and the two-state solution being the one that is the best for peace in the region, is that not the same Canadian policy that was under former prime ministers Harper, Martin and Chrétien?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sure.

You can be a steadfast ally as Canada is of Israel, and at the same time reaffirm, in a resolution, the right of the Palestinian people for self-determination. We all want a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and having a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel where both peoples can live in security, dignity, and safety. I think you will see Canada doing even more with Israel. That's why, when we explained that position, it was understood.

We will continue to be, as you mentioned, Ms. Dabrusin, the steadfast ally that Israel would expect from Canada, and we have demonstrated that time and time again.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you once again, Minister.

I think we are all focused on making the case for multilateralism.

We have lately gone through a number of crises involving the international community, be it directly or not. For example, let's think of the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh.

I would now like to talk to you about a Latin American crisis—that of the Bolivian election.

According to the Organization of American States, Evo Morales's election was tainted, and that led to his overthrow and a new election, which brought to power a successor leading the same party. An MIT study casts doubt on the OAS's findings and rather concludes that Mr. Morales would have actually won the election.

Did Canada support the OAS's findings on the Bolivian election or did it hold back, especially in light of the results of the MIT study?

• (1630)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As you have seen, I did take action after the election.

Canada certainly followed, with the Organization of the American States, the audit engagement that was launched. We will definitely continue to work with the OAS. That is something we are currently looking at, Mr. Bergeron, and I'm happy you brought up this issue. It is true that democracy has taken a bit of a step back in many Latin American countries Canada has a good relationship with. We will certainly continue to follow this matter. We are now analyzing the audit report that was presented, and we are certainly being careful. I think you used the right words.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Caution is needed, especially since people may feel that a democratically elected president has been overthrown. Fortunately enough, it seems that the new election brought the same party to power, but the fact remains that a president currently in exile in Argentina should perhaps still be in power.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

We'll have to leave it here.

[*Translation*]

You may have an opportunity to come back to this later.

[*English*]

The next round goes to Mr. Harris, for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: I would like to ask a few quick questions, given the two and a half minutes.

I understand that Canada is going to spend additional money on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament. However, we have not yet signed on to the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons, which recently received the required 50 signatories and notifications to allow it to be enforced under international law.

When will Canada join the international community in signing this treaty?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you, Mr. Harris, for a very important question.

Canada, unequivocally, supports global nuclear disarmament. We've been committed to the work that will take concrete steps toward a nuclear-free world. Like all of our NATO allies, Canada

supports the treaty of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons as the cornerstone of the international non-proliferation and disarmament architecture.

Mr. Jack Harris: Well, that's a step in the right direction. However, this is a treaty that bans nuclear weapons, and I think it's time for Canada to sign on.

You mentioned in your remarks that we need to support the most vulnerable people in world populations with respect to the COVID-19 situation, and then talked about Canada being a good friend of the Palestinian people.

Is the government prepared to respond to the request about the desperate situation of the UNRWA, the United Nations commission for refugees in Palestine? They are in a very desperate situation, unable to pay their employees, and need to be able to support the needs for medical assistance for Palestinians during this crisis.

Is that something your government is prepared to respond to, increasing our aid and dealing with the emergency now facing the Palestinian people?

• (1635)

The Chair: Please give a brief answer, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As you know, Canada is very committed to helping to meet the needs of vulnerable Palestinian refugees. You probably recall, Mr. Harris, that between 2016 and 2019 we contributed \$110 million in funding.

This is something that I've been discussing with colleagues in the Middle East. At the same time that we are supporting them, we are also monitoring the work of UNRWA very closely and making sure that we exert enhanced due diligence. I think this is very important work for stability and security in the Middle East, and that's something we're looking at, at this point.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The next series is a five-minute series. It goes to Mr. Genuis, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

About 25 Canadian children are in detention camps in northern Syria. The estimates are that 18 of those children are under six years of age. Why hasn't the Canadian government acted to repatriate those children?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you, Mr. Genuis. I'm happy to see you, I must say. I missed you yesterday.

You will have seen from news reports—and obviously there's the Privacy Act—that we were able to secure the return of one orphan to Canada. You'll remember that at the time I said this was extraordinary. That was the only Canadian orphan we had in a camp, and, thankfully, she has been reunited with her family.

The type of logistics that we needed, involving the Canadian Armed Forces, was exceptional and extraordinary. We don't have, as you know, a diplomatic presence in Syria, and we have a duty of care to our employees. That mission was very unique.

However, we are aware of the situation and we always try to find out and inquire about their well-being.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister.

I think you would understand that if those were my children or your children, neither of us would find that response to be good enough. It's not an issue of the Privacy Act; it's an issue of whether Canada is prepared to repatriate Canadian nationals who are under six years of age, who are, to put it mildly, in less than desirable conditions.

You've demonstrated that your government is capable of repatriating children from those camps. You've demonstrated it in the case of Amira.

I'll ask the question again, because I don't think you answered it. There are still over 20 children there, many of whom are under six years of age. You were able to send in Canadian personnel to repatriate one child from those camps. What about the other two dozen children who are there?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: They are with their parents. That was the distinction.

