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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

I think everyone is present, whether by video conference or in person.

I would like to welcome Mr. Boulerice, who is replacing Ms. Collins and is joining us by video conference, and Mr. Maloney, who is replacing Mr. Ali.

I won't read the names of all the witnesses now, but I will introduce them when it is their turn to speak. This afternoon, our time is precious, as a vote will be held at 5:45 p.m.

We will now give the floor to Chandra Madramootoo, distinguished James McGill professor, from McGill University.

[English]

Professor Madramootoo, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo (Distinguished James McGill Professor, McGill University, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you.

[English]

Thank you also for underscoring the significant role that water and agriculture can play in shaping Canada's foreign policy.

My name is Chandra Madramootoo. I am a distinguished James McGill professor at McGill University.

I have been fortunate to undertake an array of projects on water, agriculture and the environment over four decades in several regions of the world. I will focus my intervention on three interlinked areas: water and food security; peatlands and wetlands protection; and peace and security in transboundary basins.

Agriculture uses about 70% of global water withdrawals. In water-stressed basins, such as the Aral Sea and the Nile, agriculture consumes as much as 90% of water supplies to meet irrigation demands. Canada, at one time, was a significant donor to agricultural water projects in developing regions. Sadly, this is no longer the case, and Canada has lost its voice in major water fora dedicated to agricultural water use. Water for agriculture is critical to human

livelihoods and socio-economic well-being due to the disasters around climate, rising temperatures and increased greenhouse gas emissions.

First, water security is at the nexus of climate change and national security. The effects of climatic change are already seen through a higher frequency of hydro-climatic disasters, notably floods, droughts and land degradation. The World Bank estimates that roughly 1.6 billion people live in countries with water scarcity, and that number could double in two decades.

The United Nations reports that 258 million people in 58 countries faced acute food insecurity in 2022. Food insecurity is particularly severe in areas experiencing conflict, and it's exacerbated by extreme weather events. It leads to population migration and tensions in refugee camps.

Canada has an obligation to work bilaterally and regionally with humanitarian organizations and multilateral organizations to curb these conflicts induced by water and food insecurity. Canada's innovations in irrigation water management and modern technologies for the drainage of agricultural lands are world-renowned. Canada is well positioned to disseminate knowledge and provide expertise in climate-smart agriculture for food-insecure regions of sub-Saharan Africa, central Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and north Africa. Interventions that build resilience to drought, water scarcity, land degradation and floods—with women at the core—ought to be promoted with our development partners.

It is essential to strengthen existing platforms, such as the global framework on water scarcity in agriculture, WASAG, hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Technical leadership from Canada is urgently sought in the WASAG, aimed at the world's arid and semi-arid regions where the poorest of the poor reside.

Second, one-third of global peatlands are in Canada, covering about 12% of the country's land area. They store about 150 billion tonnes of carbon, thus mitigating climate change. Canada's wetlands, covering some 13% of the terrestrial area, are close to one-quarter of the world's remaining wetlands, and together with peatlands, support a rich biodiversity.

However, in many parts of the world, these ecosystems are being drained at alarming rates for economic development and are becoming sources of carbon dioxide and methane. By curtailing unwarranted drainage, altering the hydrologic cycle and implementing large-scale wetlands restoration, we can slow carbon dioxide and methane emissions and mitigate the impacts of temperature rises.

Canada is a leader in the development and deployment of environmental monitoring technologies. It is recommended that Canada establish an international observatory to advise on wetlands restoration, including how to balance the hydrology, soils and gas fluxes to mitigate climate change.

• (1535)

Finally, transboundary waters account for 60% of the world's freshwater flows, with some 153 countries having territory within at least one of the 286 transboundary basins. Many of these basins are in regions of water scarcity, food insecurity, environmental degradation and political conflict. The Nile, the Zambezi, the Aral Sea and the Amazon are just a few.

Competing economic interests and rising nationalism are at the heart of transboundary conflicts—

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Madramootoo.

We're going to have to stop you there. There will be many questions, so you'll be able to raise those points you want raise in response to questions.

From FLOW, the Forum for Leadership on Water, we have Ms. Emily Hines and Mr. Robert Sandford.

Mr. Sandford, I believe you'll be giving the opening remarks. You have five minutes.

Mr. Robert Sandford (Senior Government Relations Liaison, Global Climate Emergency Response, United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, Forum for Leadership on Water): Please allow me to extend the very best wishes of the United Nations to all.

I would like to begin by observing that water is already a pillar of Canada's foreign policy and has been so for more than a century. Since the signing of the boundary waters treaty in 1909, Canada and the United States have shown the entire world how water can be peaceably shared through co-operation.

Even in this relationship, we should be reminded that no pillar can stand indefinitely without being carefully maintained. As the U.S. becomes more crowded and hotter, water has come to the fore in terms of both domestic and foreign policy there. The Pentagon has already identified the declining reliability and quality of water supplies across the country as a national security threat. The U.S. has, at the same time, identified water as a potential pillar of its own foreign policy.

As Canada contemplates extending the benefit of what it knows about and how it governs water as a pillar of its broader foreign policy, it should see its southern neighbour as a simulacrum of the threats and opportunities with which it will be presented as it engages with potential beneficiaries of Canada's expertise abroad. Canada should also be careful to see the needs of other nations re-

flected in its own immediate challenges in managing water at a time of rapid loss of hydrologic stability and climate emergency globally. In this regard, Canada has much to offer the rest of the world.

In 2018, I was the lead author of a United Nations University report on Canada's capacity to shine on the world stage by assisting other countries in need of help to achieve water and water-related climate targets of the UN's sustainable development goals.

The conclusion of that report was that, if carefully deployed through measured foreign policy and skilful diplomacy, helping the rest of the world address the global water crisis could re-establish Canada's reputation on the world stage in a manner as positive and enduring as how peacekeeping once defined our national identity abroad. More importantly, by making water a pillar of its foreign policy, Canada has the opportunity to play a key role in taking the global water crisis problem to the UN Security Council to urge the UN and its member states to develop a serious global water action agenda to address the growing human security challenges, especially as they now immediately relate to agriculture and food security.

The 2018 report made it clear that all the pieces that would be needed to make water an effective pillar of foreign policy were already in place. The educational components were there, as were the research capacity, the technological innovation and the critical long-term experience in water governance, especially as it now relates to ongoing reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

All that is needed, we reported, is a unifying agent to marshal all of these capacities together and point them in the same outbound direction. In other words, harnessing and fully realizing the Canadian water sector's substantial outbound capacity will need federal government coordination and support.

The creation of a Canada water agency could potentially be one means by which Canada advances water policy at home, while at the same time significantly enhancing its visibility and impact on the global water stage, but it can't do it by itself. The urgency of responding to climate change-induced acceleration of the global water cycle should be an impetus for governments at all levels, but especially federally, to work harder to coordinate and orchestrate the significant capacity in Canada's water sector for the benefit of the country and the world.

Our recommendations are to harness and coordinate the huge capacity that already exists. Use the huge potential domestic links to the UN, such as the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, to help you step more boldly onto the world stage. Then, show up on the world stage. Participate in global water awareness initiatives. Make water the theme in the Canadian pavilion at the Osaka world's fair next year. Get on board with the UN glacier year in 2025 and host the next UN global water conference.

It will not just be Canadians that will benefit from doing so. Every country to which Canada extends foreign aid in the form of shared solutions to the growing global water crisis will thank us also.

As a Canadian working for the UN, I would be very proud to see that.

Thank you.

● (1540)

The Chair: We'll go to the International Joint Commission, represented by Susan Chiblow, commissioner; Merrell-Ann Phare, co-chair; and Christopher Wilkie, secretary to the commission.

Ms. Phare will deliver the opening statement.

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare (Commissioner, International Joint Commission (Canadian Section)): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

On behalf of the International Joint Commission, thank you very much for inviting us. I am here as Canadian co-chair of the IJC with my colleague Dr. Susan Chiblow, Canadian commissioner. As also already noted, Dr. Christopher Wilkie is here as the Canadian section secretary.

I'm phoning you from Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Treaty 1 territory and homeland of the Métis nation. I'm right in the middle of the Red River basin, which is a transboundary basin.

The IJC is a binational, impartial organization that is mandated by the governments of Canada and the U.S., through the boundary waters treaty of 1909, to work toward the prevention and resolution of disputes in shared waters along the boundary. In fact, 40% of our boundary is shared water. We work with all interested stakeholders and rights holders to recommend solutions. We have worked all across the boundary, including in Lake Ontario flooding, apportionment water quantity issues in drought regions—for example, in the Prairies—and harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie.

It's important for you to know that IJC commissioners, while we're appointed by the Prime Minister and President respectively, we do not take direction from our respective governments when we make decisions. We work as a commission to find consensus and identify solutions that are in the best interest of both countries. With that, though, we operate by the mandates given to us from the governments. The scope of our work is defined by our governments. Our conclusions are based on the best available science and informed by the knowledge and networks of hundreds of experts and local citizens on binational boards and committees. We develop a common binational fact base and then propose options in the best interest of shared waters. It's a model that has served us well for 115 years.

An effective relationship with the U.S. is imperative to any Canadian approach to freshwater management. An estimated 80% of the Canadian population lives in Canada-U.S. shared watersheds. These transboundary waters are also the traditional territories of many first nations, Métis and tribal nations.

We would like to talk to you about three main challenges we experience in relation to fresh water in Canada today.

