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Chair: Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury

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• (1555)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 56 of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. All witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

I'd like to go over a few rules for participants.

First, please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room and on Zoom, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. The committee clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on June 4, 2024, the subcommittee is resuming its study of the current situation in Sudan.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. We have France-Isabelle Langlois, executive director of Amnistie internationale Canada francophone, and Yonah Diamond, senior legal counsel with the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights.

You'll be given a maximum of five minutes for your remarks, after which we'll proceed with a round of questions and answers.

Ms. Langlois, I invite you to make your opening statement.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The interpretation is not working online.

[Translation]

The Chair: Because of technical difficulties, I have to suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

• (1555)

(Pause)

• (1615)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

[English]

First of all, I would like to apologize for this technical problem. Really, we have no control over it. It can happen to any human being.

[Translation]

At least now we can get started.

You'll be given up to five minutes for your remarks, after which we'll proceed with a round of questions.

Welcome, Ms. Langlois. I invite you to make your opening statement. You have up to five minutes.

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois (Executive Director, Amnistie internationale Canada francophone): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for your invitation.

Amnesty International notes that, since April 15, 2023, tens of thousands of people have been killed or injured in deliberate and indiscriminate attacks in Sudan in battles between the Rapid Support Forces, the RSF, and the Sudanese Armed Forces, the SAF, which are fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country, including in the Darfur and Kordofan regions. The fighting followed months of tension between the two groups over the potential reform of security forces that was proposed as part of negotiations for a new transitional government, among other issues.

The FAS is led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, while the RSF is led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti.

Given the scale of the fighting and the organization of both sides, the situation can be considered a non-international armed conflict under the Geneva Conventions. As a result, it is governed by international humanitarian law, which seeks to protect civilians and other non-combatants in armed conflicts. Amnesty International considers both the SAF and the RSF to be state forces. Various non-state armed and militia groups are also involved.

Dozens of women and girls have been raped by combatants on both sides. The conflict, which has been going on for more than a year, continues to spread across the country, and the city of El Fasher, in North Darfur, the only capital of the five Darfur states that is not controlled by the RSF, has been surrounded by them and their allies. The city has a population of over 1.5 million, including hundreds of thousands of displaced people who are now trapped and in danger of being subjected to large-scale violations. Hundreds of thousands of people could be killed.

Amnesty International has received reports of villages being set on fire, increased air strikes, bombing of residential areas, including the IDP camp at Abu Shouk, and aid delivery being blocked by both sides.

Following an investigation, Amnesty International was able to establish that all parties to the conflict are committing serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Some of the violence committed by the parties to the conflict amounts to war crimes and even crimes against humanity.

Thousands of men, women and children are caught in the cross-fire. Combatants on both sides, who often use inappropriate weapons and explosive ammunition with wide area effects, often launch attacks from densely populated residential areas. Looting of public and private property, including medical and humanitarian infrastructure, is exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation. More than 70% of hospitals, if not 80%, are now non-functional.

More than 11 million people have been internally displaced, and an estimated 2.1 million have fled to neighbouring states, where they live in appalling conditions. More than 16,650 people have been killed since the conflict escalated. Millions of people are at immediate risk of starvation. The humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated by severe shortages of food, water, medicine and fuel. According to information made public in June 2024, more than 750,000 people are facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity, and 25.6 million are acutely food insecure.

Despite multiple ceasefire declarations, fighting has intensified. In July, Amnesty International released a report detailing a steady influx of weapons into the country, fuelling the conflict and the unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The arms embargo in Sudan is therefore totally ineffective.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Langlois.

Mr. Diamond, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Yonah Diamond (Senior Legal Counsel, Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights): Thank you, Chair.

Before I begin, I just want to say that I am replacing my colleague Mutasim Ali, a world-leading authority on the conflict and on accountability for Sudan, because a close friend of his was killed yesterday in El Fasher in north Darfur. This is the reality for all members of the community. I want to dedicate this testimony to Mubarak Musa Abu Sin, in his memory.

We are discussing an atrocity situation that is affecting the same groups and survivors of genocide from 20 years ago. There is no need, really, to mention at this point the extent of the humanitarian catastrophe. It's already well known. It's just that the world is largely turning away from the largest humanitarian catastrophe on earth. More than 10 million are displaced, and 26.6 million are facing acute hunger. That is more than half the population.

It's threatening to result in 2.5 million deaths by the end of this year alone from famine. By next year, we may witness the largest amount of deaths from starvation that we've ever seen in our lifetime. Some are even estimating that it will be up to 12 million or 13 million by next year under these current conditions. We have no time to waste. As the conflict continues, more will continue to be killed every day, as I mentioned from the daily experience of the Sudanese community.

In April of this year, at the Raoul Wallenberg Centre, my colleague Mutasim and I led an inquiry into breaches of the genocide convention in Darfur. Based on our conclusions, we found that the Rapid Support Forces have committed genocide against the Massalit in west Darfur. We found reasonable grounds to believe that they are targeting other non-Arab groups with the same intention. For instance, fighters on the ground are saying things like, "We decided not to leave any of them alive, not even the children", referring to Massalit, or mocking dead bodies that litter the streets as "speed bumps" or "dirty dogs". Many of these incitements are worse than in early 2000, the first genocide of the 21st century.