We had one orphan, and you will see, Mr. Genuis, that the operation.... I cannot go into the operational details. We've said that our—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I'm going to just jump in again, because I'm looking for answers here—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: If you want an answer—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can you explain to me why it is easier—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm happy to answer a specific—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, I have a specific question for you. Why is it easier to repatriate—?

The Chair: If I could I interrupt for a second, it's impossible for interpretation to follow if two members are talking over each other.

Could I ask you, please, to separate questions and answers to the very best of your ability?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me sharpen my question and hear from the minister on this.

Minister, you said that the difference was that in one case there was an orphan and in another case there were children with their parents. It would seem to me, though, that the rights of Canadian nationals are the same and the logistics involved in repatriation are the same, and in many cases our allies have repatriated in cases where children were with their parents.

Why is the Government of Canada not repatriating the remaining dozens of children, many of whom are under six, in these camps?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Do you want me to answer now?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Please, yes. I'd really like to know.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: What I said to you was that there was only one Canadian orphan who was in a camp. That's why we could mount a very extraordinary mission to repatriate her safely, ensuring her safety and safe return home to her extended family. In the circumstances and the operations, it was possible to do that with one orphan. Obviously, it's different from what you're suggesting.

Some other countries that you have referred to have a diplomatic presence. We do not have a diplomatic presence, as you know, in Syria, and our ability to provide consular assistance is, obviously, hindered by that fact.

We have a duty of care to our employees. What we did in this case was exceptional. We had one orphan, and we brought her back. We should all be happy with that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I was very happy to see Amira brought back, but I am not happy with the response in total.

Your response, frankly, is very confusing. Are you telling me that there just wasn't enough room in the vehicle to add a few other people? Is that the issue, like, "Okay, sorry, there weren't enough seat belts, so we only brought out one person"?

Canadian personnel went in. They were in the camps. They were engaging in diplomatic conversations with the people administering the camps where there are two dozen Canadian children, and you brought back one. You're telling me that there are operational difficulties in cases where the children have parents that don't exist as operational difficulties in cases where the child is an orphan. I think you can give a better explanation than that, Minister.

• (1640)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: The better explanation, Mr. Genuis, is that, obviously, you're not aware of the details of the operation because you made a number of assertions that are just not accurate. What I said is that you're not aware of how the mission was conducted. You're not aware of what we did. You're not aware of the circumstances. You're not aware of the—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: But how in the world can it be about logistics? The Canadian Forces were there. There are two dozen children.

Minister, if it were your children or my children... These are kids under six. They're Canadian nationals under six in these camps, and you're baffling us with excuses.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, we'll have to leave it there.

Let me repeat the point, please, for future interaction, that it is absolutely impossible for interpretation to follow if members talk over each other.

You've had your five minutes.

We will now go to Ms. Sahota, please, for the next round of five minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: It's a pleasure to see you.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's a pleasure to see you, as well. As I was stating when we were doing our sound checks, you always bring a very positive vibe and good energy wherever you go. I enjoy that.

I want to talk a little bit about something that won't come as a surprise to you. We probably got to know each other a little bit better over the repatriation mission that your department and other departments had to contribute in undertaking.

You stated that you last appeared here on March 12. It was the day before that that the WHO declared this current pandemic a pandemic. Soon after that, I started receiving a whole bunch of texts, calls and emails. I couldn't believe the number of people who were stuck across the world who wanted to be back home with their families here.

Can you describe a little bit...? You talked about going from 10 people working in this department of repatriation to 600 people. I know that the estimates that we're looking at right now are prior to all of this having been done. Maybe you can inform us a little bit about what it took to get the tens of thousands of Canadians repatriated, which you mentioned before.

Go ahead, please, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for your kind words.

I'll sum it up by leadership, leadership by all members of the diplomatic corps. This was a truly extraordinary effort, coming together with the deputy, with everyone here in Ottawa, and the missions around the world. We were facing some unprecedented circumstances. We had air space closures, airport closures, martial law being imposed, restrictions on flights, on cruises. This was the perfect storm. We had never experienced anything like this, where you had hundreds of thousands of people in about every country of the world, and we were able to repatriate and facilitate flights north of 100,000. If I include the commercial flights, you go even higher than that. We did about 500 flights from 110 countries.

I want to give credit to all those amazing diplomats. People went way beyond the call of duty, working countless hours. I think at one stage it was one million emails and two million phone calls, or the other way around, I can't remember. I remember I was getting 600 text messages a day. Everyone here was transformed into a consular

officer to be able to respond. That's also why we provided the loans, because we realized people might be stuck abroad through no fault of their own and needed financial assistance. I'm happy that we gave about 5,000 of these loans.

We learned from that experience. I want to compliment the deputy minister, Marta Morgan, and all the officials there. We really stepped up. Sometimes when you face circumstances like that, you rise to the challenge, and I think the team at Global Affairs and everywhere in the world did rise up and did things, Ms. Sahota, that no one ever expected. I think of our people in Peru, and some places where our missions are certainly not comprised of enough people to face the challenges. We repatriated a lot of people from India, Peru, Morocco, Pakistan. I think we have been able to help hundreds of thousands of Canadians, and that's probably the thing I'm most proud of, the team that did extraordinary work at a time when they were also concerned about their own families.

