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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting 125 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I'd like to remind participants of the following points, and this goes for members as well as witnesses. Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 19, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of Canada's advancement of a two-state solution.

I'd now like to welcome our three panellists.

From B'nai Brith, we have Mr. Henry Topas, who is the director for Quebec and Atlantic Canada.

From the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, we have Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel, president and chief executive officer.

From JSpaceCanada, we have Ms. Maytal Kowalski, the executive director.

You will each be provided five minutes for your opening remarks. Please do look over this way every once in a while, not only with respect to your opening remarks but also following questions from the members. There are time limits, so if you see me signalling you, that means you should wrap it up in about 20 seconds or so.

All of that having been explained, we will go to Mr. Topas for his opening remarks.

[Translation]

Mr. Henry Topas (Director, Quebec and Atlantic Canada, B'nai Brith Canada): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to speak today on behalf of B'nai Brith Canada about Canada's role in advancing a two-state solution.

[English]

B'nai Brith is Canada's oldest human rights organization and the voice of Canada's grassroots Jewish community. Our organization, founded in 1875, is dedicated to eradicating racism, anti-Semitism and hatred in all its forms while championing the rights of the marginalized.

I believe it must be stated at the outset that as we wear poppies today to remember the sacrifices of Canadian fighting men and women who defend our way of life, it is the State of Israel today that is the bulwark against those who would tear the fabric of Canadian and western society asunder.

B'nai Brith's submission to this committee comes at a critical time as Israel, the Middle East's only democracy, faces an existential threat on multiple fronts. The recommendations we provide today are essential if Canada is to contribute meaningfully to any possible two-state framework that secures both peace and democratic stability.

Our first recommendation is that the Government of Canada unequivocally support Israel's efforts to eliminate all extra-territorial threats that currently compromise its security. The failure of the west to secure Israel has undermined previous peace efforts, forcing Israel to engage in repeated defensive actions against terrorist threats. Unless and until the Iranian-backed terror network is dismantled, a two-state solution remains dangerously unrealistic. Terrorist entities in the Palestinian territories have repeatedly shown that they are not interested in a lasting peace. Until all of these terrorist groups, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Hamas, all of which are designated as terror entities by Canada, are permanently removed, a viable framework cannot exist.

As an aside, last week, at Israel's National Military Cemetery at Mount Herzl, I again personally visited the graves of the many brave IDF soldiers who gave their lives fighting the defensive war now ongoing, a war neither started nor desired by Israel. Those calling for ceasefires must remember that these groups have never failed to violate each and every ceasefire agreed to by Israel.

From outside the Palestinian territories, the Iranian regime's axis of resistance—Hezbollah in Lebanon, Ansar Allah in Yemen and Shia militias in Iraq—poses an equally dangerous threat. Any meaningful support must begin with neutralizing this network that Iran has orchestrated to destabilize the region and prevent peace.

[Translation]

Our second recommendation is that the Government of Canada commit to building a democratic framework in the Palestinian territories before recognizing a Palestinian state. The Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas—now in its twentieth year of a four-year mandate—lacks both democratic legitimacy and effective governance.

• (1110)

[English]

Recognizing a Palestinian state without stable and proven democratic governance risks replacing the failures observed elsewhere, with Afghanistan serving as a cautionary example.

Afghanistan's situation demonstrates the dangers of premature recognition without democratic structures. The result is a state where undemocratic governance and terror influences have led to severe and repeated human rights abuses, particularly against women. Afghanistan's challenges serve as a warning against recognizing any state in which governance and democratic accountability are completely absent.

[Translation]

Canada's role in ensuring that the Palestinian territories establish real and democratic governance is essential. Only reforms that restore electoral processes and accountability within the Palestinian Authority will contribute to lasting peace.

[English]

Furthermore, a two-state solution cannot succeed without a Palestinian state that recognizes Israel's right to exist. Palestine must first cease its toxic UNRWA-funded hate education for the young. It must first cease its “pay-to-slay” reward program for terrorism. Any framework remains horribly premature if these preconditions are absent.

In conclusion, the Government of Canada must not recognize a Palestinian state prematurely and Canada must avoid the mistakes witnessed in cases like Afghanistan, where governance failures and terror influences have resulted in prolonged instability and deep human suffering.

[Translation]

Canada's support as a leader in international peacebuilding is essential to establish a democratic and secure base for any solution that can bring stability and peace to Israelis and Palestinians.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Topas.

We now go to Mr. Koffler Fogel.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks, sir.

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel (President and Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to address this critical discussion.

My name is Shimon Fogel, and I'm the president and CEO of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, which represents more than

150,000 Jewish Canadians through Jewish federations across Canada.

CIJA is a national non-partisan organization committed to preserving and protecting the quality of Jewish life in Canada through principled advocacy.

Today we address the committee's study on Canada's advancement of a two-state solution. This topic carries far-reaching implications for Canada's foreign policy, for Israel's security and for stability in the Middle East. While CIJA supports a peaceful two-state solution, this outcome must be achieved through direct negotiations.

Your committee has heard and will be hearing from many witnesses who reflect a broad cross-section of perspectives on the issue, and that's as it should be. However, I offer one word of caution: While the Jewish community, like so many others, is not monolithic, on the issue of support for the Jewish state there is almost universal consensus. We submitted to the clerk two independent research projects that underscore this point. To put it bluntly, there are more Canadians who believe in flat-earth conspiracy theories than there are Jews who oppose an independent Jewish state in our ancestral homeland.

The studies confirm that only 3% of self-identified Canadian Jews reject Israel's legitimacy. It would be misleading to attach significance to such a marginal view and conclude that from a Jewish community perspective, there exists any meaningful ambivalence about the place of a Jewish state within the family of nations.

It's important to remember that Palestinian statehood is not an absolute right. According to UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, statehood is conditional, requiring first the recognition of Israel's security and the legitimacy of the Jewish state in our ancestral homeland. The resolutions mandate direct negotiations to achieve these terms before statehood can be conferred on Palestine by the international community. Premature recognition contradicts this foundational formula, creating a destabilizing precedent.

Another vital component is Palestinian agency. Currently there is a worrying lack of accountability within Palestinian leadership. Statehood cannot be treated as an entitlement; it must come with the obligations of responsible governance. Recognizing a Palestinian state without first establishing structures for effective governance would risk creating a failed state from the outset. This would not help Palestinians. It would not help them achieve a better, more stable future, but rather doom them to ongoing instability.

Statehood also requires that essential issues such as borders, water rights, the electrical grid distribution, the status of Jerusalem and the Palestinian demand for the right of return be resolved first. Recognizing a state without addressing these core matters through direct negotiations not only overlooks practical functionality but also condemns both parties to enduring conflict. Without negotiated agreements on these points, the envisioned end of conflict is unattainable. A unilateral approach would leave all these issues unresolved, with no mutually agreed-upon mechanisms to address them.

Canada has historically maintained a balanced approach to this conflict, supporting peace processes grounded in negotiation, mutual recognition and security guarantees. To depart from this approach by endorsing a unilateral path risks emboldening rejectionist elements and reinforcing the idea that peace can be achieved without compromise. By supporting direct engagement, Canada upholds its values of fairness, security and commitment to true peace.

• (1115)

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, CIJA believes that Canada must remain committed to a fair, negotiated resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

One day, we hope there will be a vibrant, democratic state of Palestine, but to pretend that there is a viable Palestinian state today is inaccurate, irresponsible and based on harmful half-truths. Only a true two-state solution, achieved through direct negotiations, can ensure lasting peace, security and stability in the Middle East.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts. I'm more than happy to answer any questions in the discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Koffler Fogel.

We now go to Ms. Kowalski.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Maytal Kowalski (Executive Director, JSpaceCanada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for inviting me to be here today.

My name is Maytal Kowalski. I'm the executive director of JSpaceCanada. JSpaceCanada is a pro-Israel, pro-peace, pro-democracy Jewish Zionist organization that advocates that Canada promote and preserve the two-state solution in Israel and Palestine, as championed by our community of Canadian Jews.

I myself am a dual Canadian-Israeli citizen. I was born in Winnipeg and moved to Israel with my family in 1994. I want to thank you for holding these meetings at such a crucial time.

While some would argue that only just over a year from the horrific Hamas terror attacks of October 7 this is not the time to discuss peace, I would like to quote former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, who stated just last weekend that using October 7 as an argument against the creation of a Palestinian state is a "gross mistake". It is precisely because of October 7 and precisely because a two-state solution is the best way to defeat Hamas and other terror entities that we must act now.

Since February of this year, JSpaceCanada has been advocating that Canada recognize a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel, broadly based on 1967 borders. This is also my recommendation today, but I want to make sure that this is not merely a symbolic gesture. Therefore, I ask of you, in addition to and in tandem with recognition, to consider the following actions.

Commit to a continuation of ongoing sanctions on entities, organizations and individuals directly involved in, financing and/or supporting settler violence and annexation in the occupied West Bank, including extremist Israeli politicians and government officials such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich.