This is more than an internal armed conflict. We know that it is being fuelled by outside actors. We identified in our report that multiple outside actors are supporting the warring parties or fighters on the ground through smuggling arms or financing or political cover. The UAE is the largest backer and the most notorious. It was just confirmed, not only by the New York Times investigation but other sources, including the UN panel of experts, Amnesty, and other investigators, that the UAE is smuggling arms through Chad, along with heavy weaponry and drones. There are even hundreds of thousands of mercenaries who have been reported as fighting alongside the RSF. These are foreign mercenaries, so this is very much funded and fuelled by outside actors as well.

What can Canada do? Canada is not powerless to act, to intervene. Canada has a long tradition of civilian protection, peacekeeping and the responsibility to protect.

One, Canada can recognize this genocide for what it is. There has been no atrocity determination yet.

Two, it can invoke the responsibility to protect and it can lead on the protection of civilians through diplomacy and through dispatching a civilian protection mechanism in the areas where there are the most civilians at most risk.

Three, we can end all military exports to the UAE, pending a demonstrable halt to their arming of the RSF, the genocidal militia in Sudan, according to our treaty obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty and the Export and Import Permits Act.

Four, Canada has sanctioned only six individuals and entities connected to Sudan. This is the least out of any of Canada's main allies. It has yet to sanction 10 of the entities based in Sudan or the UAE that the U.S. has already sanctioned and that others have sanctioned. We will submit a list to the subcommittee afterwards.

Canada is well placed to take on a case unilaterally or with allies to the International Court of Justice against the UAE for complicity in breaching the genocide convention through the smuggling of arms to the genocidal militia. We are prepared to take on this case. We have pleadings already prepared and drafted.

● (1625)

Canada's immigration policy must respond to this unprecedented emergency. It must speed up the processing times to save at least some of the millions of Sudanese people displaced by this conflict. Not a single Sudanese displaced person has been resettled since the financially burdensome program was introduced in February, capped at 3,250 people. By contrast, as soon as Russia's war of aggression broke out, Canada launched an emergency family reunification program for Ukraine without eligibility or financial requirements and has approved nearly one million applications under this program.

These delays are costing lives, and we're talking about the most lethal famine in decades, genocide and the largest humanitarian catastrophe. I can't imagine a situation that demands an emergency resettlement program more. Instead, Canada has effectively closed its doors on Sudanese people and turned its back on Sudan. This widely disparate response to the war in Ukraine and to Sudan is a scandal of the first order and can only be explained by a discriminatory and, frankly, racist implementation of policy towards communities fleeing conflict.

Parliament should also revive the all-party save Darfur coalition, which was chaired by our founder, Irwin Cotler, or a broader coalition to prevent genocide and atrocity crimes. Canada can also monitor the incitement to genocide from here in Canada and implement the laws we have here to criminalize those acts. We can also ramp up humanitarian aid; only 50% of the required aid has reached Sudan out of the \$2.1 billion that has been pledged. This can go directly, and should go directly, to the grassroots mutual aid initiatives on the ground or to emergency response rooms, which have only received 0.2% this year of the actual international aid.

Canada can lead on all these fronts and more.

Thank you so much for your time, and I look forward to the questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Diamond.

Now we would like to start with our first round of questions. I would like to invite Mr. Ehsassi to take the floor for seven minutes.

You have the floor.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you very much [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] also to our witnesses. That was really effective advocacy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

There is a problem with the interpretation. Maybe the microphone wasn't on.

Anyway, I'm being told that the interpreter can't hear.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is it okay? Can you check?

It's all good.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Allow me to start off by thanking the witnesses.

I would like to point out, Mr. Diamond, that you were here in Ottawa the last few days before the summer recess for Parliament, being active. You did a media availability. Thank you so much for all the hard work you've put into this and for the excellent report that the centre has produced.

Allow me to start off with our witness from Amnesty International.

You did touch on the fact that the arms embargo is ineffective. I'm wondering if you could elaborate on that because, obviously, there's much more that we can do as a country. I'd be grateful if you could provide us with more guidance on the arms embargo.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: As I said, Amnesty International investigated and released a report last summer on the flow and sale of arms to Sudan. We found that a number of states, including China and Serbia, were continuing to transfer weapons to Sudan's combatants in one way or another, despite the arms embargo. My colleague also talked about that.

The first thing Canada can do is support renewing the mandate of the ongoing fact-finding mission on Sudan at the United Nations. The second thing it can do is support extending the UN arms embargo to the entire country and advocate for its full implementation.

Many weapons or parts of weapons end up in Sudan directly or indirectly, including guns that are not weapons of war and blank guns, which are subsequently converted and end up in the hands of fighters on both sides.

We can send you the report that details all those facts.

● (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Diamond, given that there were so many external players involved in fuelling the dispute here, as was pointed out, whether it's China, Serbia, the UAE or Egypt, why are so many countries involved and engaged in the terrible things that are going on in Sudan?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: That's an excellent question.

I would say that these states are profiting from the suffering of the Sudanese people. For instance, for the UAE and for many countries, it's about seeking access to land and resources, the seaport. In particular, the gold trade is fairly large and active in the region. Gold is a major source of funding for countries like the UAE and Russia that are conspiring to basically extract it and to colonize and steal from the Sudanese people.

That's the way I would frame it. While Sudanese people are dying on a daily basis and being killed by these armed forces and militias, the enablers are getting away scot-free from their homes in Dubai, let's say, or Abu Dhabi, and they're actually making money off this because they're smuggling out the kind of natural resources and access that serves them.

I would say that's what makes it so pernicious, and that's what makes the initiatives that I mentioned before so important: going after, for instance, at the International Court of Justice or through sanctions, the entities and states that are benefiting from this conflict, to hold them accountable. This is a massive impunity gap.