You remember this was at the beginning, when everyone was asking what was going on and they showed up for work every day and put the interests of Canadians first and made sure we could bring these people back.

• (1645)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I definitely would like to compliment your team, your parliamentary secretary as well, and all your staff. Of course, the departmental workers also who put in all those hard hours and efforts. Two million emails are not easy to respond to. It was a logistical challenge at the time and I know a lot of people in my riding were stuck in India. I was constantly messaging and emailing you and all your staff about that.

Can you give us a little more detail as to why so many people were finding it challenging to come home from that part of the world?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First of all, you said it right. Rob Oliphant was part of your committee and did amazing work, as did you, Ms. Sahota. You were very much engaged in helping the people in your riding.

Why did we have so many people? I think India was one of the places where a lot of people were vacationing and ended up stranded through no fault of their own. I think we repatriated north of...I don't have the exact number, but it was certainly tens of thousands of people from India. Overall, I think this operation went pretty well. We brought these people back home safely.

This is also thanks to all members of Parliament. We did our part, and the members of Parliament did their part, and Canadians did bear with us at that time of difficulty. We certainly learned from that.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much.

I'll have to cut you off there and go to the next round, but we can certainly circle back in a subsequent round.

We are now going into round three, and five minutes go to Mr. Morantz, please.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Minister, I want to talk to you about the vote on the resolution in the UN last week. I appreciate the attempt at what I would call damage control with respect to the conversation between you and Ms. Dabrusin earlier, but with the greatest respect, it's not the part of the resolution that says that Canada supports a two-state solution that the Jewish community is concerned about. It's the rest of the resolution that is problematic.

In fact, your own ambassador, Mr. Rae, said there were parts of the resolution that he simply did not agree with. Your own former colleague Mr. Levitt said, "By supporting this resolution, Canada is providing ammunition to those who seek to delegitimize and demonize the State of Israel, which ultimately sets back the prospects for peace in the region".

The aspects of the resolution that are problematic, Minister, have to do with three things.

First, it says that the security wall, which was put up to protect all Israeli citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish, from terrorist attacks, severely impedes the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Your government voted for that.

It says that the so-called occupied territory should be contiguous—in other words, the West Bank and Gaza should be contiguous. If that were to come true, Israel simply would no longer exist. Your government voted for that.

It also refers to Israel as an occupier, which has never been the official position of the Government of Canada.

If your goal was simply to reaffirm Canada's commitment to a two-state solution, wouldn't it have been simpler to simply vote against this ill-conceived resolution, and then put out a press release saying why you voted against it, and that you support, as always, a two-state solution?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: You know, I have enormous respect for you and your questions. You did ask me that question in the House on one or two occasions.

I think our explanation of the vote speaks for itself, and you are well familiar with that. I had a chance to speak to Jewish communities across Canada to explain our position. I also spoke to my counterpart in Israel, with whom we have an extraordinary collaboration.

The Jewish community in Canada and around the world understands that Canada is a steadfast ally of Israel. You know well that we vote against the vast majority of these yearly Israel-related resolutions. We explained the reason why we voted in that manner, and

we said that we reaffirm the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. I will continue to engage with the community, with whom I have many friends, probably as many as you, and for whom I have enormous respect.

We explained that. Ambassador Rae did that. The Prime Minister did that. It's not inconsistent with being a steadfast ally of Israel. If you look at our voting records, you will realize that our government has a position on votes. If you look at previous governments, it demonstrates very clearly that we are a steadfast ally, which is what our friends in Israel expect from Canada.

• (1650)

Mr. Marty Morantz: I don't disagree that Canada is and always should be an ally, but, to respectfully disagree with Ms. Dabrusin, the vast majority of Canadian Jews would not appreciate the fact that their government is voting for a resolution that refers to Israel, in the preamble, the way I described earlier. They simply would not.

In fact, although you say you have consulted and talked to many members of the Jewish community, I don't know if you have consulted with other people outside of the Jewish community who also feel very strongly about Canada's support for Israel. That might be a good thing to do as well. The reality is that three major organizations—B'nai B'rith, Simon Wiesenthal Center, CIJA—pleaded with you not to vote for this resolution, for the reasons they very clearly and concisely described.

If it is the position of the Government of Canada that there should be two states living peacefully side by side, that is a point you can make without voting for a resolution that calls Israel an occupier, supports contiguity of Palestinian regions, and calls the wall an impediment to self-determination. You didn't have to do that to make your point.

That's not a question. It's just a statement. It's really to set the record straight on how Canadian Jews and millions of other Canadians who support Israel feel about what your government did this year and last year.

The Chair: Mr. Morantz, thank you very much. We'll have to leave it there.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Will I have a chance to answer, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: There may well be an opportunity in a subsequent round, Minister.

We will now go to Dr. Fry for five minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: It's good to see you.

Hon. Hedy Fry: It's good to see you too.

I want to go back to something Mr. Diotte brought up, about journalism and journalists.

