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Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi



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• (1640)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): I'd like to call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 107 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Before we begin, I'd like to remind all members and witnesses in the room of the following important preventive measures.

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times. All earpieces have been replaced by a model that greatly reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black in colour, whereas the former earpieces were grey.

When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down on the middle of the sticker for this purpose, which you will find on the table. Please consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and to reduce the chances of feedback from an ambient earpiece.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I've been assured by the clerk that they have been doing the testing beforehand for connectivity. In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, everything has been undertaken, and I'm happy to advise everyone that all is good.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 29, 2024, the committee will resume its study of Canada's approach to Africa.

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses.

From the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale, we have Mr. Denis Côté, policy analyst. From the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, we have Mr. Andy Harrington, who is executive director. For the Centre for International Studies and Co-operation, we're happy to have Mr. Philippe Dongier, who is here in person, and he serves as executive director.

Each of you will be provided five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will proceed with questions from the members. I would ask all witnesses to pay attention. Once you're getting close to your time limit, I will hold this up, which means you have to wrap it up within 10 to 15 seconds. That applies not only when

you're doing your opening remarks but also when questions are posed by the members.

All of that having been explained, we will now commence with the witnesses. We will start off with Mr. Côté.

Mr. Côté, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Côté (Policy Analyst, Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale): Thank you very much.

I would first like to thank the committee for inviting me as part of this study to testify on behalf of the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale, or AQOCI.

Our association brings together 75 international co-operation and solidarity organizations based in Quebec that work with more than 1,300 local partners in 112 countries around the world to eradicate the causes of poverty and build a world based on the principles of justice, inclusion, equality and respect for human rights.

More than 50 of those organizations are currently active in over 40 countries in Africa. They highly concentrate their activities in the Sahel countries, including Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

With respect to Canada's engagement with countries on the African continent, in our view, the current situation does not lend itself to Canada's withdrawal, but rather to reinforced engagement in the region. In the context of a growing number of crises, including political, climate and security crises, it's more important than ever that we support the partners we've been working with for many years and show local communities that Canada stands in solidarity with them in their struggles to eliminate poverty, foster economic development and social justice and combat insecurity and climate change.

Quebec's and Canada's international co-operation organizations have established long-standing partnerships with local groups that give them a thorough understanding of the social realities and real needs of populations in many African communities. This gives them a unique advantage for designing relevant, responsive and effective programs.

Given that certain donor countries have disengaged, particularly in the Sahel region, Canada can step in and could play a leadership role in the Sahel countries and the francophonie in particular. Because of our long history of partnership with these nations, we can contribute significantly to their development and stability. Canada is one of the few countries that can still intervene in the Sahel region precisely because of its respect for local populations and its commitment to working in partnership with them.

In our recent consultations with our members, some mentioned that regions where international co-operation activities have been supported by Canada in the past are already more resilient in the face of the current polycrisis. This shows that our commitment is working and that we need to maintain this commitment where we've already established strong ties.

Beyond its approach, however, Canada's engagement in the region must also involve increased funding.

In 1970, the OECD countries, including Canada, committed to spending 0.7% of their gross national income annually on international assistance. Unfortunately, 54 years later, Canada has barely met half that target. Countries such as Sweden, Norway, Germany and Denmark have achieved it. Others, like Ireland, the Netherlands and Switzerland, are close. So why is Canada not succeeding? Increased funding is critical to ensure that we have the resources to effectively support development in Africa.

Finally, Canada also has an opportunity to stand out from other international players in the region by ensuring that its businesses behave responsibly on the African continent. We must act now, because there have been too many allegations of human rights violations in recent years. Canada must quickly pass corporate human rights and environmental due diligence legislation to prevent abuses by some of our businesses in Africa and elsewhere in the world. It must also give the Office of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise real investigative powers to compel companies facing allegations of human rights abuses to testify and produce documents. Canada promised to do so when the office was set up.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

[*English*]

We will now go to Mr. Harrington with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

Mr. Harrington, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Andy Harrington (Executive Director, Canadian Foodgrains Bank): Thank you to the members of the committee for inviting me to participate in this important and timely study. Canada's approach to Africa has been an ongoing discussion, and I'm happy to share some comments on the topic.

As a network of 15 Canadian church-based relief and development agencies, Canadian Foodgrains Bank is delivering food to people in humanitarian crises and helping farmers adapt their farming practices to the changing climate in order to build sustainable food security for the future. An example of this is our ongoing Na-

ture+ project funded by Global Affairs Canada through the partnering for climate initiative.

Now we're undertaking this work in the context of 158 million people in sub-Saharan Africa facing high levels of acute food insecurity and 30 million people acutely malnourished in 2023 alone. Between 2022 and 2023, Canadian Foodgrains Bank implemented 88 projects in 21 African countries, serving over 700,000 people, including responding to the hunger crisis in east Africa as part of the Humanitarian Coalition.

You've heard from witnesses who have testified before this committee about issues of political stability, trade opportunities and advancing and protecting Canadian interests. What is clear from that testimony is that Canada has the opportunity to increase its influence as other powers are seeing theirs decline, but only if we increase our investments in a holistic fashion. We have three recommendations to make.

The first one is the centrality of a comprehensive and strategic humanitarian and development assistance plan. In tackling foreign policy, we need to take account of the three Ds and T: diplomacy, defence, development and trade.

Development is a central element of this matrix and needs to be considered at the same level as the other three. We can't ignore the growing humanitarian and development needs on the continent, given the significant number of persons who are acutely food insecure in sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel.

This committee has already heard testimony from Professor Tiekou of Western University, who is saying to fix food insecurity and, chances are, you'll get better stability. I agree with that statement. If development needs are not met, the other Ds and T are in jeopardy.

Saving lives and reducing poverty are not new for Canada. It's what our intelligently applied aid does, but our approach in each region, particularly in Africa, needs to be strategic and not piecemeal. From our own work, Foodgrains Bank has strong evidence that aid is a smart investment.

For example, between 2015 and 2020, with support from the Canadian government, we implemented a project that improved the lives of over 60,000 families in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania. The goal was to improve livelihoods for small holding farming households by scaling up conservation agriculture. That's a process that helps build climate resilient food systems.

This project led to improvement in family income, food security and healthier soils, and it built resilience for the future. The project also improved gender equality, both in the field and in marketing, where women's incomes increased by 40%. In fact, in Ethiopia, the government developed a national program to promote conservation agriculture as a result of this project.

I visited the farm of one of the project participants in Ethiopia, a woman called Asnakech Zema, and I saw how this project not only has increased her resource base but has elevated her dignity and stature in the community. She told us, "My family now has food year-round, and they have given us income during the lean months."

Jane Njeri, a project participant in Kenya, also told us, "Now, after adopting conservation agriculture, we have more food using less land.... We get more than double the amount of food we used to."

It's apparent that putting in efforts in development and humanitarian assistance not only provides stability but also empowers transformation in communities and nations.

My second recommendation is on mutually beneficial partnership and collaboration. Other witnesses before this committee have pointed to the African Union agenda of 2063 as a guiding strategic document that could and should inform Canada's approach.

I agree that it's not just about what we can get out of the relationship, which has never been Canada's approach or agenda. Rather, it's about assessing how Africa's future is defined and seeing how we can contribute to the goals Africans have set for themselves, which advances our ability to work with them collaboratively across the spectrum of the three Ds and T and as we grow together.

My final recommendation is on the positioning of Canada. Engaging in Africa is in Canada's interest. We've seen China and Russia expanding their influence, with African leaders turning towards them as other countries have turned away.

• (1650)

In this critical time for the future of a continent that has so much to offer the world, Canada is in a unique position to choose to step forward and show what principled leadership could look like. As such, our aid commitments are key to how we are viewed. They stand alongside our diplomatic and trade efforts in not only bolstering our place in the world but also ensuring that, in the years to come, it is a more just and fair one.

Thanks for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Harrington.

We go now to our third witness, who is here with us today.

Mr. Dongier, welcome. The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe Dongier (Executive Director, Centre for International Studies and Cooperation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, it is an honour to appear before you today on behalf of the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation, or CECI.

CECI has been a player in Canada-Africa co-operation for over 65 years. It is active in 10 countries in West Africa and Central Africa. It is also a partner of Global Affairs Canada, which, through its portfolio of approximately \$250 million in Africa, supports women's entrepreneurship, the rights of women and girls, and climate resilience.

Personally, before joining CECI, I worked for almost 20 years at the World Bank, including as regional director in Dar es Salaam, East Africa, and for five years at General Electric in Nairobi.

As you know, Africa is going to become more and more important as a market. It's said that the consuming middle class will include more than 700 million people by 2030. Africa will also become a key producer of strategic mineral resources, a major pool for biodiversity at risk and a significant geopolitical player. Several of the 54 African countries are diversifying their international partnerships, including those with China and Russia. Based on projections, there will be 2.5 billion people in Africa by 2050 and nearly 4 billion by the end of the century, which will represent 40% of humanity.

As Africa grows, more and more of its countries have unstable governance, are affected by conflict, violent extremism and the climate crisis, and are experiencing increasing levels of extreme poverty. We're also seeing a deterioration of conditions for women as we observe an increase in gender-based violence in those countries in particular, as well as a rise in intolerance. It's also projected that by 2050, African cities large and small will be home to nearly a billion more people. In urban centres, 74% of women work in the informal sector with little to no social protection.