It's not only about holding accountable fighters on the ground. It's about their enablers and sponsors. It's very clear that they would collapse and the fighting would end without the support of the UAE, for instance. It's the UAE more so than any other country, but as you mentioned, countries like Russia, China, Turkey, Iran and Serbia have also been identified as supporting it, though not to the same extent, in terms of finances, political backing, diplomatic cover, and of course, supplying heavy weaponry and drones. The UAE is now increasingly implicated in that and has to be called out, sanctioned and taken to court over these continued violations. Otherwise the war will continue.

These are the drivers of conflict, and that's why they are the key targets to look at.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

If you could provide any additional information as to how you think these other countries could be held to account, that would be very much welcome.

Mr. Diamond, you touched on another thing, which was the family reunification program that we announced last year. Just to let you know, the Globe and Mail, in February 2024, had a headline that read, "Canada prepares to welcome thousands of Sudanese." However, there were very few Sudanese who came here. That is very disconcerting.

Do you have any recommendations on that particular front, just to make sure that Canada does open its doors to people who are fleeing the situation in Sudan?

• (1635)

Mr. Yonah Diamond: One of my recommendations is for Canada to introduce an emergency visa program in the same way as

what was introduced for Ukrainians fleeing conflict, which has yet to be done. There's only this reunification program, which has been capped at 3,250 and has financial requirements and biometric requirements that the Ukrainian program didn't have.

We have the capacity. It's a matter of political will, at least as a signal. It's not a matter of resettling everyone. It's a matter of simply introducing a program that will allow for these processing times to be sped up so that the families that do have a chance to make it here can come in an expedited, immediate manner, because there are stories of families.... You can speak to Canadian families who have lost loved ones who were waiting due to IRCC delays.

This is costing lives, the fact that there is not yet a comprehensive emergency visa program for Sudanese Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ehsassi.

Thank you, Mr. Diamond.

I now invite Mr. Genuis to take the floor for seven minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for their powerful and sobering testimony.

Briefings that I received on the crisis in Sudan suggest that the ongoing violence, combined with the humanitarian consequences, makes this likely to be the worst humanitarian crisis since the so-called "Great Leap Forward" in China in the 1950s. You talked about a scenario of mass starvation, potentially up to 12 million or 13 million people next year. To put that in context, that is well over five times the total population of the Gaza Strip.

I don't think very many Canadians are aware of the particulars of this crisis. I think it would be deeply troubling to many Canadians to find out some of the facts you shared. Tens of millions of people are affected by acute hunger already and, at a minimum, this is a situation that requires our serious attention and intense resolve and response.

It seems to me, based on what I read in your testimony today, that a critical step forward is to do more to block the flow of arms into Sudan by shaming and penalizing any country or non-state actor sending weapons to either side. Just briefly, do both witnesses agree with that in principle?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: Yes, and I'm happy to elaborate on that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: From Amnesty International, do you agree with that?

Mme France-Isabelle Langlois: I'm sorry, but can you repeat your question?

I was just informed that my mic is not working well. I hope it is working now.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The question was, do you agree that a critical step forward is for us to take action to block the flow of arms into Sudan, shaming and penalizing any country sending weapons to either side?

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: Yes, I agree.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I'll proceed and dig into this a bit further. This is a proxy war, with different actors sending weapons in and waging a conflict at the expense of the Sudanese people. Many of the players are involved in fomenting conflict and violence in other parts of the world. Unsurprisingly, the governments of Iran and Russia are involved, but the UAE is a player that we have more of a relationship with, let's say, than some of the others. There are many very serious allegations about the UAE, such as that they are actively supporting the RSF, which is committing genocide. Also, there's some detailed analysis, in *The New York Times*, suggesting that the UAE is misusing the Red Crescent as a way of trying to cover for their efforts to smuggle arms into Sudan. My understanding of international law is that, if this is true, this would make the UAE guilty not only of supporting perpetrators of war crimes, but of war crimes themselves by misusing the Red Crescent.

Perhaps, Mr. Diamond, you can comment on the UAE's actions here and on what we can do to put maximum pressure on the UAE as part of a campaign to keep arms from flowing into Sudan.

• (1640)

Mr. Yonah Diamond: The UAE, as you note, still remains among the top 20 importers of Canadian military exports, and so, yes, there's a lot that Canada can do to end this—at least put pressure on the UAE so that Canada's weapons don't become complicit in these crimes in Sudan.

Under the Arms Trade Treaty obligations, the purpose is to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade of arms. Canada is a state party. It ratified the convention and enshrined it in domestic law, but this also requires oversight by Parliament. You can't just rely on the minister to end all permits until the UAE proves that it is not sending these weapons to areas of genocide. Unlike other situations, these transfers may further breach, as we talked about, the UN arms embargo. There's already a UN arms embargo, so there are plenty of legal grounds to bar the flow of arms to the UAE—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can I just jump in? I have limited time.

Not exporting Canadian arms to the UAE is one recommendation. What other steps would you suggest to apply pressure to the UAE? I should mention that Egypt as well is believed to be supporting the other side of the conflict, and Egypt is a country that we have a much warmer relationship with, in general, than some of the other belligerent supporters.

Mr. Yonah Diamond: Yes, but in terms of the UAE, we know the evidence is a lot more solid, and it's supporting a side that is committing mass killing, massacring non-Arab groups and committing mass rape and sexual and gender-based violence against members of these communities based on their identity.

The House can also pass a motion outlining and calling for ceasing the transfer of arms per this legislation, in the same way that the House passed motion No. 658, ending the arms exports to Israel and Hamas. I understand that's not binding, but at least that is something that might get the ball rolling on this initiative to end arms transfers to the UAE until they end their support for the RSF.