Since 1992, 1,350 journalists have been murdered around the world; 40% of those have come from the Caribbean-Latin American region. We also know that in the OSCE there are many journalists right now who are being tortured, being put into prison, having their human rights denied. These are all journalists who are being critical of governments. We see Turkey in the OSCE; we see Belarus in the OSCE; we see some of the central Asian countries in the OSCE doing this.

It is easy for us to decry it internationally, but that doesn't solve the problem. Are there tools that the international community can use to sanction or to do whatever they can about countries that are actually committing murder?

It's not just about democracy now. It's about human rights. It's the right of people to speak out and have opinions. It's a whole issue of the fact that people are afraid to do this now. I think very recently we saw in Mexico that a journalist, Ms. Ferral, had been killed.

What are the tools that are available to us that can actually be effective? Really, just saying we don't like it and everyone wagging their finger has made absolutely no impression whatsoever. Are there tools?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First of all, Ms. Fry, I want to commend your work at the OSCE. Before I went there—I just want to state for the record—you were extremely helpful.

With regard to your point, it's true that we see democracy values, processes and institutions, freedom of speech and freedom of expression [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] a number of authoritarian regimes, which have used COVID-19 as an excuse.

Let me give the example of Belarus. At the media freedom conference, there's a prize that was created by Canada and the United Kingdom to recognize journalists who have done exceptional work. This year, the prize has been awarded to the Belarusian Association of Journalists.

Well, that's one way. I think that giving them a voice so that the international community, with the high-level panel.... I spoke to Amal Clooney and with Lord Neuberger—and we have our own Irwin Cotler on the high-level panel—to see how we can best protect journalists. He talked about enhancing consular assistance to journalists. There are a number of streams.

I spoke at the International Bar Association, as well, to raise awareness of the plight that is being felt now by journalists. With the rise of authoritarianism that we see in many places of the world, we see freedoms going down. Those who are suffering on the front line have been journalists, in too many parts of the world.

We're always looking at the tool box. I think what I like about the high-level legal panel in particular is that they are really looking at legal tools that states could draw upon to make sure that we can better protect journalists around the world.

• (1655)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you, Minister. That at least tells us that we're actually working on some effective ways of dealing with this issue. I just didn't know if sanctions and things like.... Obviously, you cannot apply Magnitsky because nobody is taking money and putting it into foreign accounts, especially into Canada.

The most important thing I want to talk about is that it's not just journalists. We are now seeing that parliamentarians are being murdered in many countries. These are so-called democratic countries—and I use the word guardedly—that belong to democratic institutions that are part of...people we deal with on an everyday basis.

Again, I wonder what we can do to protect parliamentarians as well.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I know that you did a lot of work on that, and I want to, first of all, commend you again for the work that you're doing on that with other parliamentarians around the world.

It is of much concern. When we see an attack on freedom and democracy, it has many concerning angles. We've seen it in many countries where.... I'll take the case of Belarus, where you see that we have not recognized the presidential election as being free and fair. We've seen a number of issues come up in Latin America. I think that, as parliamentarians, we should all be very concerned about what's going on.

Just an idea about studies.... A study about the tools you can recommend to the international community and Canada can be part of the solution in addressing the situation that you're talking about with respect to different parliaments around the world.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: The floor now belongs to Mr. Bergeron once again for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I had a series of questions, but Mr. Morantz's comments really resonated with me.

I think bad faith must really be involved for someone to claim that Canada took an anti-Israel position.

All of us here are used to having bills presented to us. There used to even be mammoth bills with a number of provisions, some of which we may agree with and others we may not. That even happened under Stephen Harper's Conservative government. In the end, a decision had to be made that could be interpreted by some as the position on all the elements of the bill.

We are also used to certain Conservative Party motions that include the kitchen sink. They contain many things, some of which we agree with, and some of which we disagree with, but, at the end of the day, we have to vote either for or against the motion.

I see that Canada has voted in favour of the two-state solution, which is the solution that will help achieve a sustainable peace to benefit both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Of course, there may be disagreements over fact that the motion was referring to a contiguous territory. In an ideal world, we may wish for the two territories to be contiguous, but the geographic reality makes this not the case.

I think that Ambassador Rae was very clear when he appeared before this committee. He told us that, when he expressed reservations about the resolution, he did so on behalf of the Government of Canada. The reservations were not expressed only by Bob Rae as a citizen or even as an ambassador, but by the Government of Canada.

As for the fact that Israel is occupying that land illegally, that is indeed the case. The international community has been refusing to recognize that since 1967. We can bury our heads in the sand and pretend that Israel is not an occupying state, but Israel has been occupying land that does not belong to it. The international community does not recognize this.

The United States went a bit outside the mainstream by moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but the entire international community is keeping its diplomatic missions in Tel Aviv to indicate that the Jerusalem question has not yet been resolved. As long as no two-state solution has been reached, no sustainable peace that will benefit all parties can be established.

Minister, on the contrary, I want to express my support for your decision because I don't think that decision was against Israel. There were elements in the resolution that we may disagree with, and I think you have been clear on those elements. However, I think it was, on the contrary, a responsible position in favour of peace, both for Palestine and Israel.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron. That was quite a comment.