Support and strengthen the Palestinian Authority as an alternative to Hamas rule in the face of plans by finance minister Smotrich to collapse the Palestinian Authority through withholding tax revenue collected by Israel.

Finally, pressure the Palestinian Authority to commit to a range of reforms aimed at enhancing democracy and governance, fighting corruption, revising its prisoner payment program and addressing incitement.

We know from a variety of polls that the majority of Canadian Jews, Israelis and Palestinians still support a two-state solution and a diplomatic—not militaristic—solution to the conflict. You simply cannot have a two-state solution without one of those states being the State of Palestine. Canada's long-stated position has been that a state of Palestine should be recognized as a part of final status negotiations directly between Israelis and Palestinians.

When my family moved to Israel in 1994, it was at the height of the Oslo accords, mere months before the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty was signed. At the time, when both Israelis and Palestinians were actually involved in negotiations, perhaps such a policy made sense, but it is no longer 1994, and peace is no longer seemingly just on the horizon.

The Israel I knew and loved as a child has been all but sacrificed for messianic, ultra-nationalistic visions of the Israeli far right. We must acknowledge not just what we want to see in the future, but what exists now. What exists now is a one-state reality, where, between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, one state, Israel, controls the entry and exit of people and goods, oversees security and has the capacity to impose its decisions, laws and policies on millions of people without their consent.

Canada's foreign policy must adapt itself to the Israel that exists now. This is precisely what being a friend of Israel means. If I stop my friend from drinking and driving, I'm not punishing my friend: I am saving them. Right now, by enabling this Israeli government headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, not only are we allowing our friend to drink and drive; we are encouraging them to take another few shots before getting in the driver's seat.

After all, when Netanyahu's own party, the Likud, sponsors an event to encourage resettling the north of Gaza, in the words of a friend of JSpaceCanada, the father of 20-year-old hostage Nimrod Cohen, held in Gaza for over a year, "They want to lay the foundations of their settlements over the body of my son."

I am here representing a large portion of the Canadian Jewish community that feels connected and attached to Israel, believes in Israel's right to exist as a secure democratic home of the Jewish people and, precisely because of that attachment and connection, opposes the current Israeli government and wants to see their Canadian government take strong action.

You may hear reasons today as to why a step like Palestinian statehood recognition is risky. There will always be inherent risks with working towards peace, but they will never outweigh the risks of living forever by the sword and being in a state of perpetual war.

At a rally with the peace organization Peace Now, in Israel, mere kilometres from where I lived in the early 2000s, a man named Haim Perry held a sign that read, “Better to have the pains of peace than the agonies of war”. Haim Perry was taken hostage by Hamas on October 7. In June of this year, he was murdered at the hands of Hamas in the absence of a hostage release and ceasefire deal that could have freed him.

For the memory of Haim Perry, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Vivian Silver, Judih Weinstein and so many others, including the tens of thousands of Palestinians whose names we never even got to learn, we must pursue a path of peace through whatever mechanisms we can, such as recognizing the Palestinian state even if it is painful, because it is better to have the pains of peace than the agonies of war.

Thank you.

• (1120)

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

We'll now turn to the members for their questions. First up is Mr. Marty Morantz.

You have four minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for your submissions.

Mr. Fogel, it's been the long-standing policy of Canada that a two-state solution is the best path forward, so long as it is negotiated and that both states live side by side in peace and security.

Are you concerned that this motion, which is the subject of these hearings, seeks to change this long-standing position?

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: I think this study reflects an anxious desire to make a contribution, break the cycle that currently exists and find a path towards what I think all of us share: an independent Palestinian state and a secure Jewish state living side by side. However, the temptation to do something is outweighed by the consideration of what the consequences are of doing anything.

I am concerned that the hunger to make a contribution is coming at the expense of a thoughtful contribution.

• (1125)

Mr. Marty Morantz: Would it be fair to say that for any resolution of this matter to succeed, it would need to be underpinned by popular support among both Israeli citizens and the Palestinian people? In other words, when you unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state without properly consulting both sides and making sure both sides are on board, don't you run the risk of continuing the cycle of violence?

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: I think that's exactly the case. Absent buy-in from the direct stakeholders, there is no externally imposed solution that has any ability to be sustained in the long

term—or even, indeed, in the short term. I think building up the peace camp in both Israel and in Palestinian society is an essential first step. We're not there. It doesn't matter how much we might want it; the two-state constituency, in either community, is simply not there now.

Mr. Marty Morantz: If the Palestinian state were unilaterally recognized without negotiation or popular support, what would the likelihood be that this type of resolution would succeed?

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: I think the likelihood is zero.

For Palestinians, there would be no incentive to address all of the outstanding issues with Israel. From an Israeli perspective, it would be seen as rewarding terror. Also, there is no path that leads to sustainable peace between the two.

Mr. Marty Morantz: That was my next question.

Regarding this idea of rewarding terror, there are still hostages being held, so I have trouble seeing any buy-in for Canada's unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state among the vast majority of Israelis while their children are still being held hostage by terrorists in Gaza.

Wouldn't you agree?

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: I agree.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you.

The Chair: We next go to Dr. Fry.

Dr. Fry, you have four minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming here.

I think we all agree that Israel has a right to defend itself from the terrorist attack on October 7. However, we also see the horrible humanitarian situation in Gaza. Most of us believe.... Why do we want to condemn generations of children to hate and fear, over all of these years?

Canada has always supported a two-state solution, and I'm hearing from many of you that this is important. I would like to know, if somebody could tell me—Mr. Fogel, for instance—why it has been 75 years since this was first suggested. It has not happened. What are the challenges? What are the barriers to this? We've had Shimon Peres. We've had Olmert. We've had a lot of people who supported it and wanted it. We had Oslo doing this. What is the reason it has never come to pass?

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: From my perspective, there's only one cause, and that's rejection of the legitimacy of the Jewish state. It was rejected by the Arab states in the region before the establishment of Israel in 1948. It was rejected by Palestinian leadership on five successive comprehensive and internationally backed U.S.-sponsored peace proposals, beginning with Oslo but not ending with Oslo.

Until Palestinians can wrap their heads around and accept the legitimacy of a Jewish state as their neighbour, we are condemning the region to conflict.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you. I have only a short time for questions and answers.

Ms. Kowalski, you have made some really clear statements here today. What must happen before...? I hear everyone saying we...

The question is, what happens? Will it completely derail a peace process if Canada unilaterally makes a decision before things change? What do you think of the conditions that must happen? This is what we're studying here. What is the process to move towards a negotiated two-state solution?

Give me—quickly, if you can—about five conditions that must exist.

• (1130)

Ms. Maytal Kowalski: Sure.

I think the first is actually recognition of a Palestinian state by Canada.

I want to say really briefly that the reason it's important is that in past negotiations, in Oslo or in other negotiations, we actually weren't talking about a Palestinian state; we were talking about an autonomous region or what a lot of diplomats and leaders refer to as a "state minus". There are 146 countries right now that recognize the State of Palestine. As more countries recognize that State of Palestine, it means that when negotiations do happen again, we're not negotiating whether it's a state or something else; we are negotiating, now that we know that it is a state, what that looks like and how we make it happen.

As to how we make it happen, the answers are all there. We have seen these processes happen before. We know that what has been lacking has been leadership—Israeli and Palestinian leadership able to speak to their people and explain why these steps are important.

I would also say that it is important to understand that while there is responsibility on both sides—for both the Israelis and the Palestinians and their leaders to do a better job on this and to be at the negotiating table—we must recognize that in this situation right now, Israel holds the majority of the cards. Israel is in a position of strength. Israel is a sovereign state, whereas Palestinians are stateless people who are divided between Hamas and the Palestinian leadership. We have to be able to recognize where the systems work in advantages and disadvantages, and put the pressure on both peoples accordingly.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

How am I doing, Chair?

The Chair: You're over right now.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I'm over?

I'm sorry, guys. Thank you.

The Chair: No worries.

Next we go to MP Bergeron for four minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being here and sharing their insights on this important issue.

In her testimony, Ms. Kowalski said something that I have always strongly believed, which is that the people of Israel and Palestine cannot continue to live in a state of permanent war. It's not possible. She probably said it much more eloquently than I could have.

Last week, a former Canadian ambassador to Israel, Jon Allen, argued that the greatest threat to Israel comes from within, and that Israel will never be safe as long as it continues to occupy the Palestinian people's territories in the West Bank and Gaza. Colonization has continued for years, particularly in the West Bank, in violation of international law. There were 1,900 Jewish settlers in the West Bank in 1977; 331,000 Jewish settlers in 1997; and 741,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank in 2022.

Mr. Fogel, you underscored the consequences of doing something. Have you looked at the consequences of doing nothing? Nothing has changed since 1977, and that led to the October 7 massacre and the butchering currently under way in Gaza and Lebanon.

What do you think the consequences of doing nothing are?

[*English*]

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: Thank you for the question. It's an important one.