It's one thing for the government to claim arms aren't being exported, but we need more parliamentary oversight if the UAE continues to be among the top 20 importers of our military goods.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Which other players that are contributing to the conflict should we be paying attention to?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, the time is up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Diamond, please take just a few seconds to answer.

[*English*]

Mr. Yonah Diamond: We mentioned some of the other actors. Amnesty International put out a report. Others have put out reports. The UN panel of experts is continuing to monitor this. In Russia, there's the Wagner Group, and there are China, Turkey, Iran and Serbia. However, the state that we have been following most closely, and the one where most of the entities that have been sanctioned already are based, is the UAE, which is supporting the RSF. We've heard in our own diplomatic discussions that without the UAE support, the RSF would collapse.

The UAE is probably the biggest exporter of conflict on the continent, so we need to increase the pressure and actually focus on imposing costs on the UAE so that it is not allowed to get away with this.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Ms. Langlois and Mr. Diamond for being here with us.

Ms. Langlois, we've heard a few recommendations from various parties, but could you share with us Amnesty International's most concrete recommendations regarding the currently escalating conflict in Sudan? The committee would appreciate that.

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

There's no silver bullet. Canada claims to be a champion of human rights at the United Nations and on the international stage. It must therefore lead the way in renewing the fact-finding mission's mandate in Sudan. It must also push to extend the UN arms embargo to the entire country. Most importantly, Canada's resources and political influence must be used to get aid to those who need it. Only a coordinated international response and unrelenting pressure on the combatants, who are blocking and restricting access to life-saving aid at this time, can prevent the imminent mass famine and alleviate the suffering of millions. We cannot overemphasize that millions of people are suffering terribly right now and are at risk of becoming victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Canada and its international partners must therefore bring their full weight to bear to exert pressure and implement concrete solutions.

I'll reiterate what I said about the arms embargo. There is an embargo, but it's not working. It must be made effective. All the allies in the region are knowingly arming Sudan, the parts of Sudan experiencing conflict. Indirect arms sales are being made to other states, which then transfer the weapons. Sometimes, several states may be involved in that activity. It is therefore very important for Canada to ensure that the weapons and parts it sells are sold to countries that absolutely will not transfer weapons or parts, even non-lethal ones, to Sudan.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much for those clarifications, Ms. Langlois.

Among other things, you said that Canada should put pressure on the UN. This conflict did not start two weeks ago. It's been going for a while. We saw it coming. It developed, and since then it has only grown and gotten worse. Sudan is experiencing one of the worst famines of this century. So this is nothing new.

As a Quebec sovereigntist, I'm telling you that Canada has a history when it comes to international human rights. We can think of Lester B. Pearson, or Brian Mulroney, who opposed apartheid.

My question is for both witnesses. Either one of you may know the answer. To your knowledge, has the ambassador and permanent representative of Canada to the UN, Bob Rae, made any representations regarding the conflict in Sudan? Have you heard anything from Mr. Rae?

• (1650)

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: We haven't heard anything recently.

Right now, we understand that the attention of states, including Canada, is focused on the conflict between Israel and Hamas. It's a terrible conflict. There is also the conflict in Ukraine and other conflicts around the world. It is important to keep an eye on all conflicts and to have a coherent policy based on our policies and positions.

It is time for Canada to get its act together and once again become the champion of human rights on the international stage.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So what we know at the moment is that Canada's ambassador to the UN has not taken any action regarding the conflict in Sudan. I asked you the question and you answered that you had not heard about it. Maybe we'll do some research on our end. Some action may have been taken, but not to

your knowledge, and Amnesty International is calling for greater pressure on our UN partners.

Mr. Diamond, in response to a question earlier, you said that one of the problems had to do with the processing times for people who want to leave Sudan for Canada. When I was deputy chair of the Special Committee on Afghanistan, we included in our report a recommendation that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, should have a permanent emergency mechanism to act quickly in the event of an international crisis, be it an armed conflict or a natural disaster. In the case of Afghanistan, it took months, if not years, to bring people to Canada.

Do you think this mechanism, which is still not in place and was promised by Mr. Fraser and Mr. Miller, should be created to help us respond to this type of crisis?

[English]

Mr. Yonah Diamond: I would say yes to any sort of emergency program that will open the doors to Sudanese people displaced from conflict. These are the most vulnerable people in the world, you know. They can't go back. These are survivors of genocide who have lost family members and who are often emaciated to the bone. It's horrific, and they don't have anywhere else to go. You know, the largest displacement crisis in the world demands this sort of program. It's beyond belief that there isn't one.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Your time is up, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[English]

I invite Mr. Johns to take the floor for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Diamond and Ms. Langlois for the incredible work that they and their organizations do on behalf of people around the world.

The data shows that only about half of the 2024 Sudan humanitarian response plan is actually funded, with \$1.34 billion U.S. in unmet funding needs. To date, Canada's contribution to this plan represents 1.6% of funding commitments, despite our much larger share of the global economy. Do you believe Canada needs to increase its financial commitments to trusted humanitarian partners operating in Sudan and encourage other donors to do the same? Also, maybe you can comment on how the government's cuts to Canada's international assistance budget during a time of rising global violence, hunger and suffering are impacting our reputation as an international human rights leader.

I'll start with you, Mr. Diamond.

Mr. Yonah Diamond: Humanitarian aid is the primary responsibility that Canada needs to ramp up its support for, and then complement that with real policies to get that aid to the groups that have proven effective after the revolution: youth-led movements and mutual aid groups on the ground that are often more effective than international aid groups. The funding also needs to be distributed in a way that's effective and supports the heroic work of the people on the ground.