Minister, I'm sorry. Two and a half minutes go by quickly. I invite you to come back to this issue during the next questions.

[*English*]

I would like to turn the floor over to Mr. Harris now, please, for two and a half minutes only.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to follow up on my colleague Mr. Bergeron's comments. Since this issue has been discussed here broadly, there are many Canadians, including Jewish Canadians, who believe in human rights, who seek sustainable peace and justice in the Middle East and who are heartened by the support of Canada on the self-determination resolution.

The preamble to many resolutions is not something that we always agree upon. The resolution itself supporting that self-determination is an important step for Canada to take on the international stage. I would like to think this is a step towards Canada being more engaged in trying to get closer to that two-state solution. It's not enough to say we support it. We've been saying that for many years, as has been pointed out by Ms. Dabrusin.

What is Canada actually prepared to do? What steps is Canada prepared to take to advance the cause of the two-state solution?

We've asked already about support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees to help them sustain their lives. We need self-determination. We need to have basics first. Can we do that, and can we do other things?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for the question, Mr. Harris.

This is something that I've been discussing with my Israeli counterpart. He asked Canada to play a positive role, and obviously we are willing to play a meaningful role. I spoke to him, and we had a conversation not too long ago, following the Abraham Accords. You may know that on the night of the Abraham Accords, I think I was the first foreign minister to whom he spoke that night when they signed with the United Arab Emirates.

We already have a free trade agreement with Israel, which we have enhanced. We're looking at ways in which.... I have been speaking with the Palestinian Authority as well. As you know, one of the good things over the last nine months is that I have been able to speak...and I spoke with the Secretary-General of the Arab League also on a number of occasions, and to my Israeli colleagues, who have been asking me in particular to play a positive role. We always answer yes, and conveying sometimes.... Canada being able to speak to both sides, there are things that we are seeing, and I think we can play a positive role and we'll continue to do so.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

[*English*]

We're now back to a five-minute round, and it goes to Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I'd like to ask you a few questions about Nagorno-Karabakh. In particular, I'd like to ask you about the conversation the Prime Minister had with President Erdogan on April 23.

There was a report that indicated the Prime Minister committed to addressing Turkish concerns about the suspension of Canadian arms exports. Is that report accurate?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm not privy to the discussion between the Prime Minister and Minister Erdogan, but I think there is a readout and the readout speaks for itself.

• (1705)

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

You approved these arms exports to Turkey. Why?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Well, let me just frame the discussion on that, Mr. Chong.

As you know, Canada, under your government and all previous governments, has been exporting equipment to NATO countries. Canada has one of the most robust export control regimes in the world. Under our government, we signed the Arms Trade Treaty—and I must say to Canadians who are watching that, sadly, you voted against that—where we enhanced our export control regime.

What I would say about the exports you are referring to is that I look at them on a case-by-case basis, as the law requires me to do, which is to look at all export permit requests on a case-by-case basis.

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, I guess what's so confounding about your approval of these exports is that last year, in the fall, in September or October, your government suspended arms exports to Turkey. That was reversed in the spring, when you allowed Canadian drone systems made by WESCAM industries of Burlington, Ontario to export these drone systems for the Baykar drone, and then subsequently you resuspended arms exports. That's why I ask the question.

High-tech drones are the reason why Azerbaijan defeated Armenia. There is no doubt that drones shifted the balance of power and made a huge difference in the conflict. The Canadian drone systems used in the South Caucasus by Azerbaijan were instrumental in Azerbaijan defeating Armenia, and it was your government—you in particular, Minister—that approved the export of Canadian drone systems.

Minister, you've said recently that Canada supports the Armenian people during this most difficult time, but what's confounding is how you can say that you're supporting the Armenian people, when you approved the export of these drone systems that were so instrumental in Azerbaijan defeating Armenia.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Let me be very clear to you and to Canadians, Mr. Chong. First of all, you're talking about cameras that were exported. That's the Canadian equipment you're referring to, I suppose, with respect to that.

To show that our export control regime works.... Mr. Chong, as you know, the moment I was made aware that the end-use certificate was violated and of the allegations that were made, I immediately suspended the relevant permits. I think the steps that have been taken by Canada have been applauded even by the Prime Minister of Armenia. You probably saw his public statement that says he welcomed Canada's suspension and he wished other countries would follow suit.

When I say that I was talking with Armenia, I've been in contact with the minister almost every day during the conflict. I have been talking to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I spoke to the Secretary-General of NATO. I spoke to the leadership of the OSCE. I spoke to my colleagues in Europe to see what more we can do.

I think, with respect to the export control regime, as you know well, Mr. Chong, it is important to say that under the law I am required to look at permits when they come to me. I look at them on a case-by-case basis with the evidence that is presented to me, and when there's a violation, the good thing with the Arms Trade Treaty—which we should all be happy about, you and all the mem-

bers—is that foreign affairs ministers currently and in the future are bound now by a much higher standard, which as a lawyer I commit to uphold in not only the spirit but the letter of the law.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Minister.