I don't suggest that nothing be done. I think Canada should invest in the Palestinian Authority, much like Maytal suggested. I think we should be investing resources—not just finance, but also expertise—to help develop, and allow to become entrenched, the civil society institutions a country must have to sustain itself and govern effectively over the future. That kind of investment...

Bringing Palestinian society to a place where they see themselves as stakeholders in protecting something—which was the expectation of Oslo, but which collapsed in 2000—is the necessary fundamental in moving forward.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: How can we make heads or tails of this? This question is for Mr. Topas, since, on October 7, 2023, Richard Robertson, director of research and advocacy at B'nai Brith Canada, said the following: "It is inconceivable for Canada to continue diplomatic relations with the Palestinian Authority, which has the blood of Canadian citizens on its hands."

How can you say, on the one hand, that we must invest in the Palestinian Authority and, on the other hand, that we must cut all ties with the Palestinian Authority?

Mr. Henry Topas: To answer the question, I would first remind you that Israel evacuated its citizens from Gaza almost 20 years ago and left all its facilities behind. It provided water and electricity to Gaza, and the people of Gaza voted for Hamas. What was the result? No matter how many times a ceasefire is ordered, what happens? These people don't abide by them, and now we're asking what we're going to do to invest in the Palestinian world? We've tried to do so before. All kinds of movements were put in place and agreements were reached, which were violated one after the other.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I don't have much time left.

So, unlike Koffler Fogel, you are suggesting that we not invest in the Palestinian Authority.

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid I'm going to have to cut it off. You are over time right now.

We next go to our friend, the NDP member.

You have four minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to mention at the outset that I had the opportunity to visit Israel and Palestine a few times, including as a parliamentarian. For a Quebecker and a democrat to witness what is happening in the West Bank is an upsetting experience. We're talking about military occupation, checkpoints, daily humiliation and children being arrested by soldiers and tried in military courts.

I'm also thinking of the arrogance of extremist settlers, particularly in Hebron, the theft of land and the destruction of villages, farms, olive trees and herds, at times. I returned from there with the image of a military boot crushing a human face. It's not a good feeling. I think we need to take action, as a country, to change this situation.

Ms. Kowalski, what do you think of what's happening in the West Bank, which has been occupied for about a year, and settler violence? Do you think the Netanyahu government is using the war in Gaza in part to accelerate the West Bank annexation?

[English]

Ms. Maytal Kowalski: The English for the last part was cut off.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Do you think the Netanyahu government is using the war in Gaza to accelerate the annexation of the West Bank?

[English]

Ms. Maytal Kowalski: Thank you so much for the question, and thank you so much for bearing witness to what is happening in the occupied West Bank right now.

The extremist ministers in Netanyahu's government are absolutely using the cover of the Gaza war to advance annexation. We've seen a number of outposts—I think there are about 43 illegal outposts, according to the Israeli government—that have gone up since October 7. If you want a contrast, in past years, between 1996 and

2023, the number of illegal outposts per year on average was about seven. You can see that this is really being accelerated.

We also see that it isn't just an issue of de facto annexation, which has been talked about a lot. Now we're moving into what is being called by many experts a de jure annexation. Finance Minister Smotrich has moved the administration of the West Bank from a military administration to a civil administration. He even admitted this himself: "It will be easier to swallow in the international and legal context". That is so they won't have to say that what they are doing is annexation.

I would also say that since October 7, OCHA has documented nearly 1,600 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians. We have also seen Israeli authorities destroying, confiscating, stealing or forcing the demolition of about 1,800 Palestinian structures across the West Bank.

I would also like to note that in a—

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I have just one minute left.

In this context of speeding up the illegal occupation and annexation of the West Bank, how important is it that we recognize the State of Palestine?

• (1140)

Ms. Maytal Kowalski: It's crucial that we do this and move on this now, because, as I mentioned in my opening testimony, what we are looking at is a one-state reality, and every day we see that creep closer and closer. We still do have the opportunity for a two-state solution. That opportunity is not gone and the two-state solution does exist, but every day that we wait to take bold action makes it harder to do so.

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Boulerice.

We now go to MP Aboultaif. You have three minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you for the generous three minutes.

Welcome to the panellists.

Mr. Topas, you precondition the Palestinian state working toward the two-state solution with two things: One is for Iran to quit interfering, basically, in the Middle East affairs the way it is, and also that to have long-lasting peace, we need to go back to negotiation.

The Oslo accords created a platform for that. Where did the Oslo accords fail, and how can we go back? The war is going to end at some point, and everyone's going to go back to the negotiation table. Do you think that Oslo is still the platform on which we can go ahead and begin a negotiation toward a lasting peace?

Mr. Henry Topas: I can't tell you whether Oslo is the proper formwork for a lasting peace for such negotiation, because every negotiation that has taken place based on Oslo has failed—every one of them.

My co-witness, Mr. Fogel, made it very clear that there were five such negotiations. If you read any of Bill Clinton's writings, he basically said very clearly that Palestine had a chance, but walked away from the table because their own people would have killed them if they had gone ahead with it.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: But the solution is a two-state solution.

Mr. Fogel, can you comment on the same question? Do you believe that Oslo is still a good base from which to continue negotiating toward a long-lasting peace? I think that's the bottom line.

You recognized the condition that a two-state solution has to be in place; otherwise, where are we going from here?

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: I think that everybody around the table who does support a two-state solution would agree that the basic terms of reference, as presented in Oslo, still inform what would likely be a resolution to the conflict: mutual recognition, guarantees of security, land swaps that would accommodate and account for some of the current Israeli presence in the territories but compensate Palestinians with other territory so that it was net neutral. Those parameters, I think, are still there.

The benefit we have today, which we didn't have in Oslo, is a growing level of comfort among the Arab world. The surrounding countries, through the Abraham accords—the peace treaties with Jordan, Egypt, the flirtation with Saudi Arabia—could support whatever the parties directly negotiate.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of the witnesses today. Your presence here shows us both the breadth of opinion and the diversity of the Jewish community in Canada and the importance to you of both Canada and Israel.

I want to start by saying very clearly that I unequivocally support the State of Israel, the defence of Israel, the people of Israel and their right to have peace and prosperity. That doesn't mean I necessarily unconditionally support the Government of Israel, nor would I ever support any government unless it protects its own citizens, the rule of law and the international rules-based order.

I would say the same for the State of Palestine, recognized by 146 countries but not yet Canada. I will unequivocally support a state of Palestine. That doesn't mean that I necessarily support its government at the current time, but I separate those issues, as I do in Canada. I don't always support the governments in Canada either. There have been several I haven't supported, but it doesn't mean that I'm not loyal to Canada.

What I want to be very clear about, however, is that the question we are dealing with at this committee is Canada's recognition of the State of Palestine. The question is not if we will or whether we will or not; we will. Canada will. I am convinced of that, so the question is about when we do it.

We have talked about a negotiated recognition. I'm not a student of history, but I don't believe that recognition of states is always ne-

gotiated. Canada will unilaterally, as we have always done, recognize states. We did that with Kosovo and we've done it with a number of places.

What are the pluses and minuses of recognition of the State of Palestine for Canada and for Jews in Canada? How will it help?

I want to begin with Ms. Kowalski.

• (1145)

Ms. Maytal Kowalski: I think the pluses are, as I mentioned earlier, that it is then not a question of when negotiations happen and it is not a question of what we are negotiating, whether a state or something else: It is that we are negotiating.

There is a State of Palestine. It is widely recognized. The question will be what that looks like, and it will be those final status issues that will be left to negotiations.

In terms of minuses—I think this is also something I brought up in my testimony—we don't want it to just be a symbolic move. We want to make sure that other actions follow, and that is also why I talked about not only moves that we can take to strengthen the Palestinian Authority but also about things that we should be asking Israel to do, because, as you said, we can support the State of Israel and realize that the government is working to the detriment of that state.

There are clear actions that have to come along with this recognition. You are right, and I agree with you. On unilaterally recognizing the State of Palestine, I think that there is no reason it should not be done by Canada or to think that it will not have benefits, so we should move forward with it.

For the Jewish community, the thing that I first want to say is that with all due respect, we are not the story here; the story is about millions of stateless Palestinians who have been waiting for so long for justice and to be treated as a sovereign people in their ancestral homeland. It should be us, Jewish Zionists, first and foremost, who recognize that. That is our story. We should have more empathy than anyone for the fact that they want it.

I think the only way that we are the story, the only way in which the Canadian Jewish community is a story, is that it is incumbent upon me and my colleagues here at the table to not fearmonger among the Jewish community and to not create nightmare scenarios of what recognition will mean but instead explain to our community why this is beneficial and how this is getting us to a two-state solution, since we know that the majority of our community supports a two-state solution.

Other than that, the focus really does need to be on Palestinians.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I suspect that's my time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Yes, that's correct.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have a minute and a half, sir.

[*Translation*]

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

I'll come back to you, Mr. Topas, because I didn't have time to finish asking my question.