The first challenge is the complex, multijurisdictional nature of freshwater management and the science needed to support good consensus-building. When we search for local solutions, the shared boundary takes precedence over political boundaries. We are unique in North America in that regard. To do this better, because collaboration is hard enough, we need collaboration around data harmonization. A key example of this is climate change and the challenges presented by climate change.

Floods, droughts and wildfires occur on a regular basis. The impacts of climate change in particular will continue to alter the flow and distribution of water resources, impacting our communities in profoundly detrimental ways, so working together is critical for resilience. We need to improve our ability to predict climate change impacts—namely, through improved flood forecasting. This needs to be done in a cross-border way, and currently it is not. This is critical for resilience.

Second, the IJC's contribution is restricted by limitations in the scope of our current activities. Our mandate varies across the border. We do not holistically consider water quantity, water quality, ecosystem health and socio-economic factors in all the lakes and rivers where we are currently active. In some places, we look at only a subset of those pieces. In addition, our remit in all transboundary basins is not universal, in that there are watersheds where we do not do anything. The IJC needs a mandate that allows us to build mutually acceptable consensus solutions all along the Canada-U.S. border, not in just some locations.

Finally, the consensus and collaboration process itself is increasingly difficult. All laws and treaties depend on their makers remaining fully committed to them to ensure that they accomplish their intended goals. It's in our national interest to prevent conflict along the border. While our countries have many issues that they deal with on a daily basis, water security is, in our view, the foundation of them all. The terms of the treaty are aimed at that specific direction, and they require domestic resolve. I would point you to your previous study in 2004, where at that time you made a recommendation to this effect.

● (1545)

Moving forward, we have already been asked by both parties to build partnerships with indigenous peoples along the border and to assist with that. We strongly encourage the federal government to further support IJC's efforts with indigenous peoples. We asked both parties to bolster domestic efforts in that regard.

To conclude, we have served both countries admirably in keeping the peace along the boundary where water is shared. Impartiality, shared fact-finding, robust public engagement and an ability to convene diverse interests are what make our model truly unique and effective.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Last but not least, we have Mr. George McGraw, founder and chief executive officer of DigDeep.

Mr. George McGraw (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, DIGDEEP): Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you for this invitation.

My name is George McGraw. I'm the founder and CEO of the U.S.-based water access non-profit DigDeep.org, and I'm a global expert on the human right to water and sanitation.

Imagine waking up and your kitchen sink has run dry. Imagine flushing your toilet and it backs up into your yard, making your family sick. To prepare dinner, you first have to travel miles to haul water.

Over the past 60 years, high-income countries led by Canada and the U.S. have invested more than \$25 billion U.S. of foreign aid in water, sanitation and hygiene projects abroad. Between 1990 and 2015, more than 2.6 billion people gained access to improved drinking water, perhaps the single most important contribution to rising global life expectancy, but WASH insecurity remains a huge issue, and now the United Nations sustainable development goals, goal number six, calls for clean water and sanitation for all.

People from high-income countries like ours often think that this work is only needed in other places, but that's a myth. Millions of Americans and Canadians still don't have access to clean running water or a working toilet, and, with a worsening climate crisis, more families are at risk of falling into the water access gap for the first time.

In Canada, the best available data shows that members of first nations are 90 times more likely to live without running water than other Canadians. Many of those communities have faced water advisories for decades, causing significant concern for health risks and long-term prosperity, and the number of waterborne diseases in first nations communities is 26 times higher than the national average.

Canada isn't alone in this. More than two million people in the United States are similarly impacted. Our indigenous households here are 19 times more likely than white households to lack running water, and Black and Latino households in the U.S. are twice as likely. Similar challenges exist in Australia and the European Union.

There is a clear and common thread here. In high-income countries, indigenous people, communities of colour, immigrants, the unhoused, rural families and other disadvantaged groups live inside an invisible water access gap, largely forgotten by their governments. They experience higher rates of mortality, physical and mental health issues and economic inequality. In the U.S., our research demonstrates that the water access gap costs our economy nearly \$8.6 billion U.S. every year. That's nearly \$16,000 per household, in many cases more than a family earns in a year. One could easily guess that the impact on families inside Canada's water access gap is similar.

Fortunately, our research also shows that, for every dollar we invest in closing the water access gap, we get a five-dollar return on that investment, but the crucial point is this: Access to water and sanitation is a basic human right and, for millions of people in the U.S. and Canada, two of the wealthiest democracies on earth, that right is not being adequately protected.

I've spent my career working alongside other activists to defend the right to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water and sanitation services, recognized as a human right by the UN General Assembly in 2010. Many high-income countries haven't enshrined this human right into their own laws, and that must change. The governments of the Northwest Territories and Quebec have paved the path to codifying the human right to water in Canada, but efforts like these must be led by national governments here in Canada, in the United States and globally.

Codifying the human right to water makes access to safe water and basic sanitation a legal entitlement rather than a commodity or a charity. It spurs the development of government programs to close the water access gap, and it gives people living in that gap, especially sovereign indigenous nations, a key advocacy tool, ensuring that they are respected and empowered as part of any decision-making process. More importantly, it ensures that your race and your zip code no longer determine whether you and your family have access to a working tap and a flushing toilet.

For now, the promise of a human right to water in Canada remains unfulfilled. I say all of this not to shame anyone for failing to meet their obligations but to inspire you. To close, I'll share a glimpse into the most incredible part of my job, that moment when someone turns on their tap for the first time.

It's impossible to describe this experience as a single thing. Sometimes it's met with tears or shouts of happiness. Other times, hordes of kids jostle around the sink waiting to be the first to touch the water when it comes out. Perhaps my most favourite of these moments, though, are the quiet ones, those few times when a person just opens the faucet, watches the water pour out and then closes the tap again without saying a word. It's a powerful reminder that access to water itself really doesn't deserve much fanfare. After all, it's our basic human right.

Thank you for the invitation and for your time.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to the round of questions.

We'll start with Mr. Deltell for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am very happy to see all my colleagues again. Greetings to our colleague Adam van Koeverden, the member for Milton. I am very happy to see him in full health.

Mr. McGraw, I would like to come back to your comment about access to drinking water. As you said so well, it is essential. It's a basic human right. Everyone recognizes that.

You've rightly identified the issues that first nations are essentially facing here in this country. You did a good job of quantifying and showing that, despite the efforts that have been made, first nations are experiencing major problems with access to water.

I would like to know if any other communities in Canada are directly affected by the lack of clean drinking water and the difficulty in accessing it.

[English]

Mr. George McGraw: Thank you so much for that question.

By my knowledge, the best data we have is on first nations communities. Canada, like the U.S., isn't collecting comprehensive data on water access across the board, so it's difficult to pinpoint other communities of need. In the U.S., for instance, we've had to use proxies, using census data and others, to first identify these communities, but then actually send physical researchers in to look.

To give you an idea of the places where we found these communities in the U.S., they're often in poorer, more rural areas. They're often in ethnically diverse areas along the border or in formerly prosperous, now poor, economic corridors, and in what are—for us—Native American territories and reservations.

I don't have any more information for you on other impacted groups, but if the Canadian experience closely mirrors the U.S. one, like I assume it does, I would be surprised if you wouldn't find other communities in need.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: In your presentation, you mentioned that Quebec was leading the way on certain issues concerning access to drinking water and that Quebec's example should inspire the federal government.

Do you have a specific example of what Quebec is doing that we could all learn from?

• (1555)

[English]

Mr. George McGraw: Absolutely.

The Quebec government has enshrined the human right to water in its territorial legislation, and I'm encouraging the Canadian federal government to do that at the federal level. I'm engaged in that same advocacy down here in the United States.

We see that when we enshrine human rights protections in a country's founding document, like its constitution or its bill of rights, or even in separate laws, there is a massive move toward

protecting those rights. They become very powerful tools for impacted communities to use in their own advocacy.

Yes, in this way, Quebec is a leader not just in Canada but internationally.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Can you give us an example of a massive action by Quebec on that file, based on what you have said?

Mr. George McGraw: No, I'm not aware of Quebec making massive moves on this yet, but I can give you an example. Here in California, we enshrined the right about 10 years ago now. Our first piece of legislation on that passed last year. It created a safe and affordable drinking water fund here in the state, which has made a massive impact in access, but I think there's a big lag in time between the recognition of the human right for water, its codification into law and then eventually its use to produce policy and programs, which I'm hoping will follow quickly in the Québécois example.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you.

Ms. Phare, my first question is a technical one.

As a member of the International Joint Commission, or IJC, do you have an eye on the relations that may exist between the provinces when a waterway is shared, or does your work focus solely and directly on relations between the United States and Canada, and not between the provinces?

[English]

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: Thank you.

The IJC is created by the two countries—Canada and the U.S.—pursuant to a treaty, but we work in collaboration with state- and provincial-level governments also, and indigenous governments. In particular, we do so through a program called the international watersheds initiative, where we have a specific mandate to bring all players—governments, citizens and nations—from within our watershed to try to create transboundary collaboration for the best interests of the shared waters.

Yes, we routinely deal with provinces, territories and nations in the work that we do in order to find that shared common vision.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Based on your experience, do you think that provinces work well together? Is that as easy or as good as our relations with America?

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: In my experience through the International Joint Commission, yes. Water management is very complex. The science and engineering are hard to determine. The people work together very well. In jurisdictions, once you get up to the level of power and authority, it gets a little harder, and I think that climate change is making that more difficult.