With that as a backdrop, I'd like to share with you our three recommendations for the committee's consideration.

The first recommendation is to stay the course on gender equality and climate resilience. CECI applauds the fact that Canada has positioned itself as a leader in gender equality in Africa. We also think that Canada's efforts on climate finance are commendable, and we recommend that these targeted actions be further strengthened. We believe this will contribute to a more prosperous and inclusive world in a sustainable way.

The second recommendation is to support the populations of the central Sahel countries, namely Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad. As you know, Africa itself and these countries want to break free from the colonial legacy. In West Africa, tensions are high with the French government, which is often perceived by many as complicit in a corrupt political elite and exploiting its former colonies. As a number of countries distance themselves from France, it's important that Russia or China not be the only alternative for the Central Sahel countries. There must be a third option. Canada is one country that has the potential to influence over the medium term, and that has to be considered. As a bilingual country and member of the francophonie, Canada has a relatively positive image among those populations, and it has the potential to help them emerge from the crisis. So it's really important to maintain humanitarian and development assistance for the communities in the Central Sahel countries. We believe that a complete withdrawal of Canadian aid would limit Canada's potential to influence over the medium term.

The third recommendation is to have a stronger Canadian identity in the bilateral geographic programs with each country Canada supports. We support Canada's key contributions to multilateral institutions through Global Affairs Canada's multilateral aid section. These institutions play critical roles. However, we're concerned that Global Affairs Canada's bilateral geographic programs make excessive use of these multilateral agencies. We advocate for greater use of Canadian organizations in the delivery of bilateral aid, which we believe would carry several benefits. First, it would provide greater value for every dollar invested and, most importantly, it would ensure greater visibility for Canada. When Global Affairs Canada funds the United Nations Development Programme, for example, no one sees the Canadian contribution. When Global Affairs Canada funds a Canadian organization, Canadian visibility is assured. Funding for UN agencies is done relatively easily and quickly by Global Affairs Canada, as there are few accountability requirements. Conversely, funding Canadian organizations requires slow and cumbersome processes, which often lead Global Affairs Canada to favour the simplest option rather than basing it on an analysis of the value of the money invested and considering the benefits for Canada's visibility. We therefore recommend that consideration be given to simplifying the processes for funding Canadian organizations in Africa, particularly for organizations that have demonstrated low fiduciary risk and successful program delivery.

• (1655)

In closing, we believe that Canada should anticipate Africa's key role in the world of the future and leverage the sympathy it garners from a number of countries. We must focus on connections with the people of Africa and between Canadian and African companies, not just on institutional government support. Canadian organizations directly carry the Canadian flag and often work more effectively and efficiently than multilateral agencies.

I want to emphasize that these recommendations are above all intended to foster a better reputation for Canada with African countries and enhance Canada's ability to influence them.

Thank you.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: We will start off with MP Epp.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'll begin my questions with Mr. Harrington from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. In the interest of transparency and for the record, I'm a past supporter of the Foodgrains Bank and I was an employee of the Foodgrains Bank prior to being elected. We continue to host a growing project on our farm at home, so I'm familiar with how the organization works.

I know that the proceeds, along with those from 200-some other growing projects, are often matched 4:1 through Canada's humanitarian efforts and through the Food Assistance Convention. I believe the Foodgrains Bank has received clearance or has an agreement with Global Affairs for the renewal of the \$25-million block grant.

Can you tell me when you're anticipating the minister's signature? We are in a new fiscal year, and that should hopefully be happening any time. What do you know?

Mr. Andy Harrington: Thank you, MP Epp. It's good to see you.

What I can say about that grant is it has been in place for decades, actually, through different governments of Canada. It's a key part of Canada's commitment to the Food Assistance Convention. It's \$25 million a year.

We had a grant of between 2021 and 2024. It's used for humanitarian food assistance at IPC level 3 and above, which is for critically acute food needs and above around the world. That grant expired on March 31. We had spent a year before then renegotiating with Global Affairs Canada very collaboratively and very much in partnership. We had an external evaluation and it has done very well, so we've agreed on all the parameters of that grant. I believe it has been forwarded to the minister for approval. It was forwarded in October, I believe.

In the meantime, the old grant has expired. We have ongoing and essential programs in places like Syria, Lebanon and Somalia. We're currently using our own resources while waiting for the grant to be signed. We're sure it will be signed shortly, but we would encourage that to happen soon as some of these needs are quite critical.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

You talked in your comments about the links between the three Ds and T. Let's talk about the importance of food in Canada's response.

How does food and agriculture fit into our general humanitarian and development response? How important is food? Can you elaborate on your opening comments there?

Mr. Andy Harrington: Yes.

When we talk about food security, we're talking about the basics of life. When we're talking about the need for food and the importance of food within that, not being hungry is a basic human need. When we see hunger happen, we basically see conflicts as a result. You can see that right around the world at the moment. When you're looking at the necessity of food, it's basically a building block not just of the international food security system but of humanity.

As we think about the support in places like Sudan at the moment, for example, which has 18 million people, it's one country in the world that has more critically hungry people than any other. The lack of food is driving conflict, it's driving migration and it's driving insecurity in terms of people's well-being. Having the ability to provide food, either by emergency assistance or by long-term development programming, which we do in many parts of the world, is critical to keeping the peace and providing stability in the international system.

I think we can all see what's happening. I know we're talking about Africa today, but we can see this in Gaza. We can see it in Yemen. We can see it all over the world at the moment. The lack of food drives conflict, it drives insecurity and it drives migration. Sadly, in some places, it's almost being weaponized to increase that instability. That's why food is of such critical importance not just in development but in international stability. That totally links to the three Ds and T, so if we're going to be willing to have—

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you. If I can, I'll get another question in.

I know that dollars are scarce. What ideas would you have so that we can improve the efficiency of our working together, of the government and of this whole space, so that more dollars are actually used directly for the aid and for the betterment of Canada and our partners around the world?

• (1705)

Mr. Andy Harrington: That's a great question.

First of all, I think it's a matter of simplifying the process. There's a grants and contributions simplification process that Global Affairs Canada is undertaking at the moment. We're encouraging that process. The number of obligations, regulations and clauses that are in the agreements that every CSO has to supply to do this work is really quite extreme. I know that everyone's aware of that, and we need to simplify the process.

Second, I think we need to be thinking about a wider context for food security. We talk about food assistance, and we talk about development. There are many places in which we're doing emergency aid that could transition into longer-term aid if we simplified the processes, particularly at Global Affairs Canada. These processes are often siloed. We do emergency assistance over here. We do

long-term development over here. In many places, we could actually have a transformation from one to the other. We've proven that in our humanitarian recovery and development projects.

We need to be thinking on a wider context of how we can do development—

The Chair: I'm afraid we're over time. We're going to have to go to the next question.

Next, we go to MP Chatel. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's exciting to hear you speak, Mr. Harrington. I'd like to invite you to explain to us what you mean in concrete terms when you talk about long-term development of the agricultural sector for better food security.

We often hear that African countries are the most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, such as droughts. Witnesses have also said that Canada had the agricultural technology and know-how to help our farmers adapt to climate change. For example, they're developing technologies and using more resistant species, grains and seeds.

How could Canada contribute to this long-term development, which is absolutely crucial?

[*English*]

Mr. Andy Harrington: That's a great question.

As well as the technological side that we've talked about there, one of the things we have to recognize is that there are many things we can do in terms of farming practices. The Canadian Foodgrains Bank has a team of agriculture and livelihood technical advisers who work though Canada with local partners on projects that build climate-resilient food systems.

I'll tell you about two quick things.

First, our Nature+ program in Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique and on the borders of Zimbabwe is working in reforestation, reclamation of soils, soil health, soil fertility and building new markets in areas that had been completely degraded.

Part of it isn't dealing with huge amounts of technology. Part of it is actually using local knowledge, combined with the knowledge we have, in order to build resilient food systems that produce more, grow better yields and are actually better in a climate context. Our conservation agriculture program is another version of that.

We have to recognize that climate change is having tremendous implications for Africans. People are being driven from the land, so it's really important that Canada use its expertise in all the ways it can in order to help provide those climate-resilient food systems that will see Africans become more resilient to the emergencies that they're currently facing.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: That's very enlightening. Thank you very much.

Mr. Dongier, in your presentation you talked about the importance of biodiversity, not only for Africans, but for all of us who live on the same planet. We heard Mr. Harrington say that it was very important that degraded environments be restored.

Could you give us more details on what assistance Canada can provide to stabilize biodiversity and regenerate degraded environments?

Mr. Philippe Dongier: As I'm sure you know, Africa has ecosystem resources that contribute to global biodiversity, even more so than the Amazon. So there's a massive amount of capital in Africa that's very much at risk. It's an essential asset for Africa and for humanity. It's being put at risk in particular by rapid population growth, which means people will need to consume a lot more agri-food products, and by declining poverty, which will also lead to more consumption.