Unlike Mr. Fogel, you're not proposing that we give even more attention to the Palestinian Authority; you're proposing that we cut ties with the Palestinian Authority.

Did I understand you correctly?

Mr. Henry Topas: I don't think I said that.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Robertson said it.

Mr. Henry Topas: That was in mid-November, wasn't it?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Henry Topas: I would remind you that, on November 7, 30 days after October 7, the synagogue at which I am a cantor in Dollard-des-Ormeaux was the target of a bomb attack.

In that context, I think what Mr. Robertson said at the time was quite appropriate. If we start bringing everything that happens over there to this country, our society's social fabric will be horribly torn apart.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: What about the Palestinian Authority?

Mr. Henry Topas: Give me a reason why the current Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas, is in its twentieth year in power when the mandate was four years.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You can't have a relationship with—

Mr. Henry Topas: Structures have to be put in place first. I'm talking about democracy and accountability, among other things. Yet there are none.

• (1150)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to Mr. Boulерice. You have a minute and a half.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulерice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Kowalski, I'd like you to tell us about the communities and movements you work with in Israel, including groups like Standing Together and Peace Now, who are protesting to demand a ceasefire and a peace agreement, as well as the release of hostages, of course.

What kind of work do you do with those groups?

[*English*]

Ms. Maytal Kowalski: Thank you for that question.

It's very important to recognize that there are so many organizations, like Standing Together and Peace Now, on the ground in Israel and Palestine doing this work.

We work in close partnership with both Israelis and Palestinians because we believe that any solution that we want to bring forward has to come, first and foremost, from the ground. Their work to advance the issues of a two-state solution, Palestinian statehood and equality and equity in the land is really helping to advance how Israelis and Palestinians see their future.

I would like to speak a little bit to the question of support of the two-state solution, which can be attributed to a lot of these civil society organizations. We should recognize that both Israelis and Palestinians, when they are given a framework for what a two-state solution would look like.... I heard a lot of testimony that the numbers in support of a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine were quite low. That actually is not the case when a framework is given and it's explained what a two-state solution looks like. We actually see broad support—majority support—for that position.

It is so important that we continue to work with peace organizations like those that are doing the work on the ground because civil society.... Top-down and bottom-up approaches are both needed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulерice: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Topas, I want to take the opportunity to talk to you about anti-Semitism. Certainly there was anti-Semitism in Canada before October 7, 2023, and there was anti-Semitism in Canada after October 7, 2023.

Since that time, we've seen some pretty ugly stuff happening in our streets, to our schools, to our synagogues, to our institutions and in our neighbourhoods. We have a government that says, on the one hand, that Israel has the right to defend itself, but on the other hand voted for a motion that would deny it the means to defend itself by banning arms permits.

We have a government that is funding UNRWA, even though it's established that UNRWA was complicit in the October 7 attacks and has been teaching young Palestinian children to hate Jews for decades, which has contributed largely to this problem.

We're now studying.... In the context of our friend Israel being attacked and 1,200 Israelis being brutally slaughtered and more taken into brutal captivity, the Liberal government thinks it's a good idea to study unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state.

Do you think the policies of this government specifically exacerbate the problem of anti-Semitism in Canada in our streets?

Mr. Henry Topas: What probably scares me more is that rather than having unilateral moral clarity on this issue, we are finding moral perfidy around all segments of different levels of government. I'm not going to single out any particular level of government.

We know what is going on in the streets of Montreal and in the streets of Toronto. We know what is happening on campuses. We believe that this is basically that someone let the cat out of the bag and people are taking full advantage of it, sadly.

If you ever listen to any of the American networks, you'll know that we have a very interesting organization in New York called Tunnels to Towers. It's an organization that was started to protect the widows and families of those people who died in 9/11 and the widows and families of soldiers who died fighting the United States' wars, etc., from abject poverty.

What we have going on right here by financing UNRWA is not Tunnels to Towers; we have dollars to tunnels. We're basically giving money to UNRWA and UNRWA is using that money to finance, promote and commit terrorism. That has to stop. That is a total lack of moral clarity.

Mr. Marty Morantz: To my question, do you think these Liberal policies are helpful in terms of containing anti-Semitism, or do they exacerbate the problem?

Mr. Henry Topas: Again, we are non-partisan, so I cannot characterize the actions of any particular party. All I can say is that what is going on under present levels of government is unacceptable.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you.

For the last question, we go to MP Alghabra. You have three minutes.

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank our witnesses for being here and for their testimony.

Mr. Fogel, I want to follow up on something you said. You said the Palestinians are not entitled to a Palestinian state. I'm curious to know, in your opinion, what they are entitled to, those stateless millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Are they entitled to something?

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: I don't think that I framed it that way. I think what I said was that in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, Palestinian statehood is not an automatic entitlement and that there were expectations based on those two resolutions. Frankly, we can't cherry-pick; either we're committed to the UN or we're not. If we're committed to the UN, then we have to follow the formula that the UN put forward in order to achieve that end of Palestinian statehood.

I think resolutions 242 and 338 recognize that Palestinians had an opportunity in 1947 for the absolute entitlement to statehood, had they accepted the partition plan. By virtue of having rejected it and having gone to war against the nascent Jewish state, they compromised their ability to acquire that right of statehood, and now they had to, frankly, earn it.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I'm sorry, Mr. Fogel, but I only have three minutes, and half of the time is already gone.

I want to follow up, because I'm still curious about your opinion. I mean, we can argue about what the UN says about entitlement to a Palestinian state or not, but I want to know your opinion, because in my opinion, the State of Palestine is not ours to give or take back. It's not ours to reward or hold back. The Palestinians are entitled to a Palestinian state. It doesn't prejudice the outcome of negotiations or borders or right of return, etc.

Are Palestinians entitled to their own state? They are currently stateless.

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: I support Palestinian statehood as an outcome of direct negotiations, unequivocally.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: By the way, every state recognition by Canada is unilateral. People keep throwing the word "unilateral" around; it's always unilateral, because it is an admission. It does not, again, preclude or prejudice the outcome of a negotiation. Therefore, there's wisdom in affirming the Palestinians' right to statehood, particularly today when we appear to be moving away from the two-state solution.

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: Being mindful of the time, I will simply say this: In Canada, successive governments have repeatedly recognized the desired end of having Palestinian statehood as a result of direct negotiations. That's not the debatable point here. What the committee, I think, is looking at is what the conditions and the criteria are that would be helpful in order to expedite that end goal.

The Chair: Thank you. I see we have a couple of minutes remaining.

MP Morrice is here. Is it the will of the committee to allow him to ask a question?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Excellent.

Mr. Morrice, you have two minutes.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, colleagues.

We had multiple academics at the committee last week who shared, from their perspectives, that there's no pathway to a two-state solution unless we recognize that there are two states. Today I heard that from Ms. Kowalski, and I heard from you, Mr. Fogel and Mr. Topas, some conditions you suggest Canada should apply before recognizing two states.

My question to you, Mr. Fogel, is this: You mentioned democracy, so should we no longer recognize other states if they're not democratic enough? For example, is Eritrea not a state?

I will ask the same question of Mr. Topas as well, who put forward that we must first establish structures for effective governance before we recognize the Palestinian state.

Mr. Shimon Koffler Fogel: I don't believe I suggested that democracy itself is a criterion. I was suggesting putting into place civil society institutions that would allow for good, sustainable governments. They are necessary ingredients in order to have high confidence that the state will be able to withstand the pressures that every state around the globe is subject to and will be able to endure even though those pressures will come to bear.

• (1200)

Mr. Mike Morrice: Go ahead, Mr. Topas.

Mr. Henry Topas: If any state that wishes to be formed has as the basis for that formation an act whereby its citizens, including UNRWA employees, go in and burn, rape, mutilate and butcher people, I don't think it's quite yet ready.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Topas, Mr. Fogel, and Ms. Kowalski. We are very grateful for your perspectives and your time.

That concludes the questions.

We will suspend for four minutes.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: We will resume our study of a two-state solution.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses. We're grateful to have them with us here today.

From the Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, we have Mr. Michael Bueckert, who's the vice-president.

From the Coalition of Canadian Palestinian Organizations, we have Mr. Mohamad Awad, who's the coordinator.

We're also grateful to have Mr. Corey Balsam from Independent Jewish Voices Canada. He is the national coordinator.

You will each have an opportunity to provide five minutes of opening remarks, after which the members will have an opportunity to ask you questions.

If we could start off with Mr. Bueckert, you have the floor.

You have five minutes, but if you see my signal, it means you really have to try to summarize your comments and wrap it up within 20 seconds.

Thank you, Mr. Bueckert. The floor is yours.

Mr. Michael Bueckert (Vice President, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East): Thank you to the Chair, and thank you to the committee for the invitation.