• (1655)

Mr. Gord Johns: Ms. Langlois, do you care to add anything on that question?

[Translation]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: On the one hand, Canadian international assistance is always insufficient, generally speaking. We are failing to meet our commitment.

On the other hand, when it comes to such crises, we should never skimp on humanitarian aid. So, to answer your question simply, it is indeed insufficient.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

There are reports of sexual violence that have highlighted the conflict's disproportionate impact on women and girls, with ongoing allegations of rape, forced marriages, sexual slavery and trafficking, particularly in Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has warned that, as many civilians flee these conflict areas, both within Sudan and in neighbouring countries, women face increased vulnerabilities.

How can international efforts better address the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls in conflict zones in Sudan, and what measures could be taken to prevent sexual violence in areas where civilians are fleeing conflict?

Ms. Langlois, if you want to lead, go ahead. I'm happy to take more comments from Mr. Diamond as well.

[Translation]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: That's a very big question you're asking.

The issue of sexual violence against women and girls is a huge problem that is seen around the world in all conflicts, and has been since time immemorial.

What we can do at the moment is provide real humanitarian assistance to women and girls who are currently victims of sexual violence.

Again, I think Canada can engage in this and play a leadership role, not only in the current crisis but in general, to address this issue that is part of the conflicts. In addition, oversight mechanisms must be put in place. Then, of course, there's the whole issue of training the belligerent forces of the known and well-managed national armies. However, it is a long journey.

That said, Canada can play a very important role. Of course, people who commit these crimes need to be prosecuted and convicted.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Mr. Diamond, you also talked about the 12 million to 13 million people who could die from famine. Your brief says, "The International Crisis Group reports that Sudan is experiencing a severe humanitarian crisis, with famine imminent and nearly 90% of those facing acute food insecurity trapped in conflict zones such as Greater Khartoum, Gezira, and El Fasher. Both the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces are obstructing aid delivery, with the Sudanese Armed Forces denying UN agencies permission to deliver assistance in RSF-controlled areas where hunger is most severe."

Can you talk about the latest information on the obstruction of aid delivery in Sudan and how it can be addressed? What more can Canada do?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: That's an excellent question.

It's catastrophic. Reuters also put out a special report on this. As we mentioned, Canada can seek to lead efforts at the UN to remove the consent of the state. A lot of times, countries say that Sudan has the right and that we need its consent, but there's no governing party right now. There's no effective legitimate leader right now who can lay claim to this.

This is a problem of international scope that demands our responsibility to protect civilians in the areas you mentioned, and the removal of obstacles or impediments to letting the trucks go through. This is something Canada and the House can demand—that the requirement for consent of state be removed—because these people are starving to death. It makes no sense to allow the Sudanese Armed Forces to continue blocking that aid. It's the same with the RSF.

I also want to quickly clarify something, because it sounds like there is some confusion in the room around it. Sudan is a massive country. The reason you hear about Darfur a lot is that the situation in Darfur is quite different. The RSF controls most of the region. In north Darfur, there's only one SAF garrison left and joint forces fighting off the RSF's siege. I talked about the RSF atrocities and the UAE's support for them. It's continuing the genocide and massacres of the Massalit, Fur and Zaghawa peoples. The UN found that 81% of the rape and sexual violence was committed by the RSF.

The conflict has to be understood. It's not simply two belligerents. They are committing different sorts of crimes. Whereas the SAF, like I said, is blocking the aid and potentially contributing to deaths by starvation and committing air strikes and war crimes, killing civilians in that context—

• (1700)

The Chair: Mr. Diamond, could you wrap it up, please? Your time has been exceeded by almost one minute.

Thank you.

Mr. Yonah Diamond: Yes. Thank you.

I want to say that the focus is on Darfur. These are survivors of genocide from 20 years ago who are now facing it again. It's a different nature of threat and vulnerability.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

I would now like to invite Ms. Damoff to speak.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of the witnesses for appearing today.

We talked a lot about the UAE, but I want to talk a bit about Russia.

I read a report called “The Blood Gold Report”. It's about how Russia, through the Wagner Group, has raised \$2.5 billion U.S. from trade in African gold since it invaded Ukraine in February 2022. It says:

In Sudan, “the Russian company” controls a major refinery that has allowed Wagner to become the dominant buyer of unprocessed Sudanese gold, with multiple accounts of Russian military transport planes shipping processed gold out of the country.

Does either of you want to speak about that, and the influence the Wagner Group is having in Sudan?

Mr. Diamond, I see you shaking your head. Go ahead.

Mr. Yonah Diamond: I believe Amnesty International also identified Russia. This is not something I've personally been involved in investigating, but we have heard in our discussions that the same way Russia has continued to wade through the sanctions by the international community... Part of that is the gold trade. Countries like Russia and the UAE are aligning themselves in a way so that they can weather these storms. It's really important to track and try to target those networks that are operating in the shadows, smuggling underneath the scrutiny of international mechanisms.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madame Langlois, do you want to comment as well?

[Translation]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: I don't have much to add, other than that Russia is helping arm the belligerent forces in Sudan.

What you are suggesting is very plausible, but it is far beyond my area of expertise. I don't have any specific information about Amnesty's reports on that.

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Human Rights Watch indicated that the signing of the Juba peace agreement in October 2020 between Sudan's transitional government and the country's rebel groups “paradoxically gave rise to new armed group recruitment in Darfur.”