We know that expanding agricultural land cuts down forests and degrades the land. This is a major factor that will contribute to the decline of biodiversity in Africa in the decades to come. It's essential that Africa find ways to increase its agri-food production so that it can provide better food for more people, but in a way that doesn't hinder biodiversity too much.

There's a lot going on right now in that area. For example, our organization has a project with the University of Guelph called the Bar Code of Living. It measures biodiversity using environmental DNA. This technology makes it possible to measure the level of biodiversity on a time scale in a low-cost manner. We can truly objectively see whether biodiversity is being conserved or not. The idea is to find ways to fund communities, local governments and even companies taking positive action on biodiversity. In other words, we're piloting methods to measure biodiversity and tying it to incentives to make sure that agriculture grows without causing too much harm to biodiversity. I think that's a major contribution that Canada and its partners can make.

• (1710)

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: That's fantastic.

I have another question for all witnesses who would like to answer it.

We've heard there's a lot of bureaucracy in the processing of applications for the various grants. In addition, people from Global

Affairs Canada told us that they were undertaking a project to overhaul grants and contributions.

Do you have any thoughts on that? How do you think the department should approach this issue so that it can more effectively provide aid to African countries?

[English]

The Chair: Please respond in 20 seconds if you can.

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe Dongier: I'd like to highlight the possibility of making greater use of Canadian organizations to deliver aid. Currently, grants are awarded mainly to UN agencies, as it is a very easy process for Global Affairs Canada. Conversely, entering into contribution agreements with Canadian organizations is a slow and complicated process. That's why we do less of it and why we rely instead on UN agencies for more than two thirds of our bilateral aid. I think Canada needs to review the way things are done and simplify the process to keep the rules of the game fair.

[English]

The Chair: We next go to MP Bergeron.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

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

I thank the witnesses for being here. This has been a fascinating exchange, especially the part about funding local organizations. I'll come back to that. I'd like to start with another issue.

Mr. Dongier, you clearly made the point that Africa is important for demographic and economic reasons as well as for the francophone, and that Canada isn't doing all it could there. None of that is up for debate. We don't really know what Canada's vision is going forward. Will it have some kind of strategy or framework or policy? As officials told us here a few days ago, nobody really knows what to call this Africa plan. People seem to be making it up as they go along.

We also don't know what kind of budget will be available to implement the policy, framework, strategy or whatever. Last year, for the first time in decades, the federal government reduced its official development assistance contribution. We're now a long way from the 0.7% target. I talked about this last Monday, when the Minister of International Development and Global Affairs Canada officials appeared before the committee to discuss the estimates, and I was told that Canada had never committed to meeting the 0.7% of GDP target.

I'd like to hear from Mr. Dongier and then Mr. Côté on this.

Is it your understanding that Canada has not committed to meeting the 0.7% target?

Mr. Philippe Dongier: I can check and get back to you, but I believe a commitment was made more than 40 or 50 years ago.

As several people have pointed out today and at other committee meetings that I've watched, there is currently an opportunity for Canada to have a greater influence going forward, particularly in West Africa. There really is a vacuum at the moment. These countries want to pursue relationships with countries like Canada, but right now it's like they have a choice between France and Russia and that's it. I'm exaggerating a bit, but that's the feeling.

That means now would be a good time for Canada to step up its involvement in Africa, perhaps by devoting additional resources and taking on a more serious role. Canada is highly respected and could play a transformative role in a part of the world that has major growth potential but also the potential to become unstable. Canada can and should make a major contribution.

• (1715)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much.

What do you think, Mr. Côté?

Mr. Denis Côté: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

It was also my understanding that Canada had made a commitment. We'd have to look for the actual document, though, because I don't have it here. Having said that, yes, that's been the premise of our work for many years.

Some fiscal years can be tougher than others. However, when we're at only half the target contribution after 50 years, we can't blame tough fiscal years for failure to boost international aid budgets. The problem is that there's something wrong with the system itself.

I want to drive home the message about funding multilateral agencies and civil society organizations. Looking at the numbers, I noticed that even Canadian civil society organizations have been getting proportionally less in recent years, compared to multilateral agencies. We need a more balanced approach to these different funding channels.

I would add that Canada has developed a very good funding program in recent years to support small and medium-sized organizations involved in international co-operation. Canada has a lot of them, but because project calls are for such large amounts, they can't access those funding sources. That's why this project is so important to so many smaller organizations in Canada. We hope that this program will be enhanced and made permanent. Increasing the overall budget would also mean fewer trade-offs between different funding channels.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Côté, that sets the stage for my next question.

I can see that it was as much of a surprise to you as it was to me to hear Global Affairs Canada officials say that Canada had not committed to the 0.7% of GDP target. It certainly raised what little hair I have left on my head. That was a surprising statement for sure.

Mr. Dongier, you pointed out that it was easier for Global Affairs Canada to use multilateral agencies to deliver official development assistance. I would almost add that it's also easier—

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, you're 35 seconds over.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Then we'll come back to it.

[*English*]

The Chair: I apologize. I misspoke. You still have 15 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much.

I was saying that it was also easier to go through large organizations, such as the Red Cross. However, as Mr. Côté mentioned, small organizations are often more engaged and have deeper roots in communities, so it may be appropriate to go beyond—

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, I'm sorry, but you are now definitely over. Not only are you 15 seconds over, but I was actually correct in my assessment. You were 45 seconds over when I brought that to your attention. The clerk thought it was only for five, but you're now a minute and 15 seconds over.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'm sorry.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to have to go to Ms. McPherson.

Ms. McPherson, you have five minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is lovely to see everyone here. This has been a really interesting conversation.

Just like Mr. Epp, I have to come clean that I have worked with Mr. Côté at the Inter-Council Network and have done some work with him in my previous life as well.

Mr. Côté, I'm going to start with you, if I could. On the value of small and medium-sized organizations that are based in communities across Canada, that engage Canadians in global citizenship and in poverty reduction efforts around the world, we know that these organizations are vitally important. I would say that in the last administration, the Harper Conservative government, the cuts to public engagement were huge and had massive impacts on Canadians' abilities to tell the story of poverty reduction around the world. The organizations that bore the brunt of this were the small and medium-sized organizations.

Can you talk about that a little bit? Why would it be beneficial for us to be able to have funding that these small organizations could access?

• (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Côté: Yes, small and medium-sized organizations across Canada do excellent work. I have nothing against large organizations, which also do excellent work, but the work of smaller organizations is often overlooked. Many of them have partnerships dating back 10, 20, 30 or 40 years, or even longer in some cases, and they're well established in communities. Their work is generally very effective.

The global citizenship education component you mentioned is really crucial to facilitating Canadians' engagement and their understanding of international issues so they can get involved in what's happening internationally.

Quebec's ministry of international relations and la Francophonie has a budget for global citizenship education activities. If I'm not mistaken, Canada hasn't funded the work that organizations do here for a long time. Whenever we picture international co-operation organizations, we picture them working abroad. That may indeed be the most important part of their work, but there's also a lot of work being done here to facilitate an understanding of the issues and activities that Canada is involved in abroad, particularly in international co-operation and solidarity.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes, and I think that, if you cut public engagement efforts around the world, all of a sudden Canadians aren't talking about this, and they don't care as much, or they're not able to recognize the value of global citizenship. When you cut aid to half of what we owe, knowing that other countries around the world are able to accomplish that 0.7% and knowing that this was, in fact, a Pearson promise that was brought forward, it's much easier for the government to do.

We saw cuts to public engagement. Those cuts have not been reimbursed. We are nowhere near, and I would say very clearly that the NDP would have a plan in place, if we were government, to get to the 0.7% in a very fast manner, but I take your point when you talk about the role all organizations play, the small, the medium, the multilateral and large Canadian organizations.

Mr. Harrington, my next question is going to be for you, if you don't mind. It's lovely to see you again.

Mr. Andy Harrington: It's lovely to see you, too.

Ms. Heather McPherson: You spoke about the weaponization of food. You spoke about how, if we don't deal with hunger, the downstream costs of not dealing with hunger are extraordinary.

Could you talk about some of the ways that we could reduce the risks and build sustainability in fragile contexts? I know you talked about being able to transition, but what does that look like for you?

Mr. Andy Harrington: That's a great question.

In terms of fragile states, we're talking about some of the world's most awkward places, in a sense, to work in. We're also talking about places where we continually have to go back to do food assistance. There are three aspects to this, I would say.

First of all, as well as doing food assistance in those places or emergency response in those places, we need to be present. This is where the three Ds and T come in for me. We need to be present as Canadians. We need to be present on the development side so we can see a transition and build disaster risk reduction in by building sustainability in as well. We continually have to keep going back to places where there are emergencies happening, supply emergency aid, leave, and it happens again, we come back again, leave, and it happens again. We need to be present. I think Denis said this very well. We need to be present through our local partners as well, who really know the situations there.

That's the first thing I would say. It's that combination of moving away from the silos of real emergency assistance one day, development next year, and bringing those two things together are very important.

I think also within fragile states, there are a lot of resources going to them, but we're not taking the time to really think through how we can apply those resources intelligently working with local partners. A lot of people have indigenous resilience that we don't always take account of, so, when we're when we're dealing with the big block grants that come through, they're covered with all sorts of clauses and all sorts of ways of doing things. Sometimes we get halfway through, and we realize there's a different way and a better way to do it, but we don't have the ability to change on a dime because we're locked in by these grants. As part of that grants and transformation process, I would say that evidence-based management is a key thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to MP Chong.

