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• (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 10 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[*Translation*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing order 108(2), the committee is meeting to study the mandate of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I would like to officially welcome our witnesses for the first hour.

With us is the Honourable Anita Anand, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have David Morrison, deputy minister of foreign affairs; Richard Arbeiter, political director and assistant deputy minister, international security and political affairs branch; Shirley Caruthers, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer, people and corporate management branch and chief financial officer; and Alexandre Lévesque, assistant deputy minister, Europe, Middle East and Arctic branch.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions.

I now invite the honourable minister to make her remarks.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start by saying that Canada stands with the people of the Caribbean at this difficult time, and that statement is backed up by action. Today, we announced \$7 million in humanitarian assistance for the region.

[*English*]

Since the end of the Second World War, multilateral institutions have helped to make our world more safe and more prosperous.

More than a billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty. Famine and disease have declined. We have seen shared effort lead to shared prosperity.

Today, the multilateral system is under threat as some countries are turning toward protectionism and unilateralism. Around the world, the geopolitical landscape is unstable, with powers shifting in ways that jeopardize Canada's security and prosperity. We face challenges that no country can resolve alone. The strength that we demonstrate abroad begins with our resilience at home.

We have a new government, a new Prime Minister and a new approach to foreign policy. This foreign policy is built on three pillars: one, defence and security; two, economic resilience; and three, the integration of core values. These priorities represent our vision for Canada's role on the world stage.

[*Translation*]

In an era of economic uncertainty, Canada must diversify trade, strengthen supply chains and position itself as a destination for investment. New agreements with the EU and Mexico, an economic partnership with Indonesia, and agreements with the Pacific region and Europe clearly reflect our desire to develop stable trade with allies who share our values.

These agreements strengthen our resilience, prosperity, and commitment to a global economy based on clear rules. I intend to leverage all diplomatic tools at my disposal to support Canada's economic priorities, and to protect against external threats to our economy.

[*English*]

I would also like to add that Canada is an Arctic country. The Arctic covers 40% of Canada's territory and more than 70% of our coastline, but the Arctic itself is experiencing major change with the shifting geopolitical landscape, with evolving security threats and with the acceleration of climate change, all of which reinforce the need for us to protect the Arctic.

That is why we announced Canada's Arctic foreign policy, a \$73-billion strategy for Canada's engagement in and on the Arctic. We are also enhancing our engagement in the north by strengthening partnerships with indigenous communities, expanding regional presence through the recent appointment of an Arctic ambassador, and leveraging our position on the world stage through NATO and NORAD.

As emerging technologies reshape the landscape of conflict, Canada is redefining global norms to navigate the risks and seize the opportunities ahead. Our near \$22 billion of support for Ukraine since Russia's further illegal and unjustifiable full-scale invasion demonstrates our unwavering commitment to upholding international law and defending sovereignty.

Our core values are our North Star. Canada stands for democracy, the rules-based international order, multilateralism, human rights, gender equality, environmental protection and reconciliation. These values are embedded in our foreign policy and will continue to be.

Our new approach to foreign policy is both strategic and pragmatic in order to lead on the world stage. That is why in Canada's national address to the United Nations, I reiterated our steadfast commitment to strengthening multilateralism by reforming international institutions so they can meet the challenges of our time. Multilateralism remains key to solving global problems today.

One multilateral institution, the G7, is led by Canada this year. During Canada's G7 presidency, we've rallied support to advance Canadian economic and security priorities, including the launching of initiatives to coordinate and strengthen our responses to threats to maritime security and shipping.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Canada's diplomacy is pragmatic. It is focused on building strategic autonomy and on delivering real benefits for Canadians: safer borders, a stronger economy and a world that reflects our values.

Mr. Chair, I am happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Thank you, honourable Minister, for your remarks.

We are now going to open the floor for questions, beginning with MP Michael Chong.

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for appearing.

I have three questions, so if we could limit the responses to about a minute and a half each, that would be helpful for getting through all three questions.