How can the international community support and foster conditions for peace that do not unintentionally result in the entrenchment of violence?

I'll turn to Madame Langlois, if that's okay.

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: Once again, that's big question.

[Translation]

There is no magic formula. We need to do everything we can to ensure that international law, humanitarian law, diplomacy and negotiations are respected, and to make the best possible use of the existing international system, even though it is unfortunately in a very bad state at the moment.

● (1705)

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Diamond, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: That's a really excellent question, and it's a very difficult one.

There's an interplay, but the need to protect civilians needs to be top of mind and guiding the discussions, because there's no end in sight to the war. We can't really discuss what the future of Sudan will look like until the warring parties can no longer receive the supplies they need and they cease fighting, and until the civilians receive the protection they need from an international monitoring force or mechanism.

The focus really can't be on that yet, but it has to be on how the international community can intervene to stop the violence.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think I have only 15 seconds left, so I'll give them back to the chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Majumdar to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If colleagues agree, I wouldn't mind taking a bit of a step back from the specific conflict and its contours in Sudan and taking a broader perspective.

Commentary opened up this discussion by describing 12 million people potentially dying from starvation, making this the biggest refugee crisis and the biggest starvation crisis of this century, and perhaps even in history. It deserves deep attention. Should the international conversation not be more affected by what we are seeing happen in this crisis in Sudan?

To our guests from both Amnesty International and Raoul Wallenberg, can you try to explain, from your perspective, why, despite your advocacy, your research, your policy recommendations and your appeals to governments around the world, this crisis is not getting the attention it deserves?

[Translation]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: Thank you.

That's a very good question. Again, it's a very broad question.

Unfortunately, the conflict in Sudan is not the only humanitarian crisis that is not receiving the attention it should.

The reason is that the international system is broken. The United Nations is broken, the UN Security Council is broken because it is too politicized. It always has been, but it used to be more balanced. Now the decision-making parties at the UN General Assembly and at the UN Security Council no longer care about the balance of humanitarian law because it doesn't work for them anymore. Every state uses its veto as soon as something does not suit it. You can think of China, you can think of Russia, but you can also think of the United States.

The system is broken, and that's why everything becomes politicized and our attention goes elsewhere. Meanwhile, states on the Security Council are fuelling conflicts around the world, while we have our backs turned, while the spotlight, the cameras, the media are not shining a light on these conflicts.

[English]

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: We need to work on fixing the UN system.

[English]

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: I appreciate that perspective on how the UN system is broken and is failing the people of Sudan.

Perhaps our witness from the Raoul Wallenberg Centre could spend some time describing why it is that the major media have not been appropriately giving the kind of attention that this crisis warrants.

Mr. Yonah Diamond: I think that's the ultimate question, and a very painful one to think about.

I just want to add, regarding the Wagner Group, that the Raoul Wallenberg Centre did submit a comprehensive sanctions filing with the government that included the Wagner Group. Unfortunately, the government didn't respond in a timely enough fashion. I want to put in there a recommendation to take these recommendations and to have quicker processing times for our sanction recommendations, because often the companies that are suggested to be sanctioned can switch hands, liquidate and evade accountability.

I also want to say, regarding the peace agreement question, that, in the past, the peace agreement has been bilateral, so any future agreement really needs to be comprehensive and inclusive of all parties, including those who have been historically marginalized and oppressed in Darfur; otherwise, it will continue to breed resentment and a kind of neglect.

In terms of the lack of attention, there's really no explanation for it, other than a dereliction of duty by everyone in any form of power or anyone who has a platform. There's also a lot of inaccurate information and a failure to even document basic information about Sudan.

There's no way to explain it other than a failure.

• (1710)

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Majumdar.

Now I invite Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do think that everyone around the table and the witnesses who are with us today share the same frustration over this conflict being completely under the radar, despite the fact that it is currently the conflict that has the greatest potential for death, if only in terms of famine.

We just had a discussion. I just heard your answers, namely that the UN, the United Nations, is broken, that the media attention is not there, that it is being directed to the Middle East, to Ukraine, to Russia.

Mr. Diamond, is the African Union's position on this matter known right now?

[English]

Mr. Yonah Diamond: That's a good question. The African Union has a special adviser on the prevention of genocide, who is very committed to this. I spent some time at the African Union meeting with missions earlier this year. To be honest, a lot of African countries are looking to have a synergistic, collaborative approach with the U.K., the U.S., Canada and others. We're looking to each other to lead on this, because the African Union can't do this alone.

There are a lot of other constraints affecting the AU, but they've had some calls for outlining the need for a mechanism for the protection of civilians, and they're calling out external actors as clearly involved in the conflict, but we've yet to see it move past that phase to become something concrete and something that will be provided by states in the region. The AU can certainly continue to play a role, but it has to be an international effort as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I was recently in Kenya and Rwanda on a mission. The growing presence of China and the Chinese Communist Party is evident.

Ms. Langlois, you just talked about the European Union. In the current conflict, are Chinese interests also present behind the scenes in this conflict, since it is an African conflict?

• (1715)

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: China is one of the main countries currently arming Sudan. Global geopolitics is at the heart of a conflict such as the one in Sudan and most other conflicts.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

That's kind of what I was getting at; meanwhile, humanitarian aid is not getting there.

Sudan was probably already one of the places with the highest child malnutrition rate in the world before the conflict began. It was already estimated that 600,000 children were malnourished.

Right now, I would say that the major international players are playing *Risk* with Sudan, if I may use that expression.

All you're asking for—and this is the message I'm hearing to-day—is that these actors facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid and impose an arms embargo as an absolute must. If that were done, there may be some hope.