I just have a comment before my time is up. Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

It was clear in your testimony yesterday in front of the Canada-China committee that the government has already adopted a new framework for dealing with China, and there will be no formal release of this framework.

I've been following this file closely since September. I have to tell you, Minister, with respect, that I couldn't tell that there was a new framework that had already been put in place, and neither could many people who follow this file. I had noted a change in rhetoric in October, but it seems to me the new framework is somewhat contradictory.

In September, when supposedly the new framework had been in place, you indicated you were no longer pursuing free trade talks with China; but Ambassador Barton said, on the same day, to an audience in Edmonton that included the Chinese ambassador to Canada, that Canada needs to do more in China and that we need to broaden trade with China.

The other thing that seems confounding about this new framework is that I don't understand how any new framework cannot include a plan to deal with China's foreign influence operations here, nor do I understand how any new framework does not include a plan to make a decision on Huawei.

Minister, the new framework, I think, needs some more work, because if I don't understand it, I can tell you the Chinese certainly will not understand it. I think it needs to be a lot clearer and a lot more consistent if Canada is going to have a clear, consistent voice with respect to China on the world stage.

● (1710)

The Chair: Give a very brief answer, please, Minister. There may be a chance to circle back.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As I said, China of 2020 is not China of 2016 or even of 2018, Mr. Chair.

I think what I said, Mr. Chong, is that we've seen our position evolve in light of this situation and I think we've been smart and firm in our position—I said that in the House today—whether it comes to the Uighurs or whether it comes to Hong Kong. I've outlined places where we're going to challenge China, places where we're going to coexist with China, and some other areas where we're going to co-operate, for example with respect to climate change.

I said that what will be driving us is interest, principles, values, human rights, and then obviously some rules and partnerships. I think this has been laid out and this is foreign policy in action. I will be happy to explain it to you further, but I can say that Canadians have seen it in action because we have taken a very strong position on all these issues.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Our final set in this round goes to Mr. Fonseca, please. The floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you, Minister. I feel that you've been very clear with our position on China, and also with what I'm going to ask you about Belarus.

On November 5, 2020, an independent expert report on Belarus was prepared under the auspices of the OSCE. I want to thank the Honourable Hedy Fry for all her hard work there at the OSCE on behalf of Canada. Thank you, Hedy.

In that report, they found that on August 9, 2020, the presidential elections were not transparent, free or fair, and that there have been beyond any doubt major human rights abuses carried out by the Belarusian state against its own people.

Minister, what impact, if any, might this report have on the international community's response to the events unfolding in Belarus?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you very much, Mr. Fonseca, for the question.

As you know, we've been at the forefront of the response. We've been issuing statements condemning the situation, calling it for what it is, with the United Kingdom and other partners around the world, with the European Union.

We have done three sets of sanctions when it comes to Belarus—the latest one with the European Union—and we will continue to do that because we think that it's really about sending a very clear and loud message that the international community is not going to stay idle.

You may recall that I was, again, one of the first foreign ministers to get in touch with the leader of the democratic movement, Svetlana Tikhonovskaya. We've remained in touch since then. I visited her last time at a summit that was organized in the Baltics, with all the Baltic foreign ministers. We have looked at ways on how we can support the democratic movement. I think Canadians should be proud to see that their government is there standing up with her and these brave women who have been facing a very authoritarian regime.

We will continue, obviously, to fight for freedom and for a free and fair election in Belarus.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Minister, it is heartening to see that there is action on these reports.

The Government of Canada is making a \$6.6-million contribution to the World Trade Organization in 2021. In 2020, Canada was a 2.5% contributor to the WTO. How is Canada ranked as a member contributor to the WTO? What voice does Canada have at the table?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I may leave that to the deputy for the exact number on contributors. She may have that.

Look at the Ottawa Group. This is a creation of Canada where we took action at a time when leadership was needed at the WTO, when the appellate function was put into question and where it was undermining the very foundation of the WTO. This is a bit like the foreign minister COVID group that I created. This was of the moment. We led and provided leadership. The Ottawa Group has done great things with respect to the supply chain.

With respect to your specific question, I'm happy to cede the floor to the deputy, or otherwise to come back to you with a written answer on the specific amount of funding.

Deputy.

• (1715)

Ms. Marta Morgan (Deputy Minister, Foreign Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't have those numbers at my fingertips, but we'd be glad to get them back to the committee after this.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you.

Minister, I have another question that comes to numbers again. At the Women Deliver conference in June 2019, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that the Government of Canada will raise its funding to reach an average of \$1.4 billion annually by 2023 to support women, children and adolescents' health around the world, with \$700 million going specifically to sexual and reproductive health and rights until 2030.

Minister, is Canada on track for holding up this commitment?

Maybe the deputy will have some of those numbers.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Definitely. This is Canada playing a leadership role in the world. We've said it before, and I think questions from the members have highlighted this. We know that the COVID crisis has disproportionately impacted women and girls around the world and that we need to do more to support them to make sure they will be fully at the table. We know that once you have more diversity at the table—more women at the table—peace is more sustainable.

We need to continue to be there for economic security. We're doing that at the UN. We're doing that through a number of agencies. That's what Canadians would expect from their government.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much.