You have to remember that the boundary waters treaty was created in 1909 over just that kind of conflict. It was based out of some things that were happening between Alberta and Montana at the time with water apportionment issues, and this tool is meant for just that kind of situation. It is—

The Chair: Thanks very much, Ms. Phare.

We'll go to Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses who have joined us today for this important study. My question is for Mr. Sandford.

Mr. Sandford, it's not a coincidence that I'm wearing my UN pin today on my lapel. I wear it almost every day. I'm happy to say that we're matching today. I'm a big fan of the sustainable development goals, and my question today is prefaced with something that I find very troubling.

Recently, Conservative MP Leslyn Lewis, Pierre Poilievre's shadow minister for infrastructure and communities, not only supported and sponsored an official House of Commons petition that calls on Canada to expeditiously withdraw from the UN, but it has also become clear that she had a hand in drafting that petition. In that petition, MP Leslyn Lewis cited the negative consequences that things like sustainable development impose on Canada.

Now, I am loath to amplify any of those harmful conspiracy theories, but they are regularly shared and used by Conservatives, and I think it's really important to recognize how much vital work Canada and the UN do together. I've been fortunate enough to witness some of it in francophone western Africa, particularly on clean water.

Mr. Sandford, could you articulate for this committee and this study how essential the work is that Canada and the UN do together to ensure water security, safety, hygiene and sanitation for those less fortunate?

• (1600)

Mr. Robert Sandford: Thank you very much for the question, and thank you for your support of the UN.

What is really important about this is that the vision and image of the UN are very much affected by current events and media, and a great deal of the tension right now happens to be focused on the UN Security Council, and in particular the two wars that are being fought.

However, one thing that's really important to understand about the UN is that there's no organization like it. Beyond and behind all of these events, they are the institution supported by the member states that are there to help in humanitarian ways, and without that we would not be able to help refugees or put people back on a course for a productive life in a different place. More importantly, we are there when there are drought crises and climate change impacts, and countries like Canada, as donors and also participants in those particular programs, are vital to holding our world together right now in a period of very great geopolitical instability.

I hope that offers some answer to your question.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Sandford. It does.

I would note that there is a great deal of misinformation and disinformation out there, and that anytime it's amplified it does more harm to the institutions that are doing all of the extraordinary work that organizations like the UN—

Mr. Robert Sandford: I would submit to you that, for almost all of us who work in this domain, this is not a job; it's a calling. The committed people we have working with us are committed wholly in their minds and hearts to doing what they can for all of humanity, and that is global citizenship. We are grateful that Canada, as a global citizen, is supporting these programs. Thank you.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Sandford. You can count on me to continue to be a proponent for and supportive of the United Nations and all of the global citizenry that comes along with that work.

I'd like to move on to agriculture and water usage if I could—perhaps, with Dr. Madramootoo—with respect to international development and how important it is that we ensure that global water security and food insecurity are not issues that persist. Particularly, because of climate change right now, we're seeing more frequent droughts, floods and extreme weather events, which are impacting people's food security, which just increases a lot of unrest around the world. We know that a lot of conflict is often spurred by water and food insecurity.

Can you speak to the importance of Canada's role globally in ensuring that we decrease that sense of insecurity?

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: Thank you very much for your question, member. I'll be happy to elaborate.

Canada's brand with respect to food and food production is well known around the world. We have several assets that we build on and that comprise our strength in our deliberations globally. First of all, we have a very safe food supply system. We have environmental controls over our food supply system, which other countries do not have. We're able to use the most modern technologies.

Whether it be precision agriculture, precision irrigation or the best genetics for crops and livestock, we have it at our disposal, and our farmers make best use of all of these technologies. If you look at our production statistics for all of our major cereal crops, for example, we have some of the highest yields under some very difficult climatic conditions. Our farmers have risen to the challenge and have been able to produce for us.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: If you would, could you point out the number one threat to that security?

The Chair: Answer very briefly, please. We're running out of time.

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: The number one threat to that security is drought and how we drought-proof and protect our crops to enable our yields to be stable during both wet and dry periods.

• (1605)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for coming to help us better understand the challenges related to water.

My question is for Merrell-Ann Phare, from the International Joint Commission.

Ms. Phare, I think you do extremely important work, which must not always be easy when it comes to working with the Americans.

I'm going to go back in time. In 2002, *Le Devoir* published an article on the 11th report of the International Joint Commission. It said that:

the International Joint Commission was no longer merely providing a picture of the evolution of pollution in ecosystems. The article stated that, in its report, the commission was proposing an action plan on two priority areas for the health of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence ecosystems: cleaning up contaminated sediments and stopping biological pollution caused by the introduction of [...] invasive alien species.

The article also talked about hundreds of thousands of kilograms of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, and other pollutants. The article reported that, according to the IJC:

[...] over a decade of research irrefutably showed the subtle but severe harms that exposure to persistent toxic substances causes to the health of basin residents. Yet delays were piling up, the restoration of the Great Lakes ecosystem was not moving forward and public health was continuing to be affected in areas of concern, according to the article.

The situation was already not easy in 2002. Since that report was published, can you say with confidence that governments have been promoting the protection of transboundary waters, as well as the quality not only of the resource, but also of the monitoring?

[English]

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: Yes, I would say they have. Without a doubt, we have.... I'll speak on behalf of the International Joint Commission. We are not the government. We are separate, but they have supported us in our work through, for example, our health professionals advisory board, which has been doing research all along the boundary on the health impacts of all kinds of different chemicals and situations, etc.

I urge you to look at some of the work of the health professionals advisory board. A number of our boards and our studies focus on water quality and its impacts, not only on ecosystems but on people and—

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'm sorry for interrupting you.

You say that there has been legislative and regulatory tightening, as well as positive progress in this whole area.

In 2016, the International Joint Commission created the International Lake Champlain-Richelieu River Study Board. A report was produced on the study of the causes, impacts and risks related to flooding in the Lake Champlain and Richelieu River basins, as well as possible solutions. That affects Quebec, Vermont and New York State. Under the new Canada Water Agency, no money will go to these transboundary plans.

What is your position, at the International Joint Commission, on the fact that the Canada Water Agency is ignoring these transboundary bodies of water in Quebec?

[English]

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: The Lake Champlain-Richelieu River study is a wonderful success for the way we can collaborate. We submitted a letter to the Canadian government on the creation of the Canada water agency, supporting the creation of that agency and urging it to focus on collaboration.

We don't take a position. We don't have positions in the way you're asking the question. We do what we're asked to do under the boundary waters treaty, but we are definitely in support of collaboration, particularly through the Canada water agency.

We do look for the governments to support the recommendations of the Lake Champlain-Richelieu River study, for example, as an excellent example of how we can collaborate.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: We will ask the government to support these recommendations.

In the document you submitted to the committee, you talk about traditional knowledge and data collected over generations by indigenous peoples. You say that those are important sources of information.

How did you gather that knowledge and how is it incorporated into your work?

• (1610)

[English]

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: I'm going to ask my colleague and I'm hoping her Internet is sufficient to answer this question for us.

Go ahead, Sue.

Dr. Susan Chiblow (Commissioner, International Joint Commission (Canadian Section)): Thank you for that great question.

Typically, what happens with all different types of scientific studies is that there's a component where indigenous science.... There are many different terms, but recently Environment and Climate Change Canada has an indigenous science branch, so I prefer to use the wording that government is using.

Indigenous science is included in the report, and—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Dr. Chiblow. Unfortunately, the sound quality is not good enough. That means we can't hear you out on this because of the harm it can do to the interpreters.

I'm sorry about that.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: In that case, Mr. Chair, I could ask that the answer be sent to us in writing.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, if you could send something in writing, that would be excellent.

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: We can do that.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Sandford, your contributions are inspiring, and you have a wealth of experience. You sent a document to the committee. Your colleague will also be joining us as a witness in the second hour of this meeting.

You say that Canada is hosting the UN water think tank, and you make five or six recommendations. I feel like being a bit of a spoiler. You say that water would be an effective pillar of Canada's foreign policy. It seems to me that Canada should first set an example domestically. Indigenous communities are complaining about oil sands spills. Some of them are complaining about nuclear waste. Others still do not have access to clean drinking water.

Would you not agree that Canada must first become a model?

The Chair: We're really over time.

Mr. Sandford, you can answer the question later or send us an answer in writing.

[English]

Mr. Robert Sandford: We can certainly answer that.

The Chair: We can't do it right now, Mr. Sandford, because we're way over time.

When somebody else brings up a question to you, you could use the opportunity.

Mr. Boulerville.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Chair, thank you very much for welcoming me to this very important committee that is conducting such a crucial study.

The witnesses in this first panel described a very troubling situation with respect to the climate crisis that is unfolding. The year 2023 was the hottest year on record, and it unfortunately had a lot of consequences. I'm thinking of droughts, floods and forest fires, elsewhere and here in Quebec and Canada.

Some people have said that the summer of 2023 was perhaps the worst in recent years. Unfortunately, many experts tell us that it is probably the best in the next 50 years. That is not reassuring to us by any means, whether it be for the most vulnerable populations or for agriculture.

Lorra Hines, you have experience in Canada, Great Britain and Iceland. You have attended a number of international conferences, such as the United Nations water conference.

In your opinion, or from what you've seen or heard, how is Canada presented in the water sector internationally?

In other words, what is our reputation?