The first is on foreign interference. Global Affairs Canada plays a big role within the Government of Canada in countering foreign interference. Foreign interference in the last election was observed by Global Affairs. The foreign influence transparency registry has yet to be stood up. The government originally said it would take about 12 months. The public safety minister indicated in the House recently that it should be up by year's end. There was hope that the registry would be up before the last election. It appears that we could have another election before the registry is stood up.

Is there a sense of urgency within the Government of Canada about getting this registry up and running before the next federal election, the second since the bill became law?

Hon. Anita Anand: I appreciate the question from my honourable colleague, and certainly his work in this area has been so important for the government of the day as well as for the citizens of Canada.

I thank you for your advocacy.

I would like to stress that the recommendations of the report, which I brought with me here today, are extremely important as well. The foreign registry is one of the issues that I know my colleague, Minister Anandasangaree, is taking very seriously. I have spoken with him about the appointment that my honourable colleague mentioned, and he has indicated to me that this should be done by the end of the year. As it rests with him, I leave my answer there.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

The second question I have concerns the Prime Minister's trip to the Indo-Pacific region. He told leaders of ASEAN that Canada wants to expedite the export of our natural resources, particularly our energy. He said, "We're an energy superpower—an unabashed energy superpower. We have the third-largest reserves of oil. We have the fourth-largest reserves of LNG. We've just started our first LNG shipments."

Can you tell the committee how Global Affairs Canada is making the export of our oil and gas and our LNG a foreign policy priority?

Hon. Anita Anand: I want to begin by mentioning the moment we are in geopolitically and economically. The world is experiencing geopolitical volatility and economic stress.

On my trip to the region just a couple of weeks ago, I raised the importance of opening up bilateral trade, but also protecting Canadian values. I would say the defence and security of our country also include ensuring that the Canadian population is protected. That was one of the foremost issues that I raised.

To the member opposite's question, let me just say that Canada has the immense potential to be a leading and reliable global supplier of critical minerals. We have launched a critical minerals strategy that is going to increase the development of domestic and global supply chains. That issue is on the table in our conversations relating to opening up supply chains with Canada and leveraging our competitive advantages.

I want to come back to my first point. At all times, we are ensuring that we're protecting the safety and security of the Canadian population, our sovereignty, and the rule of law within our own country.

• (1540)

Hon. Michael Chong: The third question I have concerns China.

I know that you have recently been talking about the renewal of the 2005 strategic partnership with the PRC. Is it really strategic? Is it really a partnership, or is that nomenclature a bit of a misnomer? In other words, are we really looking to engage China strategically and in a partnership, or are we simply looking at reopening lines of communications that went dormant on a variety of issues?

Hon. Anita Anand: You are correct that my conversation with my counterpart, Minister Wang Yi, centred on the strategic partnership that was originally in place in 2005, and that formed some of the basis of our conversation just weeks ago in Beijing.

I want to first and foremost say that the purpose of the visit wasn't focused on the strategic partnership that was referenced in the question. It was about ensuring that Canada's diplomacy is utilized to have constructive and pragmatic conversations.

We will at all times defend our national interests and the best interests of Canadians. The meeting was a first step toward recalibrating the relationship and fighting for Canada's interests on the world stage in a way that is most effective.

In those meetings, I raised a number of issues. The strategic partnership was one of them, but I will reiterate that we are in a moment of recalibrating that relationship.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go next to MP Anita Vandenbeld.

You have six minutes.

Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's wonderful to see you here, Minister.

We're here at a very fortuitous moment, because tomorrow, October 31, is exactly 25 years since the signing of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. At that time, it was recognized that if women are part of peace processes throughout the entire process, peace agreements are more sustainable. In fact, what we've seen is that if women are at the table, they are 35% more likely to have a peace deal that lasts 15 years or more.

I know that Canada, of course, is now on its third national action plan for women, peace and security, which goes from 2023 to 2029. I wonder if you could comment a bit on some of the successes, because one of the things we said 25 years ago, which I raised again in my maiden speech in Parliament 10 years ago, is that gone are the days when you have warlords who sit around a table, divide the spoils of war and call it a peace deal.