Mr. Fonseca, thank you.

I want to thank all colleagues, Minister Champagne included, for respecting the time limits. As a result of our discipline, we have an additional 12 or 13 minutes before we need to come to a hard stop.

I propose to divide that time evenly across parties to give every party an additional chance to ask one pithy two-and-a-half-minute question and answer. We'll go in the sequence of Mr. Genuis, Ms. Dabrusin, Monsieur Bergeron and Mr. Harris.

I would give the floor to Mr. Genuis, please, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I was so struck by your comment that the military technology that Canada sold to Turkey, which gave Azerbaijan a decisive military advantage over Armenia, was just cameras. To me, it's like saying that a bullet is just a piece of metal. The nature of a thing is in its use. The use in this case was critical technology that gave Turkey a decisive advantage. It doesn't matter if it's a piece of metal or a camera or whatever it is. What matters is its use. The flippant way in which you, a minister of the Crown, refer to that would, I think, be quite surprising to people whose lives were directly affected by this conflict.

Minister, you responded to that before and I would invite further comments on that in writing.

I want to ask you a specific question about your policy with respect to Iran. We all recognize the importance of democratic norms and adhering to votes that take place in the House of Commons. Two and a half years ago, you voted to immediately list the IRGC as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code. Will your government follow the will of the House of Commons and list the IRGC as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code, as you voted to do two and a half years ago?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, let me refer first to the question and the comment that was made by the member. I won't let the record stand on what he said.

There is nobody.... Look at me, Mr. Genuis. I have been more engaged on the file of Nagorno-Karabakh than you probably have been. I've been in contact with the—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, your comments spoke for themselves. I'd like a response on the Iran question, please. I have two and a half minutes.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Let me answer.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, can I just remind you of the point that we made earlier, which is not to have members talk over each other, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, that is fair, but it is my time to manage. I'd asked the minister a question on Iran—

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, I've hit the pause button.

Just as a point of order, it's impossible for interpretation to follow when members talk over each other.

Please. This is just a reminder.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, carry on, please.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: To continue my answer.... That's what I wanted to say, and I was specific. I want to set the record straight about the equipment. You had officials testify. If you want to be truthful to Canadians, you have to call things...and you have to be respectful of the record. You had officials who testified and provided you all the answers, and I'm happy to do that.

I am very concerned, Mr. Genuis. That's why you should recognize that the moment allegations were made and the equipment and the technology was used in the drone, I immediately suspended the relevant permits. They remain frozen, and I launched an investigation. That's the responsible thing to do. I will take no lessons from someone when it comes to having been there for—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister. The record is clear.

Will you list the IRGC, yes or no?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, that is your time.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The minister didn't want to answer.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Dabrusin now for the next two and a half minutes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you, Minister.

At the beginning you talked a bit about pulling out your Rolodex and pulling together foreign ministers from around the world to address the challenges that were posed by COVID. Could you speak a little more about this? What were some of the main successes you saw when you brought those people together? You said up to about 20, I believe.

• (1720)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First of all, it was at a moment when the world needed it. It was a moment when the COVID crisis had just hit and we needed to come together as an international community.

Thank God I had a chance to collect some of these numbers before the COVID crisis hit, because these numbers were very useful to me when we wanted to repatriate Canadians and bring people home. The foreign ministers' COVID committee was really to bring best practices and ideas, to have a chance to see what's going on. For example, we learned good things from South Korea and Singapore. We were hearing this because, as you know, the COVID crisis hit them before us, just like in Italy.

We could share best practices, for example air bridges, where we could work together in establishing the supply chain and making sure there would be transit. As you remember, when we were trying to repatriate people, we said that if everyone is closing their airports and their borders, there's going to be nowhere we can repatriate our citizens.

We've been working together and we've continued to engage. I think it's the 13th time we have had these discussions among foreign ministers. This is Canada leading in the moment. When leadership was needed, we rose to the challenge and we created a group.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you for that.

I only have another 30 seconds, which is not much time.

You said 13 times. Do you expect that you will continue meeting? Is this another avenue to continue those conversations as we move forward?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I believe so. I hope so.

I have been engaging with my partners around the world. I suggested that the committee continues because there's so much coordination. It's a group that brings together people from Latin America, the Middle East, Europe and Asia, the type of countries that want to work together, put politics aside and make sure we can advance some of these issues, which are critical to provide stability and address the biggest challenge we have, which is COVID right now.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

Mr. Bergeron, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I want to quickly address Mr. Genuis' questions about children trapped in refugee camps in Syria.

Minister Champagne, you said that we had no one on site to carry out this type of operation. However, we saw you succeed in spite of everything. You said that one aggravating factor was the lack of staff on the ground. However, several western countries that repatriated children from refugee camps are in exactly the same situation. I don't think that this is an argument for leaving children in that hell.

Let's draw a parallel with the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. I think that Canada suffered a disadvantage because it wasn't represented on site.

Since it failed to provide concrete assistance to the Armenians during the conflict, is Canada considering establishing an embassy in Yerevan, Armenia?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for the question.