[English]

Ms. Emily Lorra Hines (Director, Forum for Leadership on Water): I would say that Canada kind of falls into the reputation of the myth of plenty. We tend not to show up even to most conferences. When you get World Water Week in Stockholm, the UN water conference in New York or the upcoming World Water Forum in Bali, we usually are not there or, if we are there, we are not presenting and taking the opportunity.

People still think of us as having everything figured out, which Monique Pauzé has pointed out is not correct. I think that Canada can be there to show that we are working, innovating and challenging the status quo, and also what we've been doing the last 20 years and why it's not working. Yes, we definitely aren't showing up enough.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville: Thank you very much.

That's interesting, even though it is not very satisfactory behaviour by our various governments, both those led by the Conservative Party and those led by the Liberal Party. Our country has vast resources in terms of drinking water and fresh water, and it seems to me that it should set an example.

During our study, we have talked a little bit about including young people in the reflection on clean water and drinking water solutions.

In your opinion, are there any barriers to youth participation in the water sector? How can we engage them more?

My colleague Laurel Collins is a champion of the idea of establishing a youth climate group.

Do you think this could be an opportunity to include more young people in the fresh water and drinking water sector?

• (1615)

[English]

Ms. Emily Lorra Hines: I think that we need to give more opportunities, especially paid opportunities. I had to work 11 unpaid internships during my undergrad and postgraduate degrees. Too often we link water with climate, and they can become subcommittees.

The Groundwater Youth Network, for example, is doing amazing things with the UN. I spoke at the UN last year with them, but we need a Canadian earpiece for that as well.

Also, there are many students who are currently in water programs across Canada, and they are not being given apt opportunity to start working, so that first step should be created for them. The agency is one way to do this by introducing a host of new careers and young professionals into government and water policy in general.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much.

Mr. McGraw, you rightly put a great deal of emphasis on the fact that access to clean drinking water for all human beings is one of the United Nations' goals. It's goal number six. You also said that Quebec and the Northwest Territories have led the way in saying legislatively and institutionally that this is a fundamental right. However, that has not been the case in the federal government.

Why do you think that is not the case? Does it have something to do with the fact that dozens of indigenous communities still do not have access to clean drinking water?

[English]

Mr. George McGraw: That's quite right. My only guess is that water, for so long, has been an issue that countries like the U.S. and Canada can ignore, because water is perceived as being so abundant, but now we know, from our recent experience and from learning from generations of folks who have lived without it, how deeply inequitable water access is across these places where we assumed it was abundant. We assumed that everyone who lived in Canada achieved a universal standard of access to the basic necessities of life, and now we know that's not the case.

I'm not sure why Canada hasn't taken action in the last few years to do this at a federal level, but we're behind. We need not only recognition of this right but some criteria around enforceability to give it some teeth and allow people to advocate for themselves. There's really no time like the present. Our neighbours are suffering tremendously.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds left.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: In that case, I will go back to Lorra Hines and talk about the involvement of young people in finding sustainable solutions for the future of water.

Can you give us some examples of countries that include young people in their reflections on water?

The Chair: Lorra Hines, please be brief.

[English]

Ms. Emily Lorra Hines: Absolutely. The Netherlands has a water youth network. You can look at One water out of the U.K. and the University of Oxford. I would say that Europe is doing quite well with this and, arguably, America as well. We also have the North American Youth Parliament for Water, whose focus is on the Columbia basin, and they can definitely get more help in Waterlution in Canada.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We're going to have to truncate the second round a bit because there's a vote later, and we don't have the leeway to go over time.

We'll do a three-minute round, Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Phare, the International Joint Commission sent a letter to the federal government on September 14, 2020, regarding a water agency and you signed that letter. Do you mind submitting that letter to the committee so we can use it in our study?

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: Absolutely, we'll submit it.

Mr. Dan Mazier: The letter stated, "Constitutionally, the [Canada Water Agency] cannot take oversight for all water management in Canada".

Can you provide in writing the analysis that led to this statement and any constitutional limitations of water management in Canada?

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: We can certainly undertake to get you something on that, yes.

• (1620)

Mr. Dan Mazier: The letter also stated the commission:

...endeavours to consider and balance a wide range of interests in formulating its advice, including municipal water and wastewater, commercial shipping, hydro-electric power, agriculture and aquaculture, industry, recreational users, and the needs of shoreline property owners.

Could you provide in writing a list of interests and concerns these specific entities have raised to the commission on the topic of fresh water, so the committee is aware?

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: Yes, we can.

Mr. Dan Mazier: The letter also—

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: To be clear, that's mostly in the context of the Great Lakes, but we'll provide you what we have, yes.

Mr. Dan Mazier: The letter also mentioned there are ecological challenges associated with managing watersheds in Canada and the U.S. Could you provide in writing a list of the ecological challenges the letter is referring to?

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: Yes, we can.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I would like to—

Ms. Merrell-Ann Phare: Some of it might be in the form of reports we've written in the past as well, or new information, so there could be an amount of info.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I would like to give notice of the following motion—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Chair, I'd like to speak to that motion.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I move:

Given that:

Justin Trudeau's Minister of Environment has publicly stated, "Our government has made the decision to stop investing in new road infrastructure";

Trudeau's Minister of Environment has also stated that funding new roads and highways is not needed because public transit and current road infrastructure is good enough—while Canadians in large urban centres like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal spend hours in traffic each week, and rural Canadians do not have access to public transit;

Canadians living in rural and remote areas also rely on new roads and highways to raise their families;

rural Canadians don't have the luxury of being able to walk to work or to a doctor's office;

rural Canadians cannot rely on a subway to get to the nearest city, because there are no subway stations in rural communities;

many municipal and provincial governments across Canada were rightfully outraged when Minister Guilbeault announced the Liberal government will stop funding new road infrastructure;

Justin Trudeau's Minister of Environment is also plowing ahead with his plan to ban all gas-powered, passenger vehicles, preventing millions of Canadians from using a vehicle;

many Canadians, especially rural, northern and indigenous Canadians, are worried they won't be able to live or work because Minister Guilbeault's policies will directly deprive them of owning a vehicle;

no material purchase provides Canadians with more freedom to live and work than the purchase of a personal vehicle, especially in a nation as large as Canada;

the recent announcement from Minister Guilbeault to stop funding new roads and highways comes at a time when Justin Trudeau is deliberately increasing the price of fuel on Canadians;

the Liberal government plans to increase their failed-carbon tax on April 1 by 23%;

the Minister of Environment also stated earlier this month that "the government does not measure the annual amount of emissions that are directly—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): I have a point of order.

Mr. Chair, is this a speech or a motion? We have witnesses I'm dying to ask questions, so could we have the motion, please?

The Chair: I understand.

Mr. Mazier has the floor and he's giving notice of a motion, so he can do that.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you.

I'll start that part again:

the Minister of Environment also stated earlier this month that "the government does not measure the annual amount of emissions that are directly reduced by federal carbon pricing";

Canadians are sick and tired of this Liberal government's ideological crusade against vehicle ownership in Canada; and

Canadians are also sick and tired of this government's constant and undemocratic tactics of always shutting down debate on issues that they expect addressed;

the committee urge Minister Guilbeault to publicly testify before the committee for no less than two hours to explain his radical plan to stop funding roads and highways across Canada; and report to the House of Commons that Minister Guilbeault's plan to stop funding new roads and ban gas-powered vehicles is not an environmental policy; it is government-imposed deprivation.

Thank you.

The Chair: You've given notice.

We'll go now to Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. I apologize for the disrespect being shown to you.

Dr. Madramootoo, it's an honour to have you here. Thank you for all the work you've done over decades, as you said, in water.

I want to focus on the science around water, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Science and Research.

At the University of Guelph, we have Professor Thevathasan, who has been doing riparian planting research to look at nutrients coming off the soil being absorbed by the growth of plants, which also sequesters carbon. We have Ed McBean, the tier 1 Canada research chair in water supply and security. Could you comment on those two examples?

I know you've been to the University of Guelph. I know you visit other universities in Canada. Could you comment on the importance of investing in research on water, and the role university research plays in water security?

• (1625)

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: Thank you very much for that question, member. Your question is a very serious question. It certainly deserves a proper response because of its heightened interest today around the concerns of water.

There are several gaps in water research in the country. We have a handful of universities that do excellent research in water. They certainly stand up to international peer review. However, it is important that we identify the gaps in the research.

You've talked about vegetative buffer strips to reduce nutrient pollution and other areas of research, but when you think about the water sector and how broad it is, some of the areas that we know very little about are some of the emerging new pathogens and contaminants. Microplastics, for example, are of serious concern to the environment, and we need to pick up the pace on that and fund that kind of research on those new, emergent areas.

The use of remote sensing technologies in agricultural production needs to be expanded. We're a leader in RADARSAT, for example. How do we bring that to the forefront by bringing new researchers and new science to the program?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

On that, we're using RADARSAT as a way of looking at soil health and the new types of crops that you mentioned with better root structures to withstand droughts. It's not always about water and using the same water as before, but finding new ways of conserving water in agriculture.

Very briefly, could you agree or disagree with that statement? I have only 10 seconds left.

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: I'm certainly good with your statement. There's much more that we can do in water conservation. There are new technologies to conserve water, like automated water delivery systems to fields, and they can be expanded on.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Madame Pauzé.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Sandford, I'm going to come back to you because you have a wealth of experience. Earlier, I was telling you that Canada always projects a kind of image on the international scene, but when you live here, you see things differently.