Why is it important that we have inclusive peace agreements that count for everybody in a society? Can you tell us some of the successes that Canada has had?

Hon. Anita Anand: I thank my honourable colleague for the question and for her work in this area over a number of years. As she rightly points out, Canada has been a champion of gender equality for decades.

In 2023-24 alone, Canada reached over 40 million people with international assistance projects, and some of those projects addressed sexual and gender-based violence. Recently, in terms of successes, I'd characterize them as a co-operative effort. Canada joined 30 other countries in a declaration at the fourth ministerial conference on feminist foreign policy in Europe, on October 22 and 23, in support of gender equality, women's rights and a feminist approach to international engagement. Canada remains committed to implementing the WPS—that's women, peace and security—agenda through our third national action plan, which extends to 2029.

Let me conclude this response simply by saying that, as we mark the 25th anniversary of the WPS agenda, we should look back and reflect on progress, but we also have to focus on the immense work ahead.

• (1545)

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much, Minister, for that commitment. We know that despite Canada's leadership, in 2024, according to UN Women, of the peace agreements that were signed, only 7% were signed by women, and only 14% of peace mediators globally in the conflicts around the world are women.

I would just like to ask you something personally, because you are a very strong woman leader in your own right who has committed tremendously in your career to gender equality, to women's participation and to women's inclusion. You've also been defence minister and foreign affairs minister. You have a particularly unique perspective about why women's voices contribute to greater outcomes and longer lasting peace, and why that is important.

I wonder if you could give us a few of your personal reflections about what is needed, and also about what the opportunities are for Canada to lead in this area.

Hon. Anita Anand: The statistics you mentioned are very important. There's another statistic that I think about also, which is that conflict-related sexual violence documented by the UN has increased by 87% over the last two years alone. It is so important to ensure that there are women's voices at the table. The second term of Canada's ambassador for women, peace and security concluded this year, and our government is currently considering options for how best to sustain leadership on WPS at home and globally.

My honourable colleague mentioned previous positions that I have held. One of the reasons I ran for office in the first place is that I believe having women's voices at the table, at numerous tables, is crucial in this moment. In particular, this isn't just in government. This is in public and private institutions—in hospitals, universities, corporations and not-for-profit organizations.

As I was a law professor for over 20 years, I tried to focus my research on women and minorities in leadership positions. One of the studies I did was an empirical study on the presence of women and minorities on boards of directors, because my area of research and writing was corporate and securities law. I found that women make up about 16% of public company boards and about 4% of racial minorities on public company boards. This is just an example of the work I'm trying to carry over to some extent to other areas of my life.

There are certain values we hold dear, and one is to ensure that there are multiple voices at the table. One large voice, of course, is that of women.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Next we'll go to MP Brunelle-Duceppe .

[*Translation*]

You may go ahead for six minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being with us today.

I'm going to quote something I read in the news a few days ago: "Just three years after Canada called China a 'disruptive global power,' Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand says Canada now views Beijing as a strategic partner in a dangerous world."

At the leaders' debate in April, during the recent election campaign, Mr. Carney said that China was Canada's biggest security threat.

Parliament adopted reports about that. In 2020, along with members here today, I helped draft one of those reports as a member of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. The report focused on the ongoing genocide of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, in East Turkestan. What's more, a motion condemning the Uyghur genocide passed unanimously in the House of Commons. It was proposed by my friend Michael Chong and, with his permission, amended by me.

Doesn't the new strategic partnership you're referring to, not to mention the statements you and Mr. Carney have made, fly in the face of the work done by the House of Commons not that long ago?

• (1550)

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you for your question.

I'll start by highlighting that I went to China to recalibrate our relationship with the country. To do that, we need a forum where we can discuss tough issues. My counterpart and I talked about many of them, not just in relation to a strategic partnership, but also in relation to human rights.

I would add that Canada is deeply concerned by the systematic human rights violations. We will continue to stress the importance of human rights all over the world and to support the Uyghur people in China through diplomacy. We will also continue the work we started at the UN, through the UN Human Rights Council.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Minister, doesn't normalizing a new strategic partnership with China, including new economic agreements, amount to normalizing human rights violations in China?