You have four minutes, Mr Chong.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing.

I have two questions for all three witnesses.

You're appearing as part of a study on Canada's approach to Africa. The study is also taking place while the Government of Canada is considering how to engage with Africa, including the African Union.

First, if you were responsible for putting together a Canadian strategy for Africa, how would you structure it, what would you prioritize within the strategy and what resources, what money, would you attach to it?

Second, should the strategy be continental in scope, or should it distinguish between north Africa and sub-Saharan Africa? Within that, should it focus on particular subregions of sub-Saharan Africa, whether it be southern Africa, eastern Africa or western Africa?

• (1725)

The Chair: We'll go with Mr. Harrington first, please.

Mr. Andy Harrington: Thank you. That's a great question.

There was a great report put out a few years ago by Crestview—it was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—called “Opportunity 2050”. It said:

Over the next 30 years, aid, good governance, trade, and employment-generating industries could add over \$15 trillion to sub-Saharan Africa's GDP. This in turn, [could generate over 400,000 jobs and] could add up to \$2.7 trillion to the Canadian economy during the same time period.

The first thing I would say is be engaged. We are turning away. We are running down things. We need to re-up our commitment there in all of the areas that we've talked about—defence, diplomacy, trade and development.

Do remember that development really does underpin this. My colleagues have talked about how so much money flows through the UN and other organizations. I remember the days of going to Africa and seeing Canadian flags flying over projects that were run by very small to medium-sized organizations.

I would say be engaged. I would say it is a wider African context, but it's a regional context within Africa. You can't see Africa as just one place. The Sahel is very different from sub-Saharan Africa, which is very different from northern Africa, which is very different from southern Africa. We need to have a regional context.

Overall, our engagement needs to take a much higher level. It needs to be really seen as a way that would benefit Canada as well as Africa.

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to Mr. Côté.

Keep it very short. We only have a minute remaining for your response and Mr. Dongier's response.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Côté: Thank you very much.

I'm from the development sector, so I would obviously encourage greater engagement in that sector. I'm not saying that economic engagement isn't important, but it's important to remember that development activities also promote economic development in Africa. If we want economic partners as well, that's part of the equation.

I will also give Mr. Dongier time to respond.

The Chair: Thank you. You're very kind, Mr. Côté.

Mr. Dongier, you have the floor.

Mr. Philippe Dongier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would say that, given Africa's significant population growth, the primary objective should be to figure out how to achieve rapid but inclusive growth so lots of people can benefit from that growth in a sustainable way. SMEs now make up 80% of Africa's economy, but access to financing and business support services is lacking. They need finance support systems. Which industries should we focus on? There are lots of industries, but one that's very promising for Africa is the agri-food sector. It's very labour-intensive, and it contributes to both food and economic growth needs. We talked about biodiversity earlier. How can we grow the agri-food sector with SMEs in a sustainable way and in a way that builds climate resilience?

We also have to figure out where in Africa we have an advantage. Canada clearly has a special advantage in francophone Africa for the reason touched on earlier. Partnerships in francophone Africa are changing, and Canada has a special role to play in that. We can certainly be active everywhere in Africa, but I would recommend focusing on francophone Africa, and West Africa in particular.

[*English*]

The Chair: We next go to MP Zuberi. You have four minutes.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

I'm going to start with a general question about development assistance.

It's important for us to put things in perspective. Our government has been there to support the sector all this time. We also have to look at what other political party leaders are saying. For example, the leader of the official opposition is promising to cut international development assistance.

• (1730)

[*English*]

If a government of Canada—not our government, our government has always been there for international development—chooses to cut aid, as some have said they promise to do, how would that impact the sector?

I'd like to open up the floor to all the witnesses.

It's just in general terms. It's a theoretical question.

Mr. Andy Harrington: Allow me to try that one.

As an organization, we are non-partisan. We've worked with governments of different stripes for decades. I think we've already had some conversation today about the 0.7% and about how we're failing to reach the 0.7% commitment to ODA. That has gone up and down during different governments. At the moment, it depends on the figures you look at, but we're looking at around just over 0.3% that we're at.

If we were to see that fall even lower, we would see very significant consequences in three ways: first, for the people we work with in the most fragile contexts; second, for Canadian engagement and the desire to be involved around the world; and third, in the ecosystem of development agencies themselves. You can't just ramp up. If we decided next year we wanted to go higher, we couldn't just ramp up and say, "Right—go out and do this work". We would find our own sector ravaged in the ability and expertise that we have.

I think it would have fairly drastic consequences.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I appreciate that. I also appreciate your context and position in the conversation.

[*Translation*]

Do any other witnesses want to answer the question?

Mr. Philippe Dongier: Go ahead, Mr. Côté.

Mr. Denis Côté: I would just like to remind everyone that tax dollars also fund Canadian civil society organizations working in international development. They don't have a lot of funding sources. These groups don't generally get funding from private foundations. A significant portion of their funding comes from official development assistance, so that would have a significant impact on the sector. A number of organizations would probably disappear in no time, in addition to the consequences—

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

I have a question for you. You mentioned the Office of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise, the CORE.

[*English*]

Do you have anything else to add with respect to CORE that you didn't already say in terms of its importance? You spoke about the investigative power that you'd like to see it have. Do you want to add anything else to your testimony and how it relates to Africa?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Côté: Over the past 10 to 20 years or more, mining companies, including Canadian ones, have often been accused of human rights violations in Africa and elsewhere. This is a major problem.

Canada created this office, which has tremendous potential to investigate these allegations but doesn't currently have the tools to do so. We would like Ms. Meyerhoffer to have those tools. She herself has said in recent months that she needed the tools to be able to conduct these investigations fully. Otherwise, the results are not conclusive.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Next we'll go to Mr. Bergeron for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Given the little time I have left, I won't dwell on funding for small and medium-sized international development organizations, which tend to be more present on the ground than large organizations. As Ms. McPherson said, we need to strike a better balance when it comes to funding for multilateral organizations, which are still important, large organizations and small and medium-sized organizations.

Mr. Côté, I would like to go back to the part of your presentation where you recommended quickly passing legislation on corporate due diligence for human rights and the environment to give the ombudsperson for responsible enterprise real investigative powers.

Would you say that they adopted Bill S-211 on forced and child labour, which only requires companies to make voluntary declarations, and created this ombud position just to ease their conscience?

● (1735)

Mr. Denis Côté: I would say that, unfortunately, the act enacted by Bill S-211 doesn't do what we would like a due diligence law to do, which is more than just a reporting exercise. We would like it to cover all human rights. Unfortunately, that's not what this act does.

The act doesn't require companies to take action, either. Basically, the act requires companies to check if there's forced labour in their supply chain, but it doesn't necessarily require them to take measures to correct the situation if they do find forced labour issues.

When the new ombud office was announced, it was supposed to have the powers we'd asked for. Members of the coalition I'm involved in were at the announcement. Unfortunately, in the months that followed, the powers that had been announced disappeared from the ombudsperson's mandate, their job description. We want to see the ombud get those powers back, because the ombud can't investigate companies and get to the bottom of things without the power to request reports and testimony from the parties.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Madam McPherson.

You have two minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Côté, I've tabled a bill, C-263, that would actually give the CORE ombudsperson the tools that were promised to us very many years ago. So if anyone's interested in looking at Bill C-263, that's the bill that I think would actually fix the CORE ombudsperson.

I have to say, though, I am frustrated when I listen to this. I listened to the information that you're giving us, Mr. Côté.

I listened to what you've been saying, Mr. Harrington, about the complexity of Global Affairs. I was a member of TaFIE, the Task Force for Increasing Effectiveness, about seven years ago and we were having these same conversations. We were talking about why we needed to fix the exact same things that we're still talking about fixing.

What is the barrier from your perspective? Why are these things so difficult for governments to actually fix?

Mr. Harrington, I'm going to start with you.

Mr. Andy Harrington: I would, first of all, say that Global Affairs is full of very good people trying very hard and I would also say that the way that the things are structured, the way that the departments are structured, really doesn't allow for a lot of cross-fertilization.

The first thing I would say is one of the things that has to be done is to really look at the structure of Global Affairs Canada. Until that's done, it's actually really hard to make these changes because people are entrenched in their own silos. I understand that in my own world as well, but that would be a key thing for me, really looking at the actual structure of the overarching organization. I think that has to be addressed before we can actually start to address some of the key issues that are causing these [*Inaudible—Editor*].

The second thing I would say is there's a lot of risk aversion. So as we think about the work that we're doing, there's risk involved. Things are laddled on top to avert that.

I'll pass on to my colleagues at this stage.

Ms. Heather McPherson: And I would just really quickly point out that when you talk about risk aversion we're all told within the sector that we need innovation—

Mr. Andy Harrington: Exactly.

Ms. Heather McPherson: —and innovation requires risk.

Mr. Côté, sorry.

The Chair: I'm afraid we're over the two-minute mark.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Côté: Yes—

[English]

The Chair: Very briefly, Mr. Côté, in less than 30 seconds, please. Sorry.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Côté: Okay, thank you.