This study has been focused on the question of whether Canada should recognize the State of Palestine. We believe that it should do

so immediately. While recognition would not automatically end Israel's unlawful occupation of Palestine, it would strengthen the ability of Palestinians to seek justice in international forums, including the UN General Assembly or the International Criminal Court.

Over 145 countries already recognize Palestine, including European countries such as Ireland, Spain and Norway. Canada can and should follow their lead without delay.

However, I want to talk more broadly about what Canada can do to advance Palestinian self-determination, especially in light of the recent advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. I want to emphasize that I'm talking about self-determination and not necessarily a two-state solution. This is because it would be irresponsible not to mention the widespread and growing belief that Israel has deliberately killed the possibility of creating a viable and independent Palestinian state.

Israel's actions on the ground are explicitly intended to prevent the creation of a state and to guarantee Israeli domination on a permanent basis, while Israel's parliament overwhelmingly voted against the idea of a Palestinian state, in principle, ever. In this context, we need to be open to the possibility that a two-state solution may already be dead and that self-determination may have to be advanced through other means—for example, through a single shared democratic state in which all peoples have full equality.

To be sure, this is not a question for my organization to decide, nor for the Canadian government to dictate. It is up to Palestinians themselves. This much is clear: To advance Palestinian self-determination, whether that ultimately involves one state or two, Canada must impose meaningful pressure on Israel to force an end to its illegal control over Palestinian lives and territory.

The ICJ, in its recent opinion, found that Israel's presence in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza is illegal and must end as rapidly as possible. The ICJ was clear that the right of Palestinians to self-determination is inalienable and cannot be subject to the conditions of the occupying power. In other words, Israel does not get a veto over Palestinian freedom. Canada cannot continue to allow Israel to use non-existent negotiations as a justification for denying Palestinians their basic rights as a people.

We've heard it said repeatedly by committee members that Canada supports a two-state solution, but I don't actually believe this is true. This is because long-standing Canadian policy has contributed to, and profited from, Israel's illegal takeover of Palestinian territory. In many ways, Canada is still wearing the rose-coloured glasses of the Oslo period in the mid-1990s when there was this false optimism that peace talks would give rise to a two-state solution. During this period, Canada ended its arms embargo against Israel, which had been imposed under the Mulroney government. Canada also signed a free trade agreement with Israel, which was extended to all territories under Israeli control, including settlements in occupied Palestine.

There was a belief that these gestures would serve as a peace dividend that would encourage the Israeli government to complete the process. However, rather than promote peace, this failed approach has incentivized Israel to double down on its annexationist agenda. Israel instead accelerated its illegal and colonial activities, more than tripling the number of settlements and killing tens of thousands of Palestinians in the subsequent period.

For the last three decades, Canada's pro-Israel policies have given the green light for Israel to consolidate its permanent control over Palestine and to cement a system of apartheid over millions of people. Even today, Canada clings to this anachronistic approach, which has utterly failed to bring us any closer to ending Israel's illegal presence in Palestine. It has only demonstrated to Israel's leaders that there will be no consequences for defying international law. Not even Israel's acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza have been enough to push Canada to hold Israeli leaders accountable.

In order to break from this shameful pattern of impunity and to comply with Canada's obligations as outlined by the ICJ, meaningful economic pressure is needed, including sanctions. At a minimum, these measures should include a comprehensive two-way arms embargo using the Special Economic Measures Act, the suspension of the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, a ban on trade with settlements, and sanctions on Israeli political and military leaders.

It is more urgent than ever for Canada to use every tool available to safeguard the rights of the Palestinian people.

Thank you.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bueckert.

We next go to Mr. Awad.

Welcome. You have five minutes.

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad (Coordinator, Coalition of Canadian Palestinian Organizations): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through the clerk, thank you to the committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify here today.

My name is Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad. I'm Canadian born and I grew up in Palestine. I'm the coordinator of the Coalition of Canadian Palestinian Organizations, which has 26 organizations from coast to coast to coast.

I would like to preface my submission today by giving my honest opinion of the nature of this study.

All of us here have heard about the two-state solution. Canada states it believes in the two-state solution, but the reality is that there is one state that has been unilaterally recognized without forming a committee, without forming a study and without doing anything.

I will go on to say the feeling I have is that we are gathered here to provide hope in these dark times that we all face. It's hope that the Palestinian people are in such dire need of right now, more than ever, because this hope is fading. The two-state solution is dying. The Palestinian people have been failed several times, more and more by the international community and, unfortunately, by Canada as well.

We cannot honestly discuss the recognition of Palestine without going back 75 or 76 years to talk about the Nakba. The United Nations said:

The Nakba had a profound impact on the Palestinian people, who lost their homes, their land, and their way of life. It remains a deeply traumatic event in their collective memory and continues to shape their struggle for justice and for their right to return to their homes.

The main question we have here today is this: Should Canada recognize Palestine or not? Should Canada recognize Palestine now or wait until later? Do we believe in international law?

The ICJ, the International Court of Justice, in its July 19, 2024, ruling found that Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is unlawful. If we believe in that court and we believe in international law, this is what our obligation and responsibility are. The court said:

The Court considers that the violations by Israel of the prohibition of the acquisition of territory by force and of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination have a direct impact on the legality of the continued presence of Israel, as an occupying Power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The sustained abuse by Israel of its position as an occupying Power, through annexation and an assertion of permanent control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory and continued frustration of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, violates fundamental principles of international law and renders Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory unlawful.

What do we have to do? This presence in the West Bank is unlawful. The International Court of Justice says it's unlawful. What is Canada's responsibility? How can you correct this unlawfulness? If there is anybody on this committee who can tell me there is another way without recognizing Palestine, please tell me.

Regarding the argument around the peace process, unfortunately, the ICJ has debunked the message that Canada presented at the ICJ, which was that it should be through a final peace process negotiation. As Canada, as a leader in the world, we are in the position today that our message is not being heard at the ICJ.

Our position today is that we lag behind 147 countries that have already recognized Palestine. Of the 20 countries of the G20, nine have recognized Palestine and five of the NATO allies have recognized Palestine. We are sitting here, saying we should be doing this. The question is, when are we going to do it?

• (1215)

Are we going to wait through another 75 years of negotiations?

Since the time warning has been raised at me, I would like to thank you all. I hope the outcome of this exercise will be a correction and our doing the right thing for the Palestinian people.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

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

We next go to Mr. Balsam.

You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Corey Balsam (National Coordinator, Independent Jewish Voices Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee, for this opportunity to present before you today.

[*Translation*]

Independent Jewish Voices is a national organization with members and local chapters across Canada and Quebec. In our diversity, we come together as Jews to pursue a just, peaceful and dignified future for Palestinian and Israeli peoples and against all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism and anti-Palestinian racism.

[*English*]

While we gather today, it bears emphasizing that the Palestinian people are facing what has now been widely deemed a genocide in Gaza. The situation in northern Gaza was further described by the heads of prominent UN agencies just a few days ago as “nothing short of apocalyptic.” As Jews and Canadians, we are driven by the post-Holocaust edict of “never again”. To us, that unequivocally means never again for anyone.

We are likewise motivated by Jewish values, in particular the unyielding pursuit of justice. I personally lived among Palestinians in the occupied West Bank for several years and can attest to the grave injustices experienced there, and also to the warmth and kind-hearted nature of the Palestinian people.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, we cannot allow the status quo to continue, and I say this for the benefit of all people in Palestine and Israel.

[*English*]

For far too long, successive Canadian governments have repeated Canada's foreign policy position of supporting a two-state solution while neglecting to take virtually any meaningful action to attain this objective. On the contrary, Canada has been deeply complicit, particularly with Israel's efforts to establish “facts on the ground” in the form of illegal Jewish Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza—and perhaps soon again in Gaza, which will serve to ultimately block the creation of a Palestinian state.

In direct contradiction of Canada's official discourse and Security Council resolution 2334, Canada has refused to differentiate among its trade dealings with Israel, allowing illegal settlements to benefit from privileged access to Canadian markets. It repeatedly voted against UN resolutions in support of fundamental Palestinian human rights, and continues to.

It has also allowed Canadians to receive tax benefits when supporting charities that act as conduits for often violent settler organizations involved in terrorizing Palestinians, confiscating their land and even blocking aid trucks to Gaza. This is real.

Mr. Chair, it's time for Canada to change course. We believe Canada's recognition of a Palestinian state would constitute an important step toward actualizing the right of Palestinians to self-determination, which Canada acknowledges and which we support.

Of course, it can't stop there. Recognizing Palestinian statehood alone, without taking steps to end our complicity and apply pressure on Israel, would render such a move virtually inconsequential. If Canada is truly serious about supporting a rules-based international order, it must take action now and accompany statehood recognition with concrete action to that end.

The following are our recommendations.

First, take immediate steps to end Canada's complicity in Israeli occupation and the settlement enterprise, as mandated by the recent ICJ decision. To do this, we recommend beginning with an audit of the various ways in which Canadian policy functions, either directly or indirectly, to make Palestinian self-determination and statehood less and less achievable every day, not to mention aiding and abetting the very war crimes Canada claims to oppose.