You said that you spoke with your Chinese counterpart and that you discussed human rights. Did you bring up what is happening to Uyghurs in Xinjiang and Tibetans, specifically?

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you for your question.

As I just said, it's important to keep in mind that I spent two hours talking to my counterpart, so we discussed a number of issues, including the strategic partnership, human rights and Canadian concerns. I went to China in my role as minister to represent the Canadian people and stress the importance of Canadian values. I think Canadians want a minister who can have tough conversations, and that is, and has always been, my objective.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We're going to have tough conversations with China, but we are going to strengthen our economic ties with the country. In a nutshell, that's what you're telling me.

Before meeting with your Chinese counterpart, did you consult the diaspora communities of the minority groups being repressed? Those groups have a strong presence in Canada, after all. Given your conversation and efforts to recalibrate your relationship with China, what message are you sending the Uyghur, Tibetan, Hong Kong and Taiwanese diaspora communities?

Hon. Anita Anand: I would encourage the honourable member to review the readout of my meeting with my Chinese counterpart. It lists all the issues we talked about.

• (1555)

[*English*]

Canada is a world leader in advancing human rights and the rules-based international order, and this will never change.

Diplomacy is about bringing forward difficult issues and ensuring that we're representing Canadian interests. The diplomacy on that day was done minister to minister, and we will always put the needs of Canadians first. We will not shy away from our commitment to our values, which is present in multilateral organizations, multilateral commitments and bilateral relationships and includes human rights.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go next to MP Abouttaif.

You have five minutes.

Ziad Abouttaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and welcome to the minister.

Minister, earlier this year, the Prime Minister stated that China was the biggest security threat to Canada. Now your government is looking for closer ties with Beijing and renewing a partnership of some kind that includes security.

Have you raised with your counterparts the Chinese government's police stations in Canada? Can you tell us if these stations still operate, or have they stopped?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anita Anand: As I said a moment ago, we discussed a number of issues, including human rights and the safety and security of Canadians. I want to point out that the situation you're referring to is a public safety issue in this country. My fellow minister Mr. Anandasangaree is the minister responsible, but of course, I discussed a number of issues with my counterpart.

[*English*]

Ziad Aboultaif: Minister, you haven't really answered my question about police stations. You are the foreign affairs minister, and if anyone can discuss that with countries such as China, it's you.

I'm asking if that discussion took place, yes or no. That must have led to an understanding of whether or not those stations still operate in Canada.

Hon. Anita Anand: As I said, I invite my honourable colleague to review the readout of my meeting with my counterpart.

In particular, I will say that we discussed several issues of a diplomatic nature. At all times in all meetings, I raise issues relating to public safety and security for the Canadian public. In my UN speech on September 29 in New York, I specifically outlined the three pillars of our foreign policy, the first of which is the protection of the security and defence of the Canadian public. I want to reiterate that at all times in my conversations, bilaterally and multilaterally, I never shy away from raising these important issues.

My point about my colleague, Minister Anandasangaree, is that here in Canada, the public safety and security of Canadians are under his purview.

Ziad Aboultaif: I'll go back to the question, Minister.

With all due respect, you represent Canada and the interests of Canada. That is our job and your job, but again, the question is very specific, and your diplomatic answers to us are not going to serve the committee. We have a study, and we would like to know if you had any specific conversation with your Chinese counterpart about their police stations in Canada.

Hon. Anita Anand: I have provided two answers, and I will now provide a third.

We have been clear at all levels that the issues raised by my colleague will not be tolerated. We are very committed to ensuring that we have a comprehensive relationship so that we can raise issues relating to the broader relationship.

That's diplomacy. Diplomacy is not walking away from tough issues. Diplomacy is being able to have a conversation about Canadian interests, Canadian values and Canadian goals and objectives. That's what our diplomacy seeks to do.

• (1600)

Ziad Aboultaif: Canadians deserve clear answers, and this is the place for it.