I agree with the points Mr. Harrington raised.

There's one more thing I want to say. I worked with Global Affairs Canada, so I know there are lots of extremely competent and dedicated people in that department. That's not the problem. However, moving people from one position to another makes it very difficult to establish long-term relationships with agents. People always have to start over, which makes the whole process take longer. When people aren't familiar with the organizations, they have to start over every year. That's another factor that slows things down a bit, in addition to what Mr. Harrington mentioned.

• (1740)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

So now we go to Mr. Aboultaif.

You have three minutes, sir.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Harrington, you said that we need to be strategic. We need a strategic approach, not a piecemeal approach.

Do you believe that Canada has a piecemeal approach toward Africa? Could you elaborate on that a little bit? I may have following questions too.

Mr. Andy Harrington: I believe we do, actually. I do believe that we haven't had a thought-through strategic approach to the continent as a whole or even to the regional side. I think we view things often country by country. I also don't think we've had a cohesive holistic strategy in terms of how development can interface with trade and diplomacy, and even in the peacebuilding context of defence as well.

These things all underpin each other. Until we can actually come back to a place where we have a cohesion between how these things work and we're not operating in individual silos—which often face cuts or this bit is accelerated while that bit is decelerated—I'm not sure we're going to have a cohesive strategy at all. It has to be holistic.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: We have more competition in the region than ever and different competition, not from our allies but from the other side, like from Russia and from China.

What do you recommend we should focus on so we can be effective because we know that there are barriers to doing certain things and certain development projects in the region?

What are the top two things that we should do, either regionally or in product offering, let's call it?

Mr. Andy Harrington: In terms of regional, I would say my colleagues have talked about the Sahel and I would add sub-Saharan Africa to that. These are areas that are often resource-rich. They're areas where Canada could benefit, but we can't benefit without actually being engaged in the well-being of the local population, which is where development comes in so importantly. We can't do the work we're doing, the work we want to do, without having a good name there.

If you go to many of the countries that many of us would go to, you will see a huge amount of Chinese influence and a growing Russian influence there. You do not see Canadians there. We have to be present in order to be part of what is actually going to be an African century in many ways. So I think I would say the key thing we should do is to be present with all aspects of a holistic strategy, without letting go of the need for development. Build stability in those countries and you will reap rewards in all sorts of ways across the world.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you feel that the current approach by the current government for the last nine years—and I'm not asking you to be partisan on this, I just want to clarify this—has been effective? What can be done, as I said, to turn this business case into a more reasonable and effective one?

Mr. Andy Harrington: Well, again, being non-partisan, I think there are aspects of it that were effective. There were ways in which we were able to impact gender equality around the world that were very effective. I think there are some places where it was not effective and we did not really have a thought-through strategy, particularly for Africa, in terms of how development could be interwoven with the other aspects of Canadian foreign affairs. Certainly, when I look at the work that was done with women and gender, I'm happy. I think there are wider things we can do. I think a key thing we need to do—and I think all of us would agree with this—is to increase official development aid so that we can have more impact in the countries that we're talking about today.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Is an economic development approach a shorter way to get through, to be more effective and to have better presence, yes or no?

Mr. Andy Harrington: I would say yes to both. I think that if we don't have an economic aspect to what we do, we're not going to be building stability in those countries and building trade links for us, so there has to be an economic aspect, yes, but it has to be underpinned by development aspects as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the last question we go to MP Alghabra for three minutes.

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Many of the questions that I was planning on asking were asked earlier, so let me build on the point that you just mentioned, Mr. Harrington, on the role of corporate Canada. I think we all agree that we need to see more economic activities and engagement in the region. Can you help us understand what else...how can we increase the motivation, other than just profit, obviously? How can we increase—and by extension, of course, it will be profit—also the synchronicity and co-operation with international development agencies on advancing the overall goals of Canada and Canadian workers?

• (1745)

Mr. Andy Harrington: I'm sure some of my colleagues will also have something to say on this, so I'll make time for them.

I will say, first of all, that if we don't engage with the Canadian public and Canadian industry, we won't be able to raise the awareness that we need for Canada to actually have a footprint that makes sense within Africa, so there has to be a way for us to engage. I think, also with businesses, it's important for us as development agencies and others to work with them to influence some of their practices in countries that are resource rich. We see places like the DRC, for example—Democratic Republic of Congo—which has resource wars happening all the time, and so it's really important that we engage with both the Canadian public and Canadian businesses in order to make sure that the ethical and principled leadership that they can provide in Africa, through their economic activities, is highly encouraged. I've seen ways, actually, in which we can have partnerships between development agencies and economic drivers, international economic drivers in Africa, that can really benefit local communities.

I'm keen for my colleagues to answer that one as well.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Yes, I would also like to hear from other witnesses.

Mr. Dongier, go ahead.

Mr. Philippe Dongier: The most effective social policy for Africa is, in fact—in the view of African leaders and many—to attract more investment, to create more jobs. The continent is moving from 1.5 billion people to four billion in the next four or five decades. The challenge of the creation of jobs is essential, and there has to be investment in labour-intensive industries. You know there are different industries that have potential in Africa, but among them the agro-based transformation industry is one that not only meets the pressing consumer needs of the continent but also is very labour-intensive and one in which Canadian businesses have skills and value to bring. How you facilitate that is a question, but I have no doubt that this is at the core of the needs of the continent: growth that is inclusive and that's done in a sustainable way.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I will give Mr. Côté also a chance to respond, and ask him whether there's an example that he can give of how organizations have worked with the corporate world to advance this objective.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Côté: Unfortunately, I'd need some time to think about that. I can't think of any examples right now, but I agree with what Mr. Dongier said. The agri-food sector is an important one in Africa, so we have to work with small and medium-sized businesses and with the communities there. Most importantly, that has to be done ethically.

In my opinion, we definitely have to look more at how our activities can have a positive impact on human rights and on the economic development of communities there. If Canadian companies that operate ethically can engage with communities, so much the better. That's a good thing.

We mustn't forget that development assistance promotes economic development there, which can create or strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises that can then work with Canadian businesses.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes the questions by the members.

Mr. Dongier, Monsieur Côté and Mr. Harrington, I'd like to thank you very much. We're very grateful for your time, insights and expertise.

We will suspend while we prepare for the next panel.

• (1745) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1755)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone.

We will now resume with the second panel we'll be hearing from today.

I'd like to welcome Mr. Jason Nickerson, who is with Doctors Without Borders. He is their representative to Canada.

We also have, from Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie, Marie-Pierre Nogarède, deputy executive director, as well as Maxime Allard, director, volunteer co-operation program.

From Islamic Relief Canada, we have Catriona Addleton, director of international programs, by video conference.

Each of you will be provided five minutes for your opening remarks.

We're very far behind on our schedule, so this time I'm going to be very aggressive in holding everyone to the time limitations. The time limitations apply not only to your opening remarks but also when you're responding to questions from members.

All of that having been explained, we will start off with Mr. Nickerson.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Dr. Jason Nickerson (Humanitarian Representative to Canada, Doctors Without Borders): Thank you very much.

Doctors Without Borders, or Médecins Sans Frontières, is an international medical humanitarian organization that provides medical care to people affected by armed conflict, natural disasters, forced displacement and neglect. We carry out emergency medical interventions in more than 70 countries around the world, where access to health care has been disrupted and urgent needs cannot or will not be met by local authorities or other care providers.

Of the countries that MSF works in today, 35 are in Africa, representing more than half of MSF's activities by expenditure and totalling roughly \$1.15 billion. Eight of our 10 largest country programs are in African countries.

Each of these countries, and our work in them, is complex and diverse, so I want to situate my remarks on the reality of what our teams witnessed today in two countries in particular—Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

MSF has been present in Sudan since 1979 and currently works in 11 states providing emergency medical care, surgery and outpatient primary care. Today, there are more than 10 million Sudanese people who have been displaced, because of the conflict that erupted in April 2023. Over 1.7 million people have crossed the border into neighbouring countries, including Chad, Central African Republic and South Sudan. MSF runs large emergency medical programs in each of these countries and has also scaled up there significantly.

For months, we've been sounding the alarm on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sudan and a response that is well below emergency standards. It's been marked by administrative obstructions from the warring parties that are denying humanitarian organizations necessary visas, travel authorizations or permissions to bring in supplies or to reach affected populations.

The consequences are very real. Last week we issued a press release highlighting the results of the malnutrition screening our teams conducted in Zamzam camp in North Darfur, Sudan. The results showed that a staggering 30% of the 46,000 children our teams screened were suffering from acute malnutrition, and 33% of the 16,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women screened were acutely malnourished.

All of this comes alongside a reality of a violent conflict, where our teams are treating hundreds of war-wounded patients, including children, as we call for an urgent scale-up in the humanitarian response; for warring parties to ensure the protection of civilians, humanitarians and health care infrastructure; and for countries like Canada to leverage their full diplomatic influence to ensure it.

In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, we're responding to a massive humanitarian crisis, following renewed fighting in 2022, which has displaced at least 1.6 million people in a conflict that has largely been neglected, and where violence against civilians is widespread. For example, in 2023 alone, MSF clinics provided care for 20,556 survivors of sexual violence across North Kivu, which we know is only a fraction of the need.