Second, impose sanctions on Israeli officials and institutions at the highest levels in relation to both the ongoing genocide and the military occupation and settlement project in the West Bank. Canada has begun to sanction a few low-level actors. That is a step forward, but one that is grossly insufficient, given the urgent nature of the situation right now.

Finally, we recommend that Canada retract its adoption of the anti-Palestinian IHRA definition of “antisemitism” included in the handbook released last week, both because of its absolute perversion of the important fight against anti-Semitism and because it has a role in chilling vital advocacy efforts for Palestinian human rights at this critical juncture.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, the Canadian government has an important role to play in fostering the conditions for viable self-determination for the Palestinian people. We owe it to both Israelis and Palestinians to help create a future in which all peoples in the region can live in peace and freedom.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

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

We will now go to questions by the members.

First up is MP Aboultaif. You have four minutes, sir.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to all the witnesses this morning.

Peace in the Middle East means peace to the world. This has had a long history. We all hope that Canada remains in place as one of the main players to promote peace and security in many places in the world, and specifically in the Middle East. It's difficult to hear Canada being blamed for being on the shortfall of providing any support. Canada put in a lot of resources to support the Palestinian Authority after the Oslo negotiation.

The question is this: What are the conditions necessary for long-standing peace with the region? I'll give the opportunity to all three of you to answer. I'll start with Mr. Balsam and then go to Mr. Awad and Mr. Bueckert.

Please go ahead.

● (1225)

Mr. Corey Balsam: Thank you for the question.

As basic conditions, I think we need to see a recognition of everyone's human rights and everyone's humanity in the region. I think Canada taking a position to recognize Palestinian self-determination and to recognize the Palestinian state so that there can be more genuine negotiations between those parties would go a long way, as would, of course, taking steps to pursue justice, including addressing the settlement issue and putting pressure on Israel, especially at this point, to stop its ongoing slaughter in Gaza and in the region.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Awad.

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Thank you so much.

I think the first thing that comes to my mind is to uphold international law. We need law to go back to in order to be able to establish peace. If there is a conflict, there is international law and we can resort to it.

I think international law has been missing. That region is skipping it. We need to start working towards applying and implementing international law.

Mr. Michael Bueckert: I too would say that it's critically important that Canada hold Israel to its obligations before the International Court of Justice to end its occupation as rapidly as possible. This is something that is unconditional. It's not something to be negotiated. It's something that is mandated by the world's top court.

Canada often expresses support for the court, but has not articulated its support for the specific findings of the ICJ. It would be good to see Canada actually say that it expects Israel's occupation to end as soon as possible and to participate in all actions internationally through the UN and others to achieve that.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: We all know that Oslo is probably the closest point where the two sides have sat down to figure out a plan for

long-lasting peace. Do you believe Oslo is still a good base to continue on the path forward?

Again, I'll start with you, Mr. Bueckert, and then move this way.

Mr. Michael Bueckert: Unfortunately, Oslo was supposed to be a temporary period of about five years, after which there would be final negotiations and the creation of a separate Palestinian state. Some of the key issues around the status of Jerusalem and the rights of refugees were kind of put on the back burner to be dealt with in the future, which I think was a mistake.

At the time, there were Palestinian voices saying that this too was unfair. Oslo itself was not offering an actual state but an entity minus a state, as Rabin called it. It would not necessarily have given Palestinians actual sovereignty, but regardless of its prospects at the time, clearly, 30 years later, we're stuck in this transitional period. It has obviously failed. There has to be a new paradigm. Fortunately, the ICJ has given us a new paradigm to take action right now.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're out of time, Mr. Bueckert.

We go next to MP Alghabra.

You have four minutes, sir.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here this afternoon to offer their important opinions.

Dr. Awad, I have a couple of questions for you.

Some of the questions that are being asked are about the timing of the recognition. Why change the traditional Canadian policy over the last two decades of waiting until everything is finally negotiated before the recognition of the State of Palestine? Why do you think we should recognize the State of Palestine as quickly as possible?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: In my intervention, we were talking about our responsibility toward international law. Today, the more we wait, the more hope is lost in the region and even among us, as Canadian Palestinians, in international law.

The number one answer to this question is whether it is the right of the Palestinian people to be recognized. As a Palestinian today, I feel we are long overdue. We have suffered so long. We paid the price for being recognized.

Palestinians are one of the most well-educated people in the Middle East. They deserve to be recognized and be part of the international community. Canada, by delaying this recognition, puts us Palestinians on the table of negotiations, waiting for a negotiation as a sub-element of this negotiation.

If we want to wait for the final state or establishing a government, how do you think the Palestinian people can establish their governance and institutions while under occupation? You cannot work from a village, just as you can't come from Kanata to downtown Ottawa.

I grew up there. I had to go on a donkey to go to my hospital around Jerusalem.

Thank you.

• (1230)

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Thank you, Dr. Awad.

The other question for you is that there is a common point being raised. None of our allies, or very few, have made that step.

Why should we be doing it now? What is your response to that point?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Last week, Japan, which is part of the G7, also started a study to recognize Palestine.

I think, as a Canadian, that we all look to the moment when Mulroney stood up and fought for the rights of the South African people. We take pride in that moment. Today, we need to see that Canada. We need to see Canada take that prime step, be a leader in the world again, lead the G7 in this step and not wait to be second or third.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: How many of our allies that you're aware of among the G20 or European countries have already recognized the State of Palestine?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Nine out of the G20 have recognized Palestine. Five of the NATO allies have recognized the State of Palestine.

France is studying to recognize the State of Palestine. England is studying to recognize the State of Palestine. Japan is doing the same thing. Belgium is, yes.

A few months ago, Norway, Ireland and Spain recognized Palestine. There are 147 countries that have done so.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: In the last 20 seconds, what advantages are there for Canada to recognize the State of Palestine?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: It's an advantage for every country that is part of the international community to uphold the international law. We have an obligation in front of us today, as per the ICJ recommendation. We do have a big advantage in establishing peace in the Middle East and putting in that cornerstone in establishing that peace, which starts with the recognition of Palestine.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Awad.

We now go to MP Bergeron. You have four minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us today and for once again shedding light on this important—though not necessarily straightforward—issue that we are currently studying.

I think I can safely say that everyone around this table believes in the two-state solution. It's because I believe in the two-state solution that I believe in recognizing the state of Palestine. By the same token, I recognize Israel's right to exist, and its right to exist in security.

Earlier, Mr. Fogel suggested that a congruent part of the Jewish community in Canada disagreed with the idea that Israel has the right to exist, and to exist in security.

Mr. Balsam, do you believe that Israel has the right to exist, to exist in security?

Mr. Corey Balsam: Thank you for your question.

Yes, we support Israel's right to exist in peace and security, but no country has the right to practise apartheid or be an oppressive state.

Of course, human rights are for everyone. Therein lies the problem with these comments, however. The notion of recognizing the country as a Jewish country is like recognizing Canada as a white country or a Christian country. No, absolutely not. It's for everyone. What we support is equality and human rights for everyone. There can be two, one or three states, or even a confederation. That is what is important.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You're injecting something into the equation, because our current study is based on the idea of a two-state solution, that is to say Palestine on one side and Israel on the other.

Do you believe in the two-state solution?

• (1235)

Mr. Corey Balsam: We believe that recognition of the Palestinian state is the first step. Afterwards, there can be negotiations to find a solution to the current situation. As you said, there are 700,000 settlers in the West Bank. Today, it's a very mixed population on both sides. For example, 20% of Israel's population is Palestinian.

How can we guarantee everyone's rights? It's not for me or for us to say, but I believe that giving Palestinians a little power in the negotiations is extremely important.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: We must therefore recognize Palestine, since Israel is already recognized, and engage in negotiations between the two states. Lord knows where these negotiations could lead.

You explained that in direct contradiction to its official discourse and Security Council Resolution 2334, Canada has refused to differentiate in its trade dealings with Israel, thereby allowing Jewish settlements in the occupied territories to benefit from privileged access to the Canadian market.

To be clear, what do you think that means in terms of international law?

Mr. Corey Balsam: It means you're going against international law. Security Council decisions are often blocked by the United States, but that one was adopted. It is crystal clear that products from Israeli settlements should be differentiated.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Let's go to MP Green. You have four minutes, sir.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you.

Dr. Awad, I want to thank you for being here.

I recognize that this has been a devastating year for Palestinians worldwide, including in Canada, who face an ongoing genocide not just in Gaza but obviously in the apartheid system in the occupied territories in the West Bank.

You spoke about the legal implications and the moral imperative. I would like you to take a moment and tell us what the Canadian Palestinian community has experienced this year and what statehood recognition by the Government of Canada would mean to them in this moment.

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Thank you so much for including me in this testimonial.

Canadian Palestinian communities, especially in the last year, have experienced so much anti-Palestinian racism. Anti-Palestinian racism starts by denying the existence of the Palestinian people. The failure of Canada and part of the international community to not recognize the Palestinian state is the first step of not recognizing Palestinians.