Mr. Madramootoo mentioned it earlier. Canada's trademark is that it has a lot of fresh water reserves. Quebec has a million lakes. Food is safe. Technologies are modern. Opportunities abound.

We have a lot of water, but its quality sometimes leaves something to be desired, especially in indigenous communities. Think of the regions in northern Alberta, where water is polluted by the oil sands, the Ottawa River, which is threatened by nuclear waste, and the indigenous communities that are located just a few kilometres away from Edmonton and have no clean drinking water.

Don't you think that Canada has some serious work to do before holding itself up as an example?

[English]

Mr. Robert Sandford: Thank you very much for that very important question. It allows me to answer the previous question at the same time.

If we want water to be a pillar of our foreign policy, we have to get our own house in order first. We can do this simultaneously as we reach out to help others, because there are mechanisms, as Dr. Madramootoo has pointed out, and technologies that we have that are fully exportable.

However, there is a bolo effect that can happen here. We can help ourselves get our house in order because we have to, because as it has already been indicated, the global hydrologic cycle is accelerating and things are not going to be as they have been. We need to prepare ourselves for that in order to address our own problems, and in addressing our own problems, we may be able to help others.

• (1630)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sandford.

[English]

Mr. Robert Sandford: Consequently, there are multiple benefits here. Thank you, sir.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Boulerville, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

This is timely, as I'm going to continue the discussion with Mr. Sandford.

Like my colleague Adam van Koeverden, I want to reassure him and tell him that he can count on me and my party to defend the important and crucial work of the United Nations and its agencies, even if they are sometimes maligned by some media or commentators these days.

Mr. Sandford, all the current data indicates that the weather conditions next summer and fall will be quite terrible.

We were talking earlier about fires, floods and droughts. That will have repercussions not only for Canada, but also for all of the Americas.

As we saw last year, Canada must be ready to defend its lack of action when those things happen because it has not done enough to fight climate change. That is arguably a threat to national security.

What does the government need to do immediately to prepare for that?

[English]

Mr. Robert Sandford: The most important thing that can be said in answer to that is that we do face an emergency.

Almost all the indicators that we see over much of the country, from the British Columbian coast to Quebec, indicate not just drought but extremely dry conditions and vulnerability to wildfire. This is going to affect not just the sectors we normally think of. It's going to affect a wide range of economic sectors in very deleterious ways. There's no way that we can see at this moment that this is going to be alleviated by last-minute rainfalls or snowfalls.

Emergency preparedness as a nation is vital if we are to understand how we can save money and save lives this coming summer. It's a no-regret strategy because we know that as climate continues to warm, we're going to have to be prepared in those ways and to change the way we react to these emergencies.

Rather than reacting, we have to be able to prepare for them and understand what we have to change in order to become more—

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sandford.

Mr. Boulerville's time is up.

Mr. Kram, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. I'd like to start with Dr. Madramootoo and follow up on his comments.

You said in your opening statement that agriculture uses about 70% of global water withdrawals.

Is it a similar figure for Canada, or does Canada use more or less? Can you shed some light on that?

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: Thank you very much for your question.

It all depends on where you are in Canada. If you take the South Saskatchewan River basin, it is as high as 70% and there is water stress in that basin. The same happens for some of the basins in southern Alberta, such as the Oldman River, as well.

Generally we have an abundance of water, so there's quite a bit of spatial variability. Obviously, out in eastern Canada we have an abundance of water, but we do have water-stressed basins in western Canada.

Mr. Michael Kram: Can you speak to the role that irrigation projects can play in water security and food security?

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: Absolutely. Irrigation is essential, especially in these water-stressed areas, to be able to provide the additional water to meet crop water demands, to maintain stability of yields and to ensure that farmers can get the same yields, whether it be in the dry seasons, the wet years or dry years. It allows those farmers to keep enhancing their availability of high yields.

Today, we produce about 30% more crop yields with much less irrigation water than we did 25 years ago due to the modern irrigation technologies developed right here in Canada.

Mr. Michael Kram: This committee has also heard how irrigation, in addition to increasing crop yields, can increase carbon sequestration in the soil in farmland.

Can you elaborate on some of the benefits of carbon sequestration in the soil and how we can do more of that with our policies?

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: Thank you.

Irrigation alone would not be able to sequester enough carbon in the soil. We have to do other things like reduce tillage and do crop rotations. We have to do more leguminous cropping in our soil practices and cropping practices to store more carbon in the soil.

As we store more carbon in the soil, we reduce the amount of carbon dioxide that is emitted to the atmosphere, thereby helping to reduce the increase in global temperatures as well.

• (1635)

Mr. Michael Kram: To be clear, irrigation alone could not meet our CO₂ targets, but it would help. Is that safe to say?

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: It would help, but that alone would not be able to meet the targets.

Mr. Michael Kram: Could you give us an idea of how much it would help? Would it get us halfway there or a quarter of the way?

The Chair: Please give a quick number.

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: It's probably about 10% to 15%.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mrs. Chatel, go ahead.

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

I welcome our witnesses.

I'm going to start with Mr. Madramootoo.

Earlier, the representative of the IJC, an organization created by the UN, and you talked about climate change, which is having a huge impact. While more developed countries are responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions, the least developed nations are responsible for only 1.1% of global CO₂ emissions. Yet it is those most vulnerable populations that are suffering the extremely serious

consequences of climate change. We are hearing more and more about drought in those countries. They are also very vulnerable to climate disasters. I'm thinking of major floods, tsunamis and extreme storms, such as hurricanes.

Canadians expect their government to act responsibly, to act like a responsible global citizen, as was said earlier. I am a little concerned when I hear that some members of the Conservative caucus want to withdraw from their civic responsibilities.

Mr. Madramootoo, one of the things you talked about was the importance of Canada being a leader and showing technical leadership globally in addressing water shortages in the agricultural sector. Among other things, you say that Canada should be proactive in promoting innovative and responsible practices internationally.

Can you give us more details on that?

[English]

Mr. Chandra Madramootoo: Canada, in my view, should be a world leader in addressing the issues around climate change in agriculture. You're quite correct that the people in the developing world, in the arid and semi-arid regions where some of the poorest of the poor live, carry a very high burden of the impacts of climate change on their livelihoods when they produce less greenhouse gas than we do.

We are in a very good position to bring new technologies and climate-smart agriculture, regenerative agriculture—making use of some of the traditional practices that are being conducted by agriculture producers with more things like green manure and the use of cover crops, for example—to help them buffer the impacts of droughts on people's livelihoods.

I would like to suggest that Canada, as I said in my presentation, play a much stronger leadership role in the United Nations agencies to help address your points.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's very good. That brings us to the end of our first panel.

Dr. Madramootoo, if you have any examples of the kinds of projects the government could fund internationally to achieve the goals that you've enunciated, please do not hesitate to send them to the clerk, even if they're short synopses. They will be fodder for the report.

We'll stop there. I want to thank the witnesses and the members for this round of questions and answers.

We'll pause for a couple of minutes to onboard our second panel.

Thank you again.

• (1635) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1645)

The Chair: We'll start with our second panel. We're up against the clock here.

We start with Mr. Kaveh Madani, from the UN University Institute for Water, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Kaveh Madani (Director, United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable committee members, allow me at the outset to express my profound gratitude, as the director of the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, to the people and Government of Canada for nearly three decades of supporting us. The 1996 decision to host what is known today as the "UN water think tank" is reflective of Canada's progressive and visionary thinking, yet when it comes to water, Canada has much more to offer on the world stage.

Building on its firm commitment to multilateralism and proven record of peacebuilding, Canada has an unprecedented opportunity to turn water into a pillar of its foreign policy, with significant global and national security benefits, so I encourage your committee to take these three recommendations into consideration.

Recommendation one is to make water a foreign policy priority, to use water for peacebuilding and to establish Canada as a leader in the water space. Despite its fundamental importance, water is still an orphaned child in international politics, with no UN agency that is entirely dedicated to it. This gap creates a great political and also a wonderful business opportunity for Canada, a nation that has all that is required to serve as the world's water leader. Besides being a solution provider, thanks to its solid talent pool, Canada's geography puts it in a highly unique position from the water standpoint. With access to 7% of the world's renewable water supply, Canada's identity is tied to water. The experience of dealing with the most diverse range of water management problems has equipped Canada with the expertise and reputation needed to guide and set an effective solution path for the world.

One immediate opportunity for Canada is to influence the global water action agenda, which, in addition to promoting its scientists and businesses, is hosting the next UN water conference in 2026, soon after the establishment of the Canada water agency. I also encourage Canada to consider taking the issue of water to the UN Security Council, given its peace and security implications. Canada must also consider making water an integral component of its peacekeeping missions and international development projects.

Recommendation two is to put farmers at the centre of the water agenda. No water agenda can succeed without a true appreciation of the role of farmers in managing water. Unfortunately, many national and international sustainability and climate agendas marginalize farmers and overlook their significant role in managing 70% of the global water use. These reductionist and often energy-

centric policies, which ignore how investment in the water and agricultural sector benefit our fight against climate change, hunger, poor health, poverty and injustice, are doomed to fail and must be immediately revised. Robust water policies that put farmers at the centre are not vulnerable to the changes of political appetite in Ottawa or any other capital in the world. Accordingly, Canada's domestic water policies and international water leadership must promote the role of farmers and their potential to help the world mitigate its water, climate and security problems.