Yet, the broader humanitarian response to this crisis has been grossly inadequate, which is why MSF has been calling repeatedly for a scaled-up humanitarian response, including a specific call for Canada to increase its humanitarian assistance and to leverage its full suite of diplomatic tools to find solutions to this crisis.

Canada is a respected humanitarian donor that operates in a principled manner that keeps humanitarian assistance and politics separate. This separation is important, but I also want to emphasize that resolving conflicts is not the work of humanitarians. It's the responsibility of states. Here, we would like to see a clearer proposal for Canadian diplomacy and engagement in fragile and conflict-affected states, including in African countries.

To close, I want to mention that, as a medical humanitarian organization, we remain extremely concerned about our teams' and our patients' access to essential medicines, which, coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, became a significant flashpoint at the intersection of public health, human rights and international trade, and which saw many African countries deprived of timely access to vaccines and therapeutics. Unfortunately, this is not unusual for the way the market works, but there are some lessons to be learned for Canada's approach to medical research and development.

For example, from 2018 to 2020, the Democratic Republic of Congo experienced the second-largest outbreak of Ebola on record, which occurred simultaneously within a violent and protracted armed conflict. There was, at the time, only an experimental vaccine, which happens to have been developed by Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory, but it was ultimately stalled in its development when Canada licensed it to a pharmaceutical company that failed to develop it for years. There were no approved therapeutics.

Today, we have both vaccines and therapeutics for Ebola. However, the vaccines, while highly effective, are the most expensive in use in global health, and we have highlighted significant challenges in accessing the two Ebola therapeutics in a recent report.

• (1800)

Canada does good work in this space but needs a different approach to its innovation and licensing to ensure that access to medicines in places like several African countries are prioritized for their access and their affordability.

I will conclude by thanking the committee for this study. I'm very happy to answer your questions.

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

We will next go to Ms. Nogarède, who is with the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Nogarède (Deputy Executive Director, Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dear members of the committee, I'm honoured to appear before you today on behalf of the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie to discuss Canada's approach to Africa. I welcome the committee's initiative to study this theme, particularly in the current context of a growing number of crises.

For 47 years, the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie has been promoting access to quality equitable education throughout life, guaranteeing every person the means to shape their future and that of our societies, particularly in francophone Africa. Through La Dictée PGL, which has engaged 15 million students and their parents for over 30 years, we are also helping to raise public awareness of Canada's international assistance efforts.

The messages we want you to take away today are as follows.

Education is the most powerful lever for development and stability through its transformative power over individuals and societies; Canada should invest 0.7% of its gross national income in official development assistance, including at least 10% in education; and Canada's strategy in Africa should place education at the forefront, particularly given the socio-demographic composition of its population.

First, we believe that education is the most powerful tool for maximizing the impact of Canada's investments on the African continent. We believe that education has the power to drive change and to lead to more resilient, fair, peaceful and prosperous societies.

Let me give you a concrete example.

Following the Charlevoix declaration on quality education for girls, adolescent girls and women in developing countries, at the 2018 G7, the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie, in consortium with the Centre d'étude de coopération internationale, or CECI, and in partnership with local organizations, has implemented an education and vocational training project in the Great Lakes region. Thanks to funding from Global Affairs Canada, thousands of out-of-school girls and adolescent girls, including refugees, have entered the school system and the labour market. Through the project, they are studying in schools that are better adapted and safer, where education is of better quality and is delivered in a gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive way. We're seeing an improvement in the social climate in communities where refugee and host populations live together more harmoniously, and where private businesses are being created collectively by both communities.

Second, historically, Canada's commitments, including through its feminist international assistance policy, have positioned Canada as a respected leader in women's rights around the world. However, we recognize that Canada's presence in Africa is still insufficient. With an average of about 0.23% in recent years, Canada's official development assistance remains well below the United Nations target of 0.7% of gross national income, or GNI. As my colleague Denis Côté also mentioned earlier, other countries are meeting their official development assistance targets.

In addition, for several years now, the Canadian government has been investing about 10% of its official development assistance in education, which, in our opinion, must absolutely be maintained and, ideally, increased for such a crucial sector. Achieving these goals is crucial to repositioning Canada as a leader in international solidarity and education. It's also strategically important for Canadian economic, security, and humanitarian interests.

Third, sub-Saharan Africa has the youngest workforce in the world, and it will be the largest in 2050. Yet the region also has the highest rates of exclusion from education. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO, 60% of young people between the ages of 15 and 17 are not in school. This serious lack of access to education hampers the economic development potential of the African continent and makes it even more vulnerable to conflict, political instability and the consequences of climate change.

The people of Africa will shape the future, and the continent's influence will be increasingly important in various global issues. Canada, with its internationally recognized and valued educational models, has historically played a leading role in education in Africa. In this context of demographic explosion, it is crucial that Canada reclaim this role by renewing and increasing its funding for education in African countries.

In conclusion, prioritizing education ensures better use of resources and maximizes the benefits of Canadian investments, public or private, in Africa.

We reaffirm the need to invest more in official development assistance, while maintaining or increasing the education portion. Indeed, Canada must strengthen its support for the African continent, particularly in the area of education, in order to ensure its development and stability.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1805)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Nogarède.

[English]

We next go to Ms. Addleton from Islamic Relief Canada.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Catriona Addleton (Director of International Programs, Islamic Relief Canada): Good evening.

Thank you for inviting Islamic Relief Canada to partake in this discussion on Africa with the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Islamic Relief's roots began in East Africa in response to the famine in 1984. Over the span of four decades, we continued to work across Africa, implementing humanitarian and development programs, often in the most remote and underserved areas. Africa is a huge continent and a diverse region facing a number of challenges, as well as opportunities.

I would like to use this time to speak to you about an approach to what Canada can invest in, particularly as many of the challenges are compounded by the climate crisis, escalated and protracted conflicts and varied economic growth, to name a few. We must use a holistic approach that continues to focus on resilience building and supports communities in developing and implementing locally driven, inclusive and sustainable policies.

With this in mind, I would like to share a brief anecdote.

During a visit to our operations in Mali, I was struck by a very simple remark. I had several people come up to me and say: "Our communities don't differentiate needs by the type of response, like emergency, development and peace-building. To us, they're all needs that have to be addressed."

This sentiment illustrates the need for a holistic approach, also known as the "triple nexus" approach, particularly in the context of Canadian government investment, including minimizing or reducing the rigidity of financing modalities. I would like to share two examples that outline the type of impact a holistic approach can have.

In Kenya, Islamic Relief implemented a small-scale triple nexus program with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. This program sought to address tensions surrounding resource-based conflicts by developing platforms for dialogue, including peace committees, as well as engaging in livelihood activities and natural resource management support. As a result, the frequency and pattern of conflict between communities has subsided, the peace committee has established a conflict early warning system, looted assets were returned to their owners and cross-community communication was strengthened.

In another example, in South Sudan, Islamic Relief is implementing a transformative multi-year program that seeks to promote gender equality, foster peace and develop resilient livelihoods. Through activities spanning from water and sanitation initiatives to community peace-building efforts and to livelihood inputs and mentorship, the program has yielded positive outcomes, with one rights holder or beneficiary expressing, "Due to peace, we can make progress in each sector or any corner within the community."

Phase one has had staggering results, including annual income rising more than 200% among target families, a 49% increase in women-owned productive assets, a 44% increase in the number of rights holders able to discuss peace-related topics and an 8% reduction in the number of conflicts over the project duration.

These outcomes underscore the power of well-integrated programs that prioritize human dignity through essential support, a tangible pathway out of poverty and an environment conducive to inclusive participation and prosperity.

With all of this in mind, Islamic Relief Canada recommends, first, that the government increase its funding to Africa. Given the rise in disasters and compounding factors like protracted crises, it's imperative for Canada to escalate its funding efforts.

Second, as part of increasing funding, we recommend that Canada invest more substantively in specifically the triple nexus approach: humanitarian assistance, development and peace-building. We know that sustainable development is reliant on peace, and there can be more effective outcomes when all three are tackled in a well-coordinated manner.

The triple nexus approach has been recommended in multiple evaluations of Canadian country programs, like Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, so it's time to start making more substantial strides in the triple nexus. This will also involve the need to improve intergovernmental links to accommodate the triple nexus program and, as mentioned, requires a change in the rigidity of the current funding modalities.

Lastly, we recommend that Canada continue to focus on and increase strengthening governance, particularly with local authorities and civil societies within this triple nexus approach. This indirectly supports development pathways for localization and enhances state-society relations. This would also promote the identification and promotion of local solutions to humanitarian and development challenges.

We strongly believe that a Canadian strategy for Africa must include increased funding and support for transformative holistic programs that address the interconnected needs of communities and contribute to a thriving Africa.

Thank you for your time.

• (1810)

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

Now we go to questions from the members. We start off with MP Hoback.

You have three minutes.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses.

We'll have to be very quick because I only have three minutes.

What areas does Canada really excel in when it comes to giving foreign aid? What are some of the areas that we should really prioritize? Do you think a better strategy is to put our fingers in a bunch of little things but really major in nothing?