Did I understand you correctly?

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: The short answer is yes.

I think states like Canada really need to play their part in ensuring that the rules of the game and humanitarian law are respected and that humanitarian aid gets to civilians. Civilians must be protected.

I want to reiterate that both parties to the conflict are currently committing war crimes, and probably crimes against humanity.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Mr.—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*English*]

Now I invite Mr. Johns to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you both again for your really important testimony today.

Mr. Diamond, you talked about the resettlement program and the number of people who are in the resettlement program compared to that of Ukraine. You also talked about barriers in terms of the requirements and the thresholds. Can you speak about what those barriers look like, what needs to change in terms of the existing number of people, and why the government may have such a low number compared to that of Ukraine, this discrimination that we're seeing?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: I think you said it. Unfortunately, it's kind of insidiously motivated by that. I can't really think of any other explanation. For the Ukraine program, there were no eligibility or financial requirements, nor any cap for the duration of the war. So, it's not a question of whether or not.... There's an ability to do that, and the precedent is there. That's all I'll say about that.

I also want to say, in terms of how Canada can lead, that it is strange that only four of the entities related to Sudan have been sanctioned. How is that possible, if the U.S. has sanctioned over 10 entities that Canada hasn't yet sanctioned?

Canada has also played a role at the ICJ. It's leading two cases there against Afghanistan and Iran for the downing of PS752. These are efforts that Canada.... You need a state to bring a case to the International Court of Justice, and that will really raise the profile of the Sudanese conflict and then initiate a process of accountability at the international level. We are willing to work with you on this.

I just want to say that Canada is very well placed and has experience in this area, and we're ready to work with Canada.

Mr. Gord Johns: Last week, at the UN General Assembly, the European Union and several countries stepped forward with additional funding commitments to address the humanitarian needs in Sudan. Canada failed to do the same. There were also calls for those within the international community to push for diplomatic solutions to this crisis.

How can Canada take more of a leadership role in delivering humanitarian aid to people in Sudan and in negotiating diplomatic solutions?

I'll go to you, Ms. Langlois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: Canada must act in accordance with its rhetoric. On the international stage, Canada has a very strong rhetoric on human rights and humanitarian law. However, that rhetoric does not always translate into action.

Therefore, Canada must play its role. It has done so in the past, it has been said—I repeat it here—and it can and must do so again.

• (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Diamond, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: No. I just think it's very clear that more can be done. You cited all the statistics. There's no limit to what Canada can do in terms of increasing its humanitarian.... I'm not a development expert, though. My expertise really lies in the accountability at the international, regional and domestic levels.

Mr. Gord Johns: Our critic for foreign affairs, Heather McPherson, wrote a letter calling on Canada to “impose sanctions immediately on those responsible for violations of international law and human rights.” This was a year ago. She asked Canada to:

Call on Sudanese authorities to immediately surrender the suspects for whom there are outstanding arrest warrants...to the International Criminal Court;

Support and push for the expeditious issuance of arrest warrants by the ICC against those suspected of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide....

Call on Sudanese authorities to immediately secure visas and unfettered access to areas of interest for staff of International Criminal Court's Office of the Prosecutor; and

Work to build support among international partners to push for a United Nations Security Council referral of the entire situation in Sudan to the International Criminal Court.

Can you give a grade on how Canada is doing, Mr. Diamond, in terms of a response to those requests that the NDP has made?

The Chair: We need a quick answer, please, Mr. Diamond. You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Yonah Diamond: I haven't really seen any progress on this front, but I want to add that the International Criminal Court is not the only form of accountability. I want to go back to the International Court of Justice as an opportunity for Canada to really take the lead, impose a cost and enforce a judgment, potentially, against the United Arab Emirates. Even bringing them to court is a matter of harming reputation and potentially putting enough pressure on them to exert their influence on the RSF to withdraw and end its atrocities in Darfur.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you all so much. I really appreciate your testimony.

The Chair: I would like to invite Ms. Vandenberg to take the floor for five minutes, please.

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

I want to thank both of the witnesses, and those who came before, for the very alarming testimony and for putting the spotlight on this. I think if Canadians knew more about it, they would want to do more.

I know Canada has already provided about \$300 million in aid to Sudan and the surrounding area in the last two years. Our last budget has an additional \$350 million for humanitarian aid.

Knowing that this is a human rights committee and it's not specifically dealing with development or some of the other recommendations, I noted in your opening remarks, Ms. Langlois, that you talked about the violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws, but because it's an internal conflict, you made the distinction in terms of the Geneva Convention and other kinds of international law.

I wonder if you and Mr. Diamond could specify which violations of international human rights laws are happening right now and what Canada can do to ensure that those violations stop.

[Translation]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: Thank you for your question.

Civilians are recklessly being singled out and targeted. Both parties to the conflict are positioning themselves in civilian areas to launch their attacks. So they put civilians at risk, and tens of thousands of civilians are being killed or injured.

We talked about sexual violence against women and girls, and there is also the fact that humanitarian aid is not getting through, since access is being blocked. Water or electricity infrastructure is also being targeted, which also affects civilian populations. All of these wrongdoings are condemned by international law, which also applies to a conflict such as the Sudanese conflict. Even if it is not a conflict between two states, which we would describe as an international conflict, that does not mean that the Geneva conventions and international law do not apply to it.

International law still applies to the conflict that is taking place within the borders of Sudan between the two belligerent forces on the territory.