Recommendation three is to take advantage of the water-related UN entity that Canada hosts. The United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health would not have existed without Canada's thoughtful and generous support. This institute is one of the few UN entities in the world with a water-focused mandate and can serve as the gateway that connects Canada to the UN agencies and those in need of Canada's water knowledge and technology. Canada is currently underutilizing this UN entity to promote its talents, solutions and resources.

Through systematic co-operation with the Government of Canada, based on a clear and "water wise" foreign policy, the United Nations University can do much more to ensure that Canada, its researchers, innovators, businesses, farmers, politicians and water activists get the recognition they collectively deserve, as we are cognizant of what Canada has to offer and how the world can benefit from its water leadership.

• (1650)

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

We'll go now to Ms. Ito, who is in Scotland, I believe.

Ms. Mumta Ito (Founder and President, Nature's Rights): Hi there. I understand that you probably have a handout that was circulated amongst you, which I'm going to walk you through.

To give you a little bit of background, I've been advocating for the recognition of the rights of nature as the foundation of all the other rights.

If we are to solve our issues to do with fresh water, we cannot look at it in isolation from all of the other systems. Fresh water can't be isolated from our ocean systems or from the rest of the water cycle. If we want to have clean water, we also need to look at agriculture and at the entire economic system because everything is interconnected. If we think of our human society as an iceberg, all of the crises that we see—the economic crises, the six mass extinctions, climate change, pandemics and ill health—are just above the water mark.

If we look beneath the surface of the water, we have the structures and the systems—the silo systems—that come from a mechanistic world view and from a separation of consciousness that separates the human being from nature, which has been encoded in law. In law, nature is objects, property and resources, separate from the human being. This leads to a degenerative cycle that produces all of these crises on autopilot. Most of our societal solutions are all about acting on crisis management and trying to see how we can avert climate change or the various crises that are happening. That's the lowest point of leverage we act at.

If we want to really resolve our problems, move toward a thriving future long term and really be leaders on the world stage, we have to look at bottom-of-the-iceberg solutions. We have to look at how we can rebuild that relationship with nature, which is our most fundamental relationship, and drive that change into law. This is what we advocate for with Nature's Rights.

If you think of the current sustainability model, you have people, economy and nature. You have three interlocking circles, like you'll see on the diagram that I circulated.

In this model, there are a couple of flaws. One is that people have rights, the economy has rights—corporate rights and property rights—and nature has no rights. There's also an assumption that these three circles can operate independently of each other, but this isn't reflective of reality. In reality, the only one that can operate independently of the others is nature, because the other systems are derived from nature. Without nature, there's no human society. Without nature and human societies, there is no economy.

We're advocating that what we move to in our governance system is a nested hierarchy of rights that follows the natural order. The rights are not adversarial; they're collaborative and synergistic.

The model on the right is what we proposed to the European Economic and Social Committee in looking at a European fundamental charter for the rights of nature that would encompass the other rights. We've built a framework where, if you take the three circles and map out the UN sustainable development goals on each layer—nature, people and economy—and add a fourth circle at the bottom, which is the planetary boundaries, you end up with a system where you can map out the rights corresponding to that, where you have economic rights embedded within human rights, which are all embedded within the rights of nature. This gets rid of inherent conflicts between the rights.

At the moment, sustainable development goals haven't been reached. A lot of the criticism around this is that there isn't a legal framework to achieve it. With this model, we're bringing in the nested hierarchy of rights, or the integrated model of rights, as a way of driving forward those sustainable development goals, all within the planetary boundaries.

● (1655)

We've heard about climate change in this meeting, but climate change is only one of the nine planetary boundaries. Seven of those planetary boundaries have already been exceeded—

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mumta Ito: —with biodiversity and the nitrogen and phosphorus cycle being the ones that are most highly in the danger zone.

I would urge you to—

The Chair: We have to stop you there, Ms. Ito. There will be questions. You can use those opportunities to add some information.

Ms. Mumta Ito: Absolutely.

The Chair: Next is Ms. Kavanagh with Water Rangers.

I believe you were with us last week, no?

Ms. Kat Kavanagh (Executive Director, Water Rangers): No, that was some of my—

The Chair: It was a different Kat. I'm sorry about that. I'm a little mixed up.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Kat Kavanagh: Thank you.

Thanks for having me. I'm Kat Kavanagh, the executive director of Water Rangers. I co-founded Water Rangers in 2015 as part of the "AquaHacking" competition by AquaAction, another witness you had in the past week, I believe. It came from seeing my own father, who had been collecting water quality data for about 20 years at our local lake. He didn't have the tools to share and understand his data. This is quite a common picture that we see across community groups who care deeply about their local waterways.

Water Rangers set about to respond to community needs for those tools that lower barriers and help them participate in specifically community-based water monitoring. We've designed test kits and built an open data platform curated for the public, which is being used by 300 groups across Canada, the U.S., the U.K. and even Mexico. In Canada those groups can automatically share their dataset with DataStream, whom you heard from on Tuesday, a national database for water quality data.

We know that water quality data is desperately needed. According to the 2020 watershed reports, published by WWF Canada, over 60% of subwatersheds are considered data-deficient. That means we don't even have enough data to give them a score. This is better than it was in 2017, when over 70% were data-deficient. It's through efforts of environmental non-profits like DataStream and those community-based water monitoring groups across the country that we're starting to make some progress in filling those gaps. There's a long way to go, but we're starting to see a path forward. This year Water Rangers, supported by AquaAction, will be publishing the next watershed reports. Stay tuned for those results later this year.

Since the theme today is speaking to international relationships, I want to give two brief examples of where we're working with organizations in the U.S. to coordinate and standardize on both sides of Lake Erie through the Lake Erie volunteer science network. Canadians need to play a bigger role here, but there is a willingness and desire to simplify sharing across borders.

In the U.K., I'm part of a collaborative of over 80 leaders of NGOs, industry, government and researchers in a program called CaSTCo. They're investing in my participation and our tools to help create pathways for community-based water monitoring to be integrated into achieving healthier rivers here. Their investment at a national scale is substantial. It's based on collaboration amongst all those stakeholders at a watershed scale. There is an example of something we can learn from in Canada.

The Brits, though, were impressed about how Canadian non-profit collaboration is equipping communities to openly share data and share results. I gave them the example of how community groups are using Water Rangers to collect their data, share their data openly, embed it on their own websites, share with their local communities, share that data with DataStream to sit alongside government and research data, and then be part of national assessments like the watershed reports.

Coordinating, building meaningful relationships and sharing learnings takes time and effort. Canadian non-profit organizations are doing amazing work with a fraction of the resources of other countries. We should be proud of what we've been able to accomplish there. An example is the community-based water monitoring collaborative, which we are also helping lead.

We're building resources like the business case for the investment in community-based water monitoring tool kit, so that groups on the ground level in those communities who care deeply about their local waterways can express their value to funders to support in local projects. Research by the International Institute for Sustainable Development has shown in a report that community-based water monitoring groups multiply investments three to 14 times. We've heard from other witnesses about the endowment fund in B.C. that is starting to strengthen water resilience there. It's a model I'd love to see replicated across the country for supporting and strengthening water stewardship.

I will leave you with two brief recommendations. One, invest in leadership and innovation in community-based water monitoring data collection and sharing. Two, build communities' long-term capacity to participate in evidence-informed decision-making for their local waterways. Communities care deeply about water.

Thank you.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will go now to Mr. McClinchey from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

You didn't bring a lamprey with you today.

Mr. Gregory McClinchey (Director, Policy and Legislative Affairs, Great Lakes Fishery Commission): No, not today, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Gregory McClinchey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

After two failed Great Lakes treaty attempts, crisis drove the U.S. and Canada to ratify our treaty-based binational mandate to establish and maintain cross-border relationships, to build a body of freshwater science on which to base management decisions and, of course, to control sea lamprey.

These tasks were given to us, as political leadership understood that combatting invasive species, coordinating harvest policies and leveraging shared resources could only happen if we tackled challenges together. In other words, where water flows over borders, border-blind management must follow.

Our treaty drafters saw water as foreign policy, and the commission's binational engagement strategy proves it. That's not to suggest that strong domestic freshwater policies aren't needed. History underscores the importance of respecting subnational jurisdictions and rights holders. Our commission considers partnerships, the application of traditional knowledge and dialogue with first nations to be success elements.

Our convention drafters made establishing and maintaining working relationships a primary goal. That's because they understood that waterborne threats and opportunities never stay in one jurisdictional silo.

Canada has impressive freshwater resources that contribute to our triple bottom line. That's our social, economic and ecological well-being. Despite this, when it comes to Canada's fourth coast, bilateralism is the only way to protect the resource and respect jurisdictional confines, including first nations' rights, while ensuring good governance and sustainability.

The U.S. and state governments have demonstrated an understanding of this good governance potential via infrastructure renewal, habitat restoration, research and coordinated management. That coordinated management occurs under the commission-facilitated joint strategic plan for management of Great Lakes fisheries, a plan that's been signed by the subnational units.

For our commission and our partners, the joint strategic plan, which I have provided for distribution, has proven its worth. Ontario, the Great Lakes states and indigenous partners work together to make shared decisions. This non-binding, consensus-based strategy ensures that the management of Great Lakes resources by each of the jurisdictions benefits all the jurisdictions. Water, in this context, is not a cause for division. Rather, water unites. Our joint strategic plan is an example of that.