I'll start off with you, Mr. Nickerson, and I'll move down the table.

Dr. Jason Nickerson: Absolutely. I think that there have been very strategic investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights, and that is a long-standing commitment from multiple Canadian governments.

• (1815)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Is that what is required? When you're on the ground, is that the most important thing?

Dr. Jason Nickerson: There are massive gaps, no question, so providing focused assistance in that one area has been a real success.

I will say that, from a humanitarian perspective, Canada is a good, principled humanitarian donor in the sense that there's not an attempt to direct the overall activities of humanitarian organizations.

A humanitarian response needs to be based on assessing and responding to needs. That is the way in which Canada approaches humanitarian assistance, and that's a strength.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Nogarède: We feel that the message has been loud and clear. Canada needs to invest in education. I think Canada has to choose its strategy, or its signature, as Mr. Roy put it when he recently appeared here. Education really has a cross-cutting power over so many other areas: the economy, maternal and child health, the environment, peace, security and so on.

I'll stop there.

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Hoback: I don't mean to be rude; I really don't. It's just such a tight timeline.

Catriona, what do you think about this topic?

Ms. Catriona Addleton: I agree with what the previous witnesses have also mentioned.

There have been successful strategic investments in women and girls specifically, in a variety of different sectors. There is a need for focused assistance, and it will require Canada to prioritize areas based on available, and hopefully increased, funding.

I would particularly recommend West Africa for some of that increased funding.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Why haven't we seen any more business investment in that region? I know there's a lot of investment coming out of Europe in that region, out of Turkey and out of other countries.

Why is there no large amount of Canadian investment on the business side of things? Is it a lack of education? Is it a lack of security or just a lack of awareness? Would anyone like to comment?

[*Translation*]

Prof. Maxime Allard (Director, Volunteer Cooperation Program, Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie): I think all of that applies.

The lack of education is an issue. Businesses, even those that are fairly basic, need an educated population.

The rule of law, contract compliance and security are obviously also important, but we think that, in the long term, education is probably the most—

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Hoback: That's not stopping European companies from investing in the region.

The Chair: I'm afraid you're out of time now. Thank you, Mr. Hoback.

We'll next go to MP Zuberi. You have three minutes.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be splitting my time with my colleague, Ms. Vandenberg.

In the two minutes that I have, I'd like to talk about Sudan. Mr. Nickerson, you mentioned that a whole-of-government approach, a full suite of diplomatic tools, be used.

First off, I'm sure you're well aware that when it comes to Sudan, our government has given \$132 million in aid and, to the Democratic Republic of Congo, \$142 million. We're meeting the moment, but I completely agree with you that there's always much more to be done, and I respect fully the work that you and your organization have done in Sudan.

To meet the moment, we also have a program for those who are fleeing violence in Sudan. It's for 3,250 applications for those seeking refuge to come to Canada.

On the issue of diplomatic tools, do you want to elaborate a little bit on that as it relates to Sudan, in one minute?

Dr. Jason Nickerson: It's not possible for me to give you a particularly comprehensive answer here, but we have faced administrative blockages in everything from visas and travel authorizations to bringing in surgical supplies to parts of Khartoum, where we have been blocked and denied.

I want to acknowledge that Canada was one of the countries that spoke out with other donors pushing for these blockages to be alleviated, but I'm mentioning that, really, to give you a sense of the challenges of operating in this environment, and the reality that this is something quite practical and pragmatic that the international community, either as a group of donors or individually, needs to be speaking out about—that is valuable.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I'll pass it to my colleague.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I know we're very short on time.

From what we're hearing, it's about two things. It's about the amount of funding but also the flexibility, the nimbleness, the false dichotomy between development and humanitarian aid and the triple nexus.

Canada has, since 2015, increased our ODA by 54%, and we've committed to continue doing that to 2030. We've just in the last

budget, specifically for humanitarian crises, announced another \$350 million.

I'm very happy, Dr. Nickerson, that you mentioned the DRC. The minister and I have both been to the DRC within the last four months. As was mentioned, we've increased that amount by \$142 million as well as increased funds to Sudan.

Could you very quickly tell me, in addition to the amount of funding, what can we do to make it more flexible, more predictable and more long term, so that we can be more effective when we have to pivot and when a development issue becomes a humanitarian crisis and vice versa?

• (1820)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, please.

Accept my apologies, but we're over time.

Dr. Jason Nickerson: That's understood.

Some of this comes down to how organizations position themselves in these crises as well. We are a humanitarian organization that builds in emergency response capacity and that ability to pivot and scale up in those situations. Part of this is just about influencing the way that the humanitarian system operates and how the international development system operates as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we'll go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have three minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

Earlier I mentioned the fact that we know how important Africa will be over the next few decades in terms of demographics, the economy and the Francophonie. We often tend to reassure ourselves that French is the language that will experience the most growth in the coming decades thanks to Africa.

You mentioned that Jean-Louis Roy pointed out last week that this was not a given and that, for French to continue to gain ground in Africa, it will have to be taught to millions of schoolchildren.

That requires that there be schools and French instruction in those schools. If French is not taught in African schools, young people will definitely speak Wolof or Swahili, but probably not French.

We need to make an effort. As one of the previous witnesses rightly mentioned, France has been somewhat discredited in a number of francophone countries in Africa.

Is Canada missing the boat when it comes to focusing on education, particularly in French, in Africa?

Prof. Maxime Allard: Canada definitely has an advantage in terms of French given its bilingualism and its membership in the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, the OIF.

At the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie, we work with the OIF on a variety of programs that include educational ones. Keep in mind that French is the second language of most Africans who go to school in French. We are working to ensure a smooth transition between their mother tongue and French, particularly through classes in the students' mother tongue at the early stages. When you start by teaching a child French at a very young age, they often experience some learning loss that is hard to make up afterward.

That said, should Canada position itself a little better? Probably. We have an opportunity right now, because of France's reputation, particularly in West Africa. In addition, Canada is seen as being benevolent in Africa's francophone countries, in general, and in West Africa, in particular.

There's probably an opportunity there.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You are calling for Canada to maintain the 10% of the official development assistance budget that is allocated to education. You're even advocating for an increase, which I would agree with, but the evidence shows that it's well below 10% in some cases.

The most recent statistical report on Canada's international assistance in 2022-23 shows that 4.23% of Canada's international assistance ended up going to education.

Do we set targets that we know we won't be able to meet?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Nogarède: As I mentioned today, I do think it is essential to set a target of at least 10% and to reach it.

Let's look at the situation from the opposite point of view. What will happen if Canada does not invest in education or does not invest enough in education?

The result will be that literacy rates will remain low and the skills needed to access well-paid jobs will be scarce. This will increase social and economic inequalities, perpetuate the cycle of poverty and social exclusion, contribute to political instability, create fertile ground for conflict, extremism—

• (1825)

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid I'm going to have to move to the next MP.

We now go to Ms. McPherson.

You have three minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Three minutes are very short and I'm going to jump in right away with you, Mr. Nickerson.

First, thank you for being here. It's nice to see you again.

You talked about the lessons learned with regard to vaccine equity, with regard to access to essential medicines. Have the lessons

been learned by Canada? I mean, we haven't agreed to the TRIPS waiver. What has changed? If we have another COVID-19 tomorrow, would there be any difference in what would happen this time around?

Dr. Jason Nickerson: No, I don't think the lessons have been learned. This is a global issue, in the sense that access and affordability considerations are not being baked into the way that funding is being allocated for the development of things like vaccines and therapeutics.

One of the very clear lessons learned—and in fact, it's recommended in multiple reports from different parliamentary committees—is to include access and affordability provisions in funding agreements, in the funding provided for the development of vaccines and therapeutics, basically to say that if Canada is providing funding to develop a medicine, that medicine should be made affordable and accessible to Canadians and people around the world at reasonable and fair prices.

No, the lessons have not effectively been learned, and we continue to see massive inequity in access to things like vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostic tests in the places where we work.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

I know that there have been some efforts made to perhaps have vaccines manufactured in different areas around the world, but I don't believe that has proceeded to any great level at this point.

I've met with community members who are very worried about folks in the DRC. We know that the situation there is so dire in terms of getting support in there and in terms of dealing with the political implications and what's happening within the region.

Mr. Nickerson, what can you tell us about the DRC, and how can Canada help at this point?

Dr. Jason Nickerson: There is a funding consideration here. There is a dollar-and-cents problem. I'm not suggesting that Canada needs to be the only one that closes that gap, but we need to be honest about a reality that there needs to be a mobilization of donors. I think that is an area where Canada can play a significant role in not only being the funder but also mobilizing others to fund the humanitarian response.

The second thing, as I mentioned, is that people are subjected to incredible levels of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence. There needs to be a mobilization of diplomatic efforts to stop the perpetuation of violence against people. That's not something that we as humanitarians can do. We are there to provide medical assistance and to provide life-saving assistance to people in need, but I do think that as Canada is asking itself these questions of its role in the African continent, part of that obviously needs to be about effective diplomacy and the resolution of conflicts.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes, and peacebuilding.

Thank you very much.

I think that's my time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We next go to MP Aboultaif.

You have three minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to leave one minute for my colleague, MP Epp.