As Canadian Palestinians, we have suffered so many incidents, and we saw so many incidents when just trying to speak for human rights and speak about the genocide that is going on and the killing of Palestinian people. Doctors are fired from their hospitals. University professors have been stopped from work, and then they returned back to work because.... We all saw this, and we're still in this mess that we are in.

Mr. Matthew Green: Is it your testimony that state recognition domestically here in Canada would provide a type of societal legitimacy for those who are advocating for Palestinian rights or, I should say more specifically, facing deep anti-Palestinian racism here in Canada?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Absolutely.

Mr. Matthew Green: How has the Canadian Palestinian community advocated with this government?

You'll recall that there was an opposition day motion. Obviously, New Democrats put state recognition on the table. The Liberal government took it off the table at that time.

What impact did that have on the community from your perspective, in terms of seeing your identities and indeed your national identity effectively erased from that particular motion?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Even before October 7, the Palestinian community had suffered from a policy versus implementation issue.

We had the coalition and we issued a study about policy versus implementation. We shared it with most of Parliament. We state in our foreign policy on our website that we believe in a two-state solution, yet Canada recognizes one state and doesn't recognize the other.

On policy versus implementation, we go to the United Nations and vote against our own policies that we state in our official practice. The Palestinian community has seen this throughout this whole year, and when that part about officially recognizing Pales-

tine was removed from the table, the whole Palestinian community was boiling.

• (1240)

Mr. Matthew Green: As somebody who has been actively advocating to this Liberal government, do you feel they're listening to you?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Again, within the coalition, we're non-partisan. We're going to continue advocacy, pushing the message and speaking with our voices.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll repeat the question very specifically. Given the fact this Parliament is likely on its last legs, why is there urgency to have this passed now versus perhaps kicking it down the road past a further election?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Well, first, I think we shouldn't be waiting too long to do the right thing, because this is the right thing. It should have been done a long time ago.

Second, we don't want to wait for another year, because then the new Parliament, the new government that is going to come in, is going to start from scratch.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to the second round.

MP Epp, you have three minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Just as a side comment, I will take Mr. Green at his word that we're in our last days, but let's go back to the subject at hand.

Lasting peace is the goal is around this table. That has been the goal of the international community and of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. It has long been Canada's position, and our allies' position, that we support a two-state solution that's a result of negotiations between both parties—and this is where I want to focus some of my questions—that enjoys popular support from both the Israelis and the Palestinians. This is the only way to lead to lasting peace.

This is not a phenomenon that's limited to Israel or Palestine; it's a phenomenon we've experienced here in our own country. Constitutional deals made by leaderships did not survive—think of Meech Lake and Charlottetown—because they did not end up enjoying popular support across our own country. Fortunately, here we haven't had the consequences of death and destruction that both the Israelis and the Palestinian people have suffered.

I want to focus on that mechanism, first of all, of popular support. Whether you agree or disagree with the route of the Israeli government, there are elections coming up in 2026, so there's a mechanism in place for the Israeli people to express their will through a process that's self-determined. I heard from the testimony today the importance of self-determination.

From the Palestinian people's perspective, who speaks for Palestine? What is the process that leads to a lasting peace? Surveys have shown that 40% of the Palestinian people support the two-state solution. What is the mechanism that you or your organization would advocate as the voice of the Palestinian people to lead toward peace?

Maybe we'll start with Mr. Bueckert.

Mr. Michael Bueckert: Well, obviously, the Palestinian people are divided among many different factions and parties. A part of this is a result of the occupation itself.

We have to consider that the Palestinian Authority, for example, isn't operating under conditions of democracy but under conditions of subjugation to the Israeli state. When we're talking about popular legitimacy, the occupation is the biggest obstacle to Palestinian democracy. It denies it explicitly.

When we're talking about popular legitimacy among Israelis for a Palestinian state, we have to remember that.... Why should Israelis get a veto over whether Palestinians have a state or not? This is not an issue for Israelis to determine among themselves but something for Palestinians to determine.

Mr. Dave Epp: To follow up, does your organization support the right of Israel to exist? I know Mr. Balsam did state that. Does your organization support the right of the State of Israel to exist?

Mr. Michael Bueckert: We support the rights of all people to live in peace and security. We don't support the rights of states. States don't have rights, but yes, obviously, whether it is a two-state solution or a single democratic state, the option has to make sure that all peoples live in full equality, peace and security.

Mr. Dave Epp: Mr. Awad, would you comment on the route—

The Chair: Save your answer.

Now we go to MP Zuberi. MP Zuberi, you have three minutes.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses for being here for this very important study, and thank you to all the members for the shared common goal of ensuring peace and security for everyone in the region, regardless of faith, ethnicity or which border one sits within.

I want to ask about the hope that would be created within a Palestinian society for Palestinians, if and when Canada were to recognize a state of Palestine and does recognize the State of Palestine.

I understand, Mr. Balsam and Dr. Awad, that both of you have deep links in different ways to Palestinians living in the region. I'd like to hear from both of you.

Mr. Balsam, I understand that you worked for Oxfam and were stationed in Ramallah for four years. Can you speak about the hope that would be created?

To Dr. Awad, I ask you the same question, please.

• (1245)

Mr. Corey Balsam: Thank you, MP Zuberi.

I think we should be careful about creating false hope. I think the recognition is an important piece, but it has to come with some

teeth. I think Canada can take a leadership position here on the global level.

Palestinians have had that false hope so many times. Talking about popular support, there was mass support for a two-state solution back in the Oslo years, going back 20 years, but it has lost support as the land mass has disintegrated.

Recognition would be important, but again, it needs to come with teeth.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I appreciate that. You did mention, in your testimony, about how it needs to be coming with teeth, as you say.

Mr. Awad, can you speak about what your expectation would be with regard to hope, if and when Canada were to recognize...?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: I'm going to answer you with my personal experience because I lived in Palestine before the Oslo accords and afterward. I remember when the Palestinian Authority took over Ramallah. I left my medical school in Jordan and I went to celebrate in the streets of Ramallah. That's how the Palestinian people reacted to the peace process.

A year later, Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel, was assassinated by the right-wing Israeli parties who rule Israel today. This is when we started to see the falling down of this hope and this peace process.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: In your opinion—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi:—do you feel that peace and security would be furthered by the recognition?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Of course.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to MP Bergeron.

You have a minute and a half.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Bueckert, your organization argues that Palestine meets at least three of the four criteria of the Montevideo Convention to be recognized as a state under international law. The last criterion is having a territory. You say that the territory of Palestine is not defined because Israel illegally occupies Palestinian lands.

Why is it advisable to opt for recognition even if your organization finds that the solution of recognition would not address the substantial means by which Israel occupies Palestinian lands and disregards the human rights of Palestinians?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Bueckert: I'm sorry. I was waiting for the translation there.

Yes, there are a number of conditions under the Montevideo convention of 1933 in terms of the conditions of statehood. You don't have to meet all of them. Some of the other conditions—a permanent population, a government, the ability to conduct international affairs—are already being met, and you don't need to meet all of these conditions to satisfy the qualifications for statehood.

The issue of the lack of definition of territory is somewhat resolved if we look again to the ICJ decision, which explicitly states that East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank are a territory that does not belong to Israel. That presumably would be the basis of recognition, and then any final eventual borders could be negotiated down the line between two equal parties, rather than between an occupying power and an occupied population.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to Mr. Green.

You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much.

Mr. Balsam, I want to give you the opportunity to reflect on what I consider to be an obvious contradiction. We heard about how the diversity of Palestinian ideologies and political affiliations somehow doesn't qualify them for statehood, yet there are some groups, including those who provided testimony today, who claim to speak on behalf of all Jewish people in Canada.

I would put to you, sir, that I've witnessed you and your organization sometimes being denigrated, sometimes being positioned as not having a legitimate Jewish voice, a progressive Jewish voice, in this conversation. I want to give you the opportunity to respond to that and to say why you feel that the diversity within this country might reflect a greater call for state recognition for Palestine than perhaps what some of the other witnesses may have presented to committee.

• (1250)

Mr. Corey Balsam: You know, I take the fringe accusation as a bit of a compliment, because Jews are actually commanded to wear tzitzit, which are literal fringes, to remind them of God's commandments.

I'm not saying that we are a fringe, because IJV and organizations like us are actually growing very significantly. Just since October 7, we've just about doubled in members and now have about 25 chapters across the country, including in Cape Breton. Really, we're all over the country.

I think that is a way to delegitimize voices within the Jewish community who are supporting Palestinians. There's a lot of fear-mongering in the community—and I grew up with it—to keep the community behind Israel. There's a lot of financing of different charities and things like that. There is sort of a reward for that.

However, again, yes, the diversity point is very important to acknowledge.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

The Chair: MP Epp, you have three minutes.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, thank you to the witnesses.