• (1725)

[English]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

Mr. Diamond, what are your thoughts?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: In terms of what the international community has been able to do to stop those kinds of violations, historically, the International Criminal Court tried to issue an arrest warrant, for example, against al-Bashir. I just want to note that the traditional ways of doing things might have brought us to this point and are not necessarily the best forms of deterrent.

Concrete ways of stopping the violence may include blocking the flow of funding and finding out what the sources of their funding are. Where are they getting their military supplies? How are they able to continue these atrocities? That obviously will penalize them more than the threat of future prosecutions for violations or telling Sudan or RSF that they're violating human rights.

When we're speaking of genocide and mass atrocity crimes, I think we share the same goal, but I'm not quite sure if traditional ways of looking at it are the best ways to go about it.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: One of the other questions I have for you, Mr. Diamond, is regarding the Arms Trade Treaty. The enabling legislation in Canada specifies that the minister must not allow an export permit if there is "a substantial risk" in one of the listed areas. I believe there was actually an amendment in the foreign affairs committee to say "must" instead of "may".

Could you clarify what might be done differently, given that right now, under law, it would actually be illegal to allow that kind of export permit?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: That seems like an opaque way of enforcing this sort of law. I'm not exactly sure how the assessment or evaluation works and whether it's transparent or not, but I certainly believe Parliament can ask, request and demand that all these exports be reviewed against the risks that are now known of where these weapons can end up.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Diamond, you also mentioned, I think, 10 other entities or individuals who have been sanctioned by other countries like the U.S. You were going to submit that to this committee. Could you submit those names? Do you want to elaborate a little bit on that here?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: Absolutely. Some of these companies are controlling business interests of the RSF from the UAE or have sent vehicles armed with machine guns. These are key entities that Canada has yet to sanction, and I look forward to submitting those names.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I noticed that you mentioned countries like Russia and China, but you also mentioned Serbia. What is the nature of what Serbia is doing in this regard? I can't remember if it was you or Ms. Langlois who mentioned that.

Go ahead, Ms. Langlois.

[Translation]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: I was the one who mentioned that. Serbia and China—

The Chair: Answer quickly, please, as time is up.

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: —are two of the states that are sending arms to Sudan, even though they have signed the Arms Trade Treaty. So they are in breach of their own obligations.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Langlois.

I now invite Mr. Genuis to take the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

We've heard powerful testimony today about tens of millions of people in Sudan displaced, starving or already killed.

We must do more here in Canada. We need to hold all violators of human rights accountable, whether they're on the ground in Sudan itself or foreign enablers. We've heard that the Government of Canada has been behind on imposing sanctions, so it's critically important that we tighten those up and, in the process, hold foreign enablers accountable as well.

I want to draw your attention to one aspect of recent New York Times reporting: "While not admitting direct support to the R.S.F., Sheikh Mohammed said he owed the paramilitary group's leader, Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan, for sending troops to fight alongside the Emirates in the war in Yemen." One way to think of the war in Sudan is that it's an extension of the war in Yemen with Iran and the UAE fighting for power and control. It seems, based on what I've read, that Iran would like resources in Sudan but also a strategic foothold, and that the UAE doesn't want Iran to have that strategic foothold. There are other relationships established in the context of the Yemen conflict that are spilling over.

Mr. Diamond, just very quickly, because I have limited time, what are your thoughts on that kind of frame and what does Iran want in Sudan specifically?

• (1730)

Mr. Yonah Diamond: I'll say that I'm not a geopolitical expert, so I won't try to address that, but I wouldn't say that it's only in terms of fighting over regional control. I think that the UAE is also exploiting this war for control of resources, including the very powerful gold trade. It's been involved militarily in Ethiopia, Tigray and also in Libya, where it backs the warlord Khalifa Haftar.

This new form of colonization.... It's the way they're exploiting Africa for its resources.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You started to say something about "colonization". It's a kind of colonization.

Do you think Iran is similarly motivated by this new colonial strategy of resource control?

Mr. Yonah Diamond: I won't say that I know as much about that side.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I want to ask about the Sudanese democracy movement. There was a lot of hope, including in the Sudanese diaspora here in Canada, about what could come about following the initial democratic revolution. What are the prospects for the democracy movement to be able to become a player in the country's politics again, and how can we specifically support the pursuit by the Sudanese people of a free and democratic future?

[Translation]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: I don't know whom that question was for, but I can take a stab at it.

The movement has been completely demolished. In fact, the current conflict stems, among other things, from tensions over negotiations for a democratic transition. The hopes for a democratic transition are all but dashed right now.

This does not mean that the movement for democracy no longer exists, but rather that it no longer has the space it needs to be heard. That is why it is important to quickly find a negotiated diplomatic solution to the conflict, which would put the democratic transition on the table and promote the democratic movement in Sudan.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just to put that together, then, your recommendation would be that the order of operations is denial of arms, a political solution and then the revivification of the democracy movement.

Are there things we can do in the meantime, though, to support the laying of groundwork by the democracy movement, so that they're in a stronger position when, hopefully, the conflict is brought to an end?

The Chair: Please answer in 20 seconds.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Ms. Langlois.

[Translation]

Ms. France-Isabelle Langlois: Yes, of course we need to continue to support civil society and the democratic movement in Sudan as much as possible. However, there must be a resolution to the conflict. States must stop arming Sudan and negotiate the transition.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

I would like to thank our witnesses for their time and for their good answers. The illustrations you gave to this committee, to all members, are highly appreciated. Thank you, and have a wonderful afternoon.

[Translation]

Would someone move to adjourn the meeting?

A voice: Agreed.

[English]

The meeting is adjourned.

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