Madame Nogarède, I was in Dakar in 2018 at the Global Partnership for Education, and Canada committed to a large fund at that time. How do you assess the Canadian commitment to that? How is it working for the countries that we have committed to and, if we were to do an assessment at this point, how impactful was that on education there?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Pierre Nogarède: Thank you for your question.

I think Canada's education commitments have had a significant impact. Over four million girls have benefited. These commitments have bridged the gap in access to education during times of conflict and crisis. However, these education systems are still fragile and are collapsing because of the growing effects of climate change and conflicts.

I also mentioned population growth in Africa. As a result, we really need to continue to invest massively in education. Despite considerable progress, there are growing needs, particularly in terms of qualified teachers and adequate infrastructure.

• (1830)

[*English*]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Doctors Without Borders, I have a question on the situation in Sudan. Your organization indicated that the United Nations needs to show more boldness when it comes to Sudan. In which areas do you believe that the involvement or the commitment has to be better? How can that be done and where is Canada in that?

Dr. Jason Nickerson: As I say, we're seeing large gaps in the humanitarian response in North Darfur, where, as mentioned, there's a malnutrition crisis. For example, we find ourselves as essentially the only international organization with a presence on the ground at the moment, despite massive needs.

First of all, there's a need for the political will to scale up a response and to work in what is a very challenging environment. We're not trying to give the impression that it's not difficult, but it is possible to work there, and the needs exist. It certainly needs to be scaled up.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: To what extent is international aid reaching the people rather than the organizations on the ground? How successful have you been in doing that among other organizations, and what's the way around it if we're not able to deliver aid to people directly?

Dr. Jason Nickerson: We need to think of this as a regional crisis as well. Certainly, the situation in North Darfur today is quite severe, but so are the needs in eastern Chad, where access is much more straightforward and easier. There's obviously a funding gap, and there needs to be more of a scale-up, but it's very possible to

deliver assistance to people in need, particularly, as I say, in eastern Chad.

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to MP Vandenbeld. You have three minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you. I wasn't expecting another round.

I would like to go back to the triple nexus question, particularly with regard to being able to pivot from when you're there for development and then a humanitarian crisis happens or being able to change over the years, as with the grants and contributions transformation that GAC is currently doing.

How do you see that helping with the triple nexus but also with the flexibility to respond to the needs on the ground quickly and not be bound by a particular results framework?

I'll start with Ms. Addleton.

Ms. Catriona Addleton: With respect to the grants and contributions initiative, beyond the UN agencies going into pooled funding, which can be flexible, I think it's really important for organizations to also receive somewhat flexible funding.

I think it also goes down to finding solutions that work across all parties. Perhaps have a contingency fund in a budget that would be specific for an emergency if it were to arise rather than pivoting some of the development funding into the humanitarian crisis—spreading the funding out in a consistent manner rather than having it fluctuate between the two.

I'll leave it at that because I know we're short on time, but maybe you can pass it along to another witness as well.

[*Translation*]

Prof. Maxime Allard: It is important that Global Affairs Canada be flexible in its funding and that it have pre-existing partnerships.

Local civil society is also crucial. We have to build the capacity of partners in each country so that they can deal with peace and security, development and humanitarian aid at the same time.

We can do so in certain fields and certain regions. We can work on preparations and risk reduction, but we need long-term funding.

[*English*]

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Nickerson.

Dr. Jason Nickerson: I'm not going to comment on the financing aspect of it because I think that's being covered, but I will say that we have some significant concerns about the triple nexus approach as a humanitarian organization. We are able to operate in very difficult situations because of a real and also perceived application of humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality.

One of the ways in which we exert that is through a very clear independence in the field. We are there to provide medical humanitarian assistance. We are not involved in peacemaking or state-building—that's not what we do. We have very real concerns about the application of the nexus potentially compromising the safety and security of humanitarian organizations if not employed properly.

That's something that we can follow up with the committee on, but I do not think that it's an important consideration.

• (1835)

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to MP Bergeron.

You have a minute and a half.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief.

Do you think the Government of Canada should get the Government of Quebec more involved in French-language education in African countries?

Prof. Maxime Allard: Organizations such as the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie already engage with the Government of Quebec and the Government of Canada. We don't really have a problem with that. We already co-operate with international bodies. I think that Canadian organizations, particularly those in Quebec, are able to make the connection between the two bodies. That is one of the reasons why we favour Canadian organizations over multilateral organizations. We are able to address a number of needs or priorities at the same time.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Nogarède: In addition, I think that Quebec's expertise in education really should be shared, not only in Canada, but also on the African continent as a whole. I'm thinking, in particular, of the skills-based approach, gender-sensitive instruction, education management, life skills learning and entrepreneurship.

All of these approaches should be shared with Canada.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I didn't mean to put you on the spot. I just wanted to say that the federal government has the means and that the Government of Quebec has the knowledge in terms of education. Therefore, more can probably be done to better support organizations like yours that focus on education in developing countries.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We next go to MP McPherson.

You have a minute and a half.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

As interesting as this is, I'm going to ask Mr. Nickerson some questions again.

In terms of protection of humanitarian workers, we are seeing the increase on attacks on humanitarian workers around the world. We

know how dangerous it is for humanitarian workers in so many different contexts.

Can you talk about the importance of independence? Can you talk about what the Canadian government should be doing to help protect humanitarian workers?

Dr. Jason Nickerson: Yes, I'll say a few things.

The first is that I think we have the mechanisms in place, from a legal perspective, to provide clarity around the fact that humanitarians are afforded certain protections under international humanitarian law. I don't think that this is necessarily a new laws kind of question. It's about respect for existing protections.

Canada does speak out when there are attacks against humanitarians. That is helpful. It helps to establish a normative kind of framework and set of expectations. That's valuable, but again, I think this comes down to a question of diplomacy and ensuring that parties to conflicts are receiving clear messages of expectations from the international community through diplomatic means. Again, that's a bit outside our wheelhouse, but it is our expectation that things like international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions are treated as a common good and require the active promotion of the protections that are afforded to humanitarians. That's how we stay safe. That is the framework that we rely on to afford ourselves protections in very difficult circumstances.

I think that continuing to promote that through different platforms that Canada has, including as chair of the Group of Friends of Resolution 2286, which has a clear UN Security Council resolution about exactly this—protection of the medical mission in armed conflict—is something Canada needs to continue to do and to champion.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

The Chair: We next go to MP Epp.

You have three minutes.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There have been discussions among the parties with respect to a motion that I put on notice last week. If you seek it, I think you will find consent and support for the following motion.

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development report to the House the following:

1) That the committee call upon the Government of Canada to implement recommendation number eight of the Eleventh Report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans entitled "Restoring Full Accountability for Resources and Governance of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission", adopted during the first session of the 44th Parliament, by transferring responsibility for the Great Lakes Commission to Global Affairs Canada: and

2) That, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response to recommendation number eight of the Eleventh Report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Mr. Chair, I think you will find support to adopt this on division.

• (1840)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Zuberi.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Mr. Chair, I have an urge to channel my inner Garnett and filibuster, but I won't do that.

I suggest we do this on division.

(Motion agreed to on division)

The Chair: Next, we have Mr. Epp.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll cede the rest of my time for questions to witnesses.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the last question, we'll go to MP Dabrusin. You have three minutes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): I was hoping to ask Dr. Nickerson if he could submit anything about the nexus piece. I think that would be really helpful.

I was really quite taken when you were speaking. You were talking about the threats of sexual violence—

The Chair: Give me one second, please. I think we're having translation challenges.

Please proceed.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: In the first part, I asked if the witness could submit materials and their point of view on the triple nexus, because I think that's important for the committee.

My second piece is that you talked about the number of women who have been subjected to sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was over 20,000. Is that correct? Yes.

When we're looking at developing policies in conflict zones—we have a feminist policy and approach—what can we do to better support women and make sure they're getting the aid and the support they need?

Dr. Jason Nickerson: I would start by saying that continuing to fund comprehensive medical and psychosocial responses to sexual and gender-based violence is key.

Our role as a medical and humanitarian organization is to bring that very high level of care to the places where we work. We're able to provide a comprehensive package of medical interventions, psychological services and other things. I would say that one thing that needs to be considered is how there are protection issues in terms of preventing sexual and gender-based violence, which is something that requires much more attention.

We consistently run into challenges when our interventions come to an end. People still need access to safe shelter, legal supports and so on. Typically, in many places, those are best provided by local organizations. There are a number of local feminist organizations that run safe shelters, provide protection services and so on, so that people aren't then returning to a community where their perpetrator might live, for example.

I think this is one very clear area where local organizations bring something that the international, non-governmental organizations and humanitarian organizations just aren't particularly well adapted to implement. Local organizations simply have deeper connections with protection services, supports and so on.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you.

I'm sorry. I'm going to run out of time.

The Chair: I'm sorry. You are out of time, Ms. Dabrusin. You have my apologies.

It now being 6:45, we will conclude this session.

Allow me to thank all of our witnesses and the organizations with which they work. They are doing really tremendous work in Africa, if not beyond.

Thank you very much, Dr. Nickerson, Madame Nogarède, Monsieur Allard and Ms. Addleton. We're very grateful for your time and expertise.

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