Continuing in the same vein, I just want to provide a little more clarity. The question before this committee and the question for Canada is not whether to recognize Palestine as a state. I think we have broad support for that around this table. The broader question is when to recognize Palestine as a state so that it leads to peace and so that the peace has popular support. That's the question I want to come back to.

I'll go to Mr. Awad and give you the same opportunity.

I don't think anyone is asking for a homogeneous position of the Palestinian people on the issues. The basis of my question is more around what system needs to be in place to lead to that lasting peace and to allow the voice of the Palestinian people to be reflected and represented. That, I don't see now.

That is why the result of negotiations and self-determination must come from the Palestinian people, but how do we get there? Is the problem of Iran part of the problem?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Thank you so much for your question.

I think, as we've stated here, that we are all looking for a two-state solution and for lasting peace. The main problem here is that we have an occupation that is going on. If you have a Palestinian people who are living under occupation, who cannot go from their homes to their work freely, and then you expect them to build a governance, to build a political system.... Yet the Palestinian people have done that, and we have institutions established. I'll give you the numbers.

Before 1992 and the Oslo accords, from 1967 to 1992, when Palestinians in the West Bank were under the occupation, the number of hospital beds increased by zero under the military rule of Israel. From 1992 until now—30 years—the number of hospital beds has quadrupled. It is the same thing with school chairs.

When Palestinians were given that sort of autonomy, they built an economy; they built ministries; they built institutions. There is the Palestine National Council, which has existed for 60 years now. There is the Palestinian Legislative Council. There are grounds that the Palestinian people have built and established toward establishing a Palestinian state, yet with the occupation, since 1996 the number of settlements has tripled.

Even since last July, Israel has, according to The Associated Press, seized the largest amount of land in the Jordan Valley—five square miles of land. They gave permits for 5,295 housing units to be built. When Canada and the international community recognize Palestine, that is going to tell the Israeli government that this is Palestine and that settlements have to stop.

Mr. Dave Epp: Who speaks for Palestine?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Who speaks for Palestine? It's the Palestinian people.

Mr. Dave Epp: How?

The Chair: You're at time.

An hon. member: Give him a chance, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Awad, you have 30 seconds and no more.

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Thank you.

Who speaks for Palestine? The Palestinian people, who are educated. There is a Palestine National Council today. Give us a space to breathe, and you will see wonders from the Palestinian people. Go to every university. You'll see university professors who are willing to sit down and formulate a whole system.

However, when you are living under occupation, it's as though you are tied down and literally cannot go from Kanata to downtown Ottawa without passing a checkpoint. Do you expect me to tell you who represents the Palestinian people? The PLO is established and is there. The Palestine National Council is there. The Palestinian Legislative Council exists. It needs reform, yes—we all agree on that.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you.

For the last question, we go to MP Chatel. You have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Canadians are watching this war, this tragedy, and they want to see their government stand up for peace and human dignity. That's quite clear. That's what I hear in my community. It is very difficult for Canadians to understand how we can move forward with a two-state situation when one of the two states is not recognized. Some people seem to be in a quandary. On the one hand, Palestine cannot fully function as a state without being recognized, and on the other hand, it cannot be recognized without demonstrating that it functions as a state. It's a bit of a chicken and egg situation.

Mr. Awad, could Canada's recognition of the Palestinian state strengthen Canada's position as a promoter of human rights and the peaceful resolution of conflicts? This would bring Canada in line with its more traditional role as a mediator in international conflicts.

[*English*]

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Thank you. I was just listening to the interpretation.

Yes, again, definitely, recognizing Palestine will put Canada back at the forefront of international diplomacy. It will promote peace. More importantly, we will be doing our due diligence towards international law and the international community, which we've always stood for.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Mr. Bueckert, as a human rights defender, do you believe Canada's position as a defender of human rights would be strengthened by that recognition?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Bueckert: Yes, I think so.

Again, I don't think that this is the only action that Canada needs to take to demonstrate that it is taking a leadership role.

You know, Canada's reputation is affected by this. Canada lost a couple of bids to join the UN Security Council, partly because of its decision to side with the U.S. and Israel on these matters against the rest of the international community. There's a good chance that it will continue on that path.

Countries that have actually won seats—Ireland and Norway—are leading the way. They recognize Palestine. Ireland is moving forward with a possible ban on trade with settlements. They're really leading the way and showing that....

These aren't the big, powerful countries, but they're making a name for themselves and they're earning a lot of respect by actually putting action behind their words. Canada could be one of these countries. It doesn't have to be a junior partner to the U.S. or only do whatever Israel wants. It can chart its own path.

Mr. Matthew Green: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm wondering if you can invite the witnesses, should there be any additional information they didn't get to provide today in this short period, to submit it in writing for the benefit of the study.

The Chair: Absolutely. Yes, we always extend that invitation to anyone who appears before us. If there's any additional information you would like to submit, then certainly feel free to do so. It would certainly be of assistance to all of us.

Go ahead, MP Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, could we ask for unanimous consent to give our colleague Mike Morrice two minutes so that he can also—

[*English*]

The Chair: I would like ask a question myself, Mr. Bergeron. I very seldom do so. We have two minutes remaining. I'm grateful to the witnesses for having appeared.

As you can imagine, every witness we have heard from so far has said that they very much would favour a peace process in the Middle East, but what does trouble me is that we have not seen a peace proposal from the Government of Israel since 2008.

I was wondering if each of you could briefly tell us why you think that is.

Mr. Michael Bueckert: As I mentioned in my presentation, Canada has demonstrated to Israel that there are no consequences for maintaining the status quo. For Israel, the status quo is completely acceptable, but for Palestinians, it means that everybody is stateless, without rights, dispossessed and subject to horrifying violence. It's not acceptable. Either they have a state or they have equal rights within a democratic state. It's one or the other. The current status quo is not an option.

If Canada is committed to two states, it has to actually force it to happen, because most people think that the idea is dead or on its way out.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Awad.

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: Israel has made it clear that it has no intention of respecting the ICJ ruling. Israel has made it clear that it has no intention of respecting international law. Israel is now planning to take over northern Gaza and re-establish settlements in northern Gaza. Since July, Israel has, as I mentioned earlier, seized the largest amount of land.... I think what we are seeing right now is the absence of the international community holding Israel accountable for these actions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Awad.

Go ahead, Mr. Balsam.

Mr. Corey Balsam: Thank you.

Israel has no reason to pursue peace in its own interest right now without pressure. There's no real pressure, and I think we're seeing the consequence of that impunity play out right now in the region.

For a very long time, Israel had a policy of negotiating while at the same time making sure, through the construction of settlements, that a Palestinian state would not be possible. That was said openly in the Knesset among Israeli politicians. It was acknowledged that it was okay to let Tzipi Livni or someone else go to the negotiating table, but that if the government were to actually pursue a Palestinian state, they would make the government fall. That's been the approach.

Israel needs to feel a pressure in order to actually move on this.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. We're very grateful for your time, for your perspectives and for your expertise.

Before we turn to you, Mr. Bergeron, I want to make sure that there's unanimous consent for us to adopt the the subcommittee budgets in the amounts of \$1,250 for the study targeting civil society in Venezuela, \$6,500 for the study of forced migration, \$2,750 for the study of the implementation of Canada's universal periodic review, and \$5,000 for the study of transnational repression in developing democracies. Is everyone okay with that?

(Motions agreed to)

The Chair: Excellent.

Go ahead, Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask you again to request unanimous consent so that our colleague Mike Morrice can ask questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent for Mr. Green?

You have two minutes, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Oh, Mr. Green.... There's only one in this room.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mike Morrice: I thank Mr. Bergeron and all my colleagues for giving me this opportunity.

[*English*]

My question would be to return to some of the remarks we've heard.

A number of academics and in fact all three panellists here have said that the right time to recognize two states is now. There is no possibility of a two-state solution without recognizing that there are two states.

In the previous panel, we had some put forward the idea that there should be conditions. That's what the foreign affairs minister has also most recently said. I asked the question to those panellists who put that question forward. I think we'd really benefit from hearing your perspective.

Dr. Awad, maybe you can start. If I have time, Mr. Balsam can go next.

What is your response to those who say there should be conditions before Palestine can be recognized as a state?

Dr. Mohamad Abu Awad: I would laugh at the idea of putting in conditions. We're not immature. We're not children or babies. Palestinian people are people. They're professors, they're smart and they deserve independence.

Starting with conditions is simply like you're telling a nation that you shouldn't be ready for a state. I don't think there is a nation in this whole world that will tell you that this nation is ready to be a nation: Every nation is an evolving process. Allow us to evolve.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Thank you, Dr. Awad.

Go ahead, Mr. Balsam.

Mr. Corey Balsam: I don't have much to add, except that, as Mr. Bueckert has suggested, the conditions have already been met for a Palestinian state. I think that to now add more conditions is just blocking that way forward.

The Chair: That's excellent.

Thank you again. We're very grateful.

The meeting stands adjourned.

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