We're still considering how we could maintain a presence on site. You mentioned assistance, Mr. Bergeron. However, if you saw how many times I spoke with the Armenian government and the community during the crisis, you would understand that, every day, we were aware of the situation on the ground. Just about every day, I would receive a text message describing the exact situation on the ground, so that I could talk to my counterparts, whether it was—

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Minister Champagne, I just want to point out that your own officials told us that they were having trouble getting information on what was really happening on the ground. Either they didn't inform us properly, or this really reflects what was going on.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I was receiving this information, as the minister of Foreign Affairs, because I remained in contact with my counterpart.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: We didn't have this information.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: To answer your question, of course we're always considering what we can do. We share with the Armenian people principles and values linked to democracy and the francophonie. That's why we took a position from the start, when we saw the ceasefire. We said that we really needed to determine, with the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, whether this agreement would lead to a lasting peace.

I think that Canada will keep its commitment in this area. I'll do so, and the Government of Canada will do so as well, because we were all deeply affected by what happened to the Armenian people. That's why Canada wants to and will continue to pursue a resolution to this conflict.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron and Minister Champagne.

[*English*]

The final round of questions goes to Mr. Harris, please, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, Canada contributes \$11.1 million to the International Criminal Court. In March, Amnesty International questioned a letter that Canada sent to the ICC on February 14, 2020, in which they reiterated Canada's position that the court doesn't have jurisdiction to investigate alleged war crimes in Palestine and also reminded the court of Canada's budgetary contributions. Amnesty interpreted that it appears to be a threat for Canada withdrawing financial support.

That is a serious accusation, which deserves a response by you and your government. Does such a letter exist? Will you release it to the committee? Does it, in fact, remind the court of Canada's contribution?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Harris, I have responded to that question. I'm not aware of any such letter.

What we said is that in the absence of a Palestinian state, it is Canada's view that the court does not have jurisdiction in this matter under international law. Obviously, we don't link that to any contribution.

This was just a statement we made. I'm not aware of any such letter.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you for that denial on the record, because we haven't been able to get that specifically from you and your office, despite my letters to you. However, thank you for that today.

Canada's contribution to the World Health Organization has decreased each year since 2018. The United States has pulled back. You have questioned the financing of the WHO. We're going to look at it to see if it's doing the right thing.

Is it not important that Canada perhaps increase its contribution to the WHO? Experts say that there will be more pandemics as we go forward. What do you say about that? Is that not Canada's role, to fix institutions if they need fixing and make them work?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Certainly. I think you will see, Mr. Harris, from the estimates—to the best of my recollection—that we have increased our funding.

Certainly I've said that we want to make sure, if you're saying... I will perhaps leave it to the deputy to provide the limits of response. I recall that there was a separate call made by the World Health Organization and that Canada was responding to that.

I can say that we did that with the Red Cross. We did that in Latin America. We did that in Africa. We did that in the Caribbean, in many ways, to help during this COVID crisis.

Like you, I believe that Canada should stand with people around the world who are facing significant hardship from this COVID crisis.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Champagne.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Colleagues, that brings us to the end of our scheduled time with our Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[Translation]

Minister Champagne, thank you for speaking to us this afternoon.

Thank you for your contribution and for your team's contribution.

[English]

It was a pleasure to spend time with you, and we had a fulsome discussion.

I propose that we let you and your team disconnect, and then we will turn our minds, expediently, to the votes we need to complete tonight.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Thank you for inviting me.

[English]

Thank you, committee, for your work on behalf of Canadians. It's really appreciated.

Thank you, Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Madam Clerk, as the minister and his team disconnect, we have a couple of options with respect to the votes that need to follow, the main estimates. One proposal is that we take them all at once and the committee votes on division as one package, or we can go through them one by one. I'm in the committee's hands.

In the interest of time, if there's no objection, maybe we can treat them all as one package.

Madam Clerk, I would then be in your hands with respect to the appropriate language that I need to put to the committee.

Are there any views from colleagues on this?

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron, the floor is yours.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I think that we should adopt them as a package, on division.

The Chair: Does everyone agree?

[English]

I will then put to the committee that we pass the votes that were read out at the beginning of this meeting on division in their entirety.

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,897,264,276

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$113,830,264

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$5,035,414,948

Vote 15—Payments, in respect of pension.....\$71,024,000

Vote 20—Pursuant to subsection 12(2).....\$1

Vote L25—Pursuant to subsection 12(2).....\$1

Vote L30—Loans – International Financial Assistance Act.....\$60,500,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, L25 and L30 inclusive agreed to on division)

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

Vote 1—Payments to the Centre.....\$141,848,784

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION (CANADIAN SECTION)

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$11,682,786

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

Okay, the votes carry. With that, Madam Clerk, I think we are done for today.

We stand adjourned until our next meeting on—

• (1730)

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Did the votes carry on division?

The Chair: Yes, that's correct. Did I misspeak?

Hon. Michael Chong: You simply said that the votes carried.

The Chair: On division. Understood. Thank you, Mr. Chong, for verifying that they were carried on division.

We are adjourned until Thursday's meeting.

Thank you for being disciplined and on time this afternoon.

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