Fisheries managers have prioritized habitat protections and improvement despite the daunting task. Five lake committees, which are joint strategic plan elements, provide managers from provincial, state, indigenous and federal agencies a forum for discussion. They work through a common framework to identify impediments to fish production and then pinpoint management actions, termed “environmental priorities”.

These environmental priorities provide structure, continuity and value here and in the U.S. Coordinated partnerships then find resources to implement habitat protections. These projects, which vary in complexity from large-scale deepwater reef restoration to small culvert replacements, are advancing after decades of inaction.

This process of identifying impediments and actions, funding streams and project accomplishment goals is the vision for sustainable Great Lakes, but the process is only possible due to the joint strategic plan, which helps managers find shared priorities. Prior to the commission's establishment, this exchange would have been impossible. Success only became possible when we started acting beyond our one border.

With the benefit of hindsight, it's clear that viewing water as a foreign policy matter is neither novel nor optional. We can't afford to view boundary waters as just domestic resources because our trading partners see them through a foreign policy lens. This divergent view is why the interface our commission uses in the U.S. flows through the Department of State but through DFO here in Canada. It's a matter of priority.

In closing, water can separate or unite us. After years of divided governance and strife, Great Lakes water has become a uniting force, but that state has taken effort. Establishing and maintaining binational working relationships on this scale has taken decades of trust-building, but the investment of energy positively impacts on the triple bottom line for the communities and governments of the basin.

We hope this study will yield positive results, so that all Canadians can enjoy the benefits of well-managed and sustainable freshwater resources. We stand ready to help in any way we can.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McClinchey.

Mr. Leslie, you have six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Brandon Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start with Mr. McClinchey.

I understand that the fisheries are worth about \$7 billion a year. What would you say at this point in time is the biggest threat to commercial fish stocks?

Mr. Gregory McClinchey: I was actually asked this question not that long ago when crossing the border one time. A border guard asked me what the greatest threat was to the ongoing sustainability of the Great Lakes. There are lots of answers I could give to that. The biggest threat to it is complacency.

In many of the meetings we've had with members across the table here over the last couple of years, we've talked about how gov-

ernments and people like to respond to a crisis. Fortunately, in the case of the fishery itself, there's not a crisis per se, but we need constant vigilance. With regard to the lamprey control that we look after, if we stop doing it, then it immediately becomes a problem. With respect to cross-border collaboration, the minute we take any of that partnership for granted, it begins to fall apart.

There are lots of external threats. There are lots of environmental challenges, like climate change and lots of other things, but certainly complacency is top of the list.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: What would your biggest ask of the federal government be? Obviously, you mentioned complacency.

Secondary to that, how would you describe your relationship with recreational fisheries groups in terms of some of the projects you mentioned, in terms of water quality and the enhancement of our fisheries?

Mr. Gregory McClinchey: Our organization is premised largely on partnerships. Most of what we do is based on working with industry, state and provincial partners, federal governments and so on. Those are the kinds of things we do. Certainly our relationships are strong.

We have identified—as I mentioned in my opening comments—an issue where we have a governance interface problem here in Canada that's been a bit of a barrier to those things. We have an ask to remedy that. In the context of this study, the notion of looking at water as a foreign policy priority would certainly fit.

With regard to the things we do to set up those partnerships, I might ask my colleague, Ms. Walter, to talk to that. That's her area of expertise. That joint strategic plan of management really is the flagship mechanism. Before it, there was no opportunity or no real conversations across borders. That's something that's been successful.

Perhaps Ms. Walter can add something to that.

Ms. Lisa Walter (Coordinator, Aquatic Connectivity, Great Lakes Fishery Commission): We have a great history of building up these partnerships, both at the agency level, the non-government organizational level, as well as with recreational and commercial fisheries and the people involved in those.

I would just say that the continuity of that and the ability to continue those relationships is key to doing so.

Mr. Brandon Leslie: Thank you.

Mr. Madani, I appreciated your comments regarding the way farmers should be engaged as solutions providers and stewards of the land, particularly in Canada. Our southern working landscape is made up largely of privately owned farmland. I think we are very proud, as farming communities, of the stewardship we have undertaken and the advances we've made.

I'm just curious. Given your global perspective and seeing some of the protests that have come out of various European countries right now—not necessarily all related to water, but a host of other policies being driven down on farmers—would you say that this is a global problem?

In the context of Canada right now, I think there's a very real frustration with the way our farmers have had policies imposed on them that they know are detrimental to their own economic imperatives.

• (1710)

Mr. Kaveh Madani: It is. This is due to the fact that many of those who set policies don't understand the political economy of water. In many countries, water is used not only for producing food but also employment. Unless you understand this critical role of water, you cannot set policies that address some of the other problems and solve the threats to the farmers themselves.

Unfortunately, we have created unintended competition between some of the sustainability policies or climate actions, and the water sector. We thought water was an impact sector, although water is also a sector to mitigate a lot of those other problems. The opportunities that exist in the agriculture sector are too many. Anything you do for the agriculture sector—anything you do to empower the farmers and anything you do to prepare them for climate change, other disasters and extreme events—would benefit other fights, like the fights against biodiversity loss, climate change, hunger, inequality and so on. This is something we don't understand.

The problem is more severe in the global south and in many countries that don't have the luxury that you have to be able to compensate the farmers and change your policies a little bit. In those places, unemployment means migration, tension and war. There are lots of other effects that would not be limited to those regions.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Madani.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to put the following motion on notice:

Given that:

- a) Steven Guilbeault, the Minister of Environment, announced, "There will be no more envelopes from the federal government to enlarge the road network";
- b) Minister Guilbeault also said the Liberal government has decided to stop investing in roads because the current network is "perfectly adequate"—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Is this a different motion from the previous motion where the Conservatives wasted time? Are they just putting it on notice a second time?

Mr. Branden Leslie: This is my time to ask questions. I'm moving it within my time. I don't think he should be upset with this.

The Chair: It's not the same motion, is it?

Mr. Branden Leslie: No, it's not the same motion.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue:

—is "perfectly adequate" to respond to the needs of Canadians;

- c) Moreover, Minister Guilbeault said, "We can very well achieve our goals of economic, social and human development without more enlargement of the road network";

d) Minister Guilbeault has provided no evidence to back up his erroneous claims;

e) The Liberal government has not consulted with provincial, territorial and municipal governments, or with Indigenous leaders regarding Minister Guilbeault's announcement;

f) Drivers in Canada's major cities spend on average 144 hours in rush-hour traffic every year, with Toronto topping out at 199 hours, Vancouver at 197 hours, Montreal at 180 hours, and Winnipeg at 173 hours;

g) Kam Blight, the president of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, said:

"In response to the recent comments made by federal Minister Steven Guilbeault that demonstrate a lack of awareness regarding the challenges faced by municipalities, investing in municipal infrastructure, particularly road projects of all sizes, is crucial in fostering economic growth and addressing the challenges posed by a growing population and expanding trade networks.

"With the reality of our members facing an ever-increasing municipal infrastructure deficit and operating under 19th century fiscal limitations, it is now more important than ever that other orders of government increase investments to support all kinds of infrastructure and work in partnership with municipalities to develop a modernized Municipal Growth Framework for the 21st century.

"It is a strategic move that not only addresses the immediate needs of a growing population but also positions municipalities as hubs of economic activity, fostering sustainable development and enhancing their roles in the broader regional and global economy"; and

h) Minister Guilbeault's plan to end all federal investments in new roads and highways would cripple Canada's economic growth;

the committee call on the Liberal government to condemn Minister Guilbeault's announcement; and the committee report its opinion to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll go now to Madame Chatel.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague Pam Damoff.

I may have a bit of advice for some of my colleagues.

Your puppet master should make the motions a little shorter. That would save us some time.

Thank you.

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. We cannot tolerate that kind of speech when we're talking about our colleagues.

Did you really say "*marionettiste*"?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Yes because—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Because what?

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: This happens pretty regularly. You put forward motions—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Your minister is in the House of Commons today, and he has not answered the questions that are raised in the motion.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Well, I—

The Chair: Excuse me, colleagues.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Why didn't Mr. Guilbeault answer the questions?

The Chair: Colleagues—

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: The economic impact of the damage caused by the Conservatives' action or inaction on climate change could really slow down Canada's economic growth.

That could cost as much as \$25 billion a year by 2025. If we do nothing on climate change, as the Conservatives are proposing, it will cost us a lot of money to fight climate change.

I see it even in my region. Some municipalities need to build resilience—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, Ms. Chatel.

I think we are being called to the House for a vote. The lights are flashing and I saw the notification on my phone. So we have to go vote.

I think we have to either suspend the meeting or carry on, with the committee members' unanimous consent.

So I am asking what the committee members wish to do.

Do you wish to continue the meeting?

Voices: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

Most of us will be voting remotely, I think.

You may continue, Ms. Chatel.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I really liked the figure you used, Ms. Ito, because it illustrates what one of my constituents told me. We cannot have a healthy economy without a healthy environment.

Can you elaborate on this very simple conclusion that one of my constituents told me about? The municipalities in my riding recognize that failing to address climate change comes with a major financial cost.

As I said earlier, water shortages, extreme climate events and harmful insects are raising concerns for farmers and for the resiliency of municipal infrastructures in my riding. All of this is detrimental to farmers' crops and to municipalities. We cannot have a healthy economy if nature is not thriving and the environment is not healthy.

Can you provide more details on that? How can economic health and environmental health be integrated?

[*English*]

The Chair: Is that for Ms. Kavanagh?

It's for Ms. Ito. Is she still there?

Ms. Mumta Ito: Yes, I'm still here.

Yes, of course. As I was trying explain in the beginning, if we really want to take an integrated approach and we want to resolve our issues, we have to think long term. The problems that our society has created are partly or, I would say, primarily caused by some of the assumptions that are embedded within our legal system that have allowed our economies to develop in the ways that they have. It's allowed us to over-exploit the natural world.

If we are really going to turn the tide on that, I feel that we have to start with a new beginning, and we have to look at our structures of law and re-establish that interrelatedness, this understanding that there can be no human health without ecological health and to see how can we embed that within our legal structures—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Ms. Ito.

That is exactly what I was referring to.

I will now give Ms. Damoff the rest of my speaking time.

[*English*]

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

My question is for Great Lakes Fishery.

It's nice to see you, and it's been wonderful to work with you over the years to support the good work that you do. I know that my colleague Vance Badawey has made it his mission to support the good work that you do.

In your presentation, you talked about being border blind. A few years ago, I think it was 2019, we advocated for increased funding, and we were able to get it for you. However, you live within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and, when you talk about borders, being the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I know that there must be challenges for you living in fisheries and then crossing over with the U.S.

I'm wondering if you could talk to the committee and maybe make a recommendation on how your agency should work in that whole border-blind mentality.

• (1720)

The Chair: Answer briefly, please, if you can, sir.

Mr. Gregory McClinchey: Sure.

In the United States, we are structured. We have an interface into government, so we interface with the U.S. Department of State. Congress appropriates money to the State Department, the State Department exchanges financial accountability and dollars with us, and then we work with partners across the spectrum to execute our programming. That works very well and has allowed multiple partnerships to spring up over the years that have saved the Government of the United States and the various state governments millions and even hundreds of millions of dollars.

In Canada, it's slightly different. We have an interface where Parliament appropriates money to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and then the discussion goes between us and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The nuance there is that we also contract with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which has created some challenges and some barriers to those partnerships. In order to remedy that conflict of interest and certainly to allow partnerships to expand more broadly, we've recommended a mirror process to that in the United States, where we would be nested within Global Affairs Canada, interface with them on budget accountability and all of those kinds of things, and still work hand in glove with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the other partnerships that spring out of that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have time for Madame Pauzé and Mr. Boulerice, and then we'll have to stop.

[Translation]

You have the floor, Ms. Pauzé.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Many thanks to all our witnesses for helping us better understand the issues relating to water, an essential resource.

Ms. Ito, I listened to your 2016 TED talk. Your 15-minute talk was clear, concise and inspiring. You did however refer to a complete change in paradigm. In my opinion, it takes a long time to change paradigms, yet I think the climate situation and our relationship with nature are in a state of crisis.

Should we not instead change our collective values relating to nature?

[English]

Ms. Mumta Ito: Yes, exactly. The reason that I've been advocating in the way that I have for a change in the legal system is that it's such a powerful way to shift societal norms. Originally, when corporate rights were brought in, there was a massive outcry. Nobody could even envisage how a being that was not even a being and just existed on paper could even be the subject of rights, but now it's massively empowered, this vehicle called the corporation. It led to a whole different economic structure.

I believe, in the same way, that by embedding the idea that—

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Ito. but I do not have much speaking time.

Other witnesses have spoken about the rights of nature. One witness pointed out in fact that we can establish all kinds of rights, but

they have to be upheld. As we are seeing right now, fundamental human rights are not being upheld, particularly in the Israel and Hamas war. It might be useful to establish all kinds of rights for nature, but there will have to be limits for the people who do not uphold them.

Isn't that the case?

[English]

Ms. Mumta Ito: Yes, absolutely.

There has to be an enforceability to the rights as well, but how we enforce them.... Whether we do that by using the rights as a tool to evolve our societal structures, our economic system, our agriculture system and our food system, or we use the rights just as a litigation tool would be entirely up to us. I would say the more powerful use is to embed them in society in such a way that industries have to evolve and human rights conflicts have to be resolved in a way that also respects the rights of nature.

Fundamentally, even this conflict we see with Hamas would be against the rights of nature.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: What you say is very interesting. It gives us another perspective on respect for the environment.

Mr. Madani, I read your submission and have a lot of questions for you.

In the part of your submission entitled "Excellence in Water Governance in Service of Foreign Policy", you said that "Canada could be perfectly positioned [...] by continuing to profile Indigenous co-governance successes [...]".

I met with two indigenous groups yesterday. The first is from northern Alberta. Those people do not drink the water because it is contaminated and they are developing very rare cancers. The second group is local. It is opposed to the plan to build a radioactive waste mound, since the waste could find its way into the water.

I am not sure the first nations would agree with what you wrote.

Can you elaborate and give us some more examples?

● (1725)

[English]

Mr. Kaveh Madani: There is no perfect system in the world. There is no country that is perfect when it comes to water management. Every system has deficiencies.

Last year, we published a report that showed the systematic injustice, essentially, and inequity behind the levies of the United States, which is your neighbouring country. It's a wealthy country that's very advanced in its technology. You go to every location in the world and there are deficiencies, but don't forget the size of Canada and the diversity of the problems you're dealing with. It's hard to find another country of this size with so many diverse problems.

Claiming leadership, sharing experiences and learning from others happen if you get more active on the international stage, and I think this is something good for Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you.

You talked a lot about the Canadian Water Agency and said it plays an important role by exerting influence internationally. In its voluntary national review, Canada set 17 sustainable development goals, only five of which are priority goals.

Sustainable development goal 6, which pertains to clean water and sanitation, and goal 15, which pertains to terrestrial ecosystems, are not even among the priority goals.

Are we not putting the horse before the cart?

[English]

The Chair: Answer fairly briefly, if you can, Mr. Madani.

Mr. Kaveh Madani: There are problems. Of course, you have to do much more to get where you want to be and where you deserve to be, but I don't think this should stop your nation from getting more active on the international stage.

The establishment of a Canada water agency is a historic moment in this country and a step forward to where you deserve to be, but there's a lot of work to be done.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

You have the floor, Mr. Boulerville.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Ito, I do of course agree that nature should have rights. According to the French scientist Aurélien Barrau, the crises relating to the climate, the loss of diversity, and plastic and chemical pollution are in fact sub-crises of the broader and more encompassing problem, namely, the relationship that human beings have with other living things and nature in general.

Your movement is inspiring, Ms. Ito. Among those it has inspired are the people of the North Shore and the Innu community of Quebec, who have accorded rights, legal status to the Magpie River. That inspired me as well. I introduced a bill in the House to give legal status to the St. Lawrence Seaway and its tributaries. That would be a first in North America, and I am very proud of it.

Much of this movement comes from South America and is inspired by indigenous cultures.

What do you think governments can do to support this movement in their efforts to protect nature and improve our relationship with living things?

[English]

Ms. Mumta Ito: Whilst I'm aware that in South America and in Canada the cries mostly come from the indigenous peoples who haven't lost that awareness of our deep dependence on nature—without nature none of this exists—so they still have their priorities in that way, what we've done in Europe is seen how those principles are actually applicable everywhere. The whole environmental crisis

that we have is a product of the way we have structured our economy. It's legal to have an economy based on infinite growth because nature has no rights. Nature is objects, property and resources in law. This has nothing to do with indigenous peoples. This is applicable in our modern system of law worldwide.

I do believe that the Canadian government, by making a stand for supporting the rights of nature nationally, and then shifting the whole basis of our society towards a regenerative society, would be making a massive leap forward in leadership for the whole world.

Also, I feel that by protecting individual ecosystems in that way, it's a good start. However, it won't really realize its full potential if the national legislation works against it, because everything that happens around these rivers, the very actions that are destroying nature, are in effect legal. They're part of the way that our economy operates. If we can use the rights of nature to help us reorient our economies towards a regenerative society, I feel then it will be much more robust.

• (1730)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville: Thank you.

Somebody said that anyone who believes that the growth of capitalism is unlimited even though the earth's resources are limited is either crazy or an economist. That is a quip that can mean a lot of things.

Ms. Kavanagh, to what extent is a central database on water quality essential, not only for tracking water quality in Canada, but also in terms of providing important data for international science?

[English]

Ms. Kat Kavanagh: The first step to any action is to understand what your current state is. How can we know what changes we've made if we have no data to say what our current state is?

A lot of times that data might be collected but is not in a format that's easy for us to access to glean those insights, to innovate and to come up with those moments of innovation or creativity. The more we're willing to share that at a community level, at a watershed level and at a country level, and then internationally, it's really powerful.

Over in the U.K., part of this collective that's sharing and looking at ways for communities to be involved in action towards better rivers...if there's that willingness for industry, for government, to look at data and look at possible solutions, that's the pathway forward. It's part of that cycle.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have a minute left.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Okay.

[*English*]

Ms. Kavanagh, what can you tell us about the role of conservation, preservation and water quality in our global fight to protect the environment?

[*English*]

Ms. Kat Kavanagh: I really believe in nature-based solutions and restoration as building resilience in all of those ecosystems. I see communities playing a huge role in supporting their local climate resilience. If we're looking at waterways, things like droughts and floods are huge components of that climate picture, and I really want to see communities be a part of building that resilience for their futures.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, your time is up.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their really interesting insights, and all the members for the good questions that brought out those insights.

We have a vote now, so we'll have to end the meeting here. We're at our two-hour mark anyway.

Thank you again. We'll see each other as a committee in about 10 days.

Thank you.

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