I agree that you're going to use your tactics and diplomacy to work with your counterparts around the world, but the committee and Canadians are watching. They deserve an answer. I'm expecting an answer from you because I think my question is very clear.

Have you had a specific conversation about the police stations in Canada with a Chinese counterpart, yes or no?

The Chair: Give a very brief response, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anita Anand: I don't know how many times I have to say it, but the safety and security of Canadians is a crucial part of our mandate and is incredibly important to our government.

I stress the importance of public safety at each and every meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we'll go to MP Marie-France Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

You may go ahead for five minutes.

Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a real pleasure to have you here, Minister.

[*English*]

You talked in your opening remarks about the emerging geopolitical dynamics around the world, and I would like to focus my questions on the Arctic in particular.

You've taken significant steps to affirm Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic, as you mentioned, from the appointment of the Arctic ambassador to the signing of a new partnership with Finland. I would like you to expand on how these initiatives could and will advance Canada's strategic environmental and economic interests in the north.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you.

I will answer in both English and French.

Marie-France Lalonde: That would be great.

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand: First, I didn't get a chance to finish my answer to my honourable colleague's previous question related to women's leadership in all areas, including in peace and security. I just want to tip my hat to you and to my honourable colleague Anita Vandenberg. You both have done considerable work on women, peace and security. We owe a debt of gratitude to you for your efforts.

I would say this, in answer to your question.

[Translation]

As you know, Canada is an Arctic nation. The current geopolitical situation makes developing our northern infrastructure essential. We are partnering with indigenous peoples to do just that.

Canada's Arctic foreign policy sets out \$73 billion over 20 years and resources to strengthen our year-round presence in the Arctic.

For example, we announced the purchase of two new icebreakers and six Arctic offshore patrol ships. We also announced projects to build infrastructure.

[English]

For example, there's the over-the-horizon radar system the Prime Minister announced. I know that former minister Blair played a very large part in ensuring it got off the ground.

We named an Arctic ambassador as well, with an office in Iqaluit, and we took steps to open a consulate in Nuuk. I will be travelling to Nuuk, Greenland, in the coming weeks to officially open our consulate there.

This gives you an idea of the seriousness with which we are taking our Arctic foreign policy, which sees a greater footprint in the Arctic.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

In August, you attended the Nordic Five meeting. How is Canada expected to work more closely with all the Nordic countries on Arctic security? I know you mentioned it, but I'd like to hear you talk about the meetings you had and the way that countries in Europe, Baltic states specifically, can benefit.

Hon. Anita Anand: That's a good question.

[English]

I wanted to delve a little deeper, but I wanted to wait to see if you wanted to ask anything else.

Obviously, the Arctic is an area that affects a number of countries, so what I have been pushing is the viewpoint that NATO, a collective defence organization for the North Atlantic, should focus on the North Atlantic and the Arctic as well as on Europe.

I've had this conversation with my counterparts in the Nordic Five—Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland. I've also spoken with Secretary Rubio and the Secretary General of NATO, Mark Rutte, about the point that as we see greater threats in the

Arctic, we need to utilize multilateral alliances and collective defence to address those issues.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

I'm looking for an honest answer, Minister.

Given your meetings and discussions, and your mission to China, do you think it's more likely that trade with China will increase or that human rights violations will decrease?

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand: That is an issue the Prime Minister is currently addressing in the region. In my conversations with my counterpart recently, I took steps to recalibrate the relationship so that Canada can have a conversation—

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Minister, I asked a short question, and I expected a short answer. We have to share my speaking time, and you weren't answering the question, even though it was a very simple one.

As you know, many of the goods that come from China are produced using forced labour, child labour. The U.S. passed much tougher legislation on imports produced by forced labour than Canada did. In 2023-24, your government made commitments to get tough on forced labour, but never managed to bring in significantly stronger legislation. My colleague, the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot—Acton, just introduced Bill C-251, which basically follows through on the Liberal government's broken promise.

Are you going to support the bill, which shifts the burden of proof from customs authorities to importers, who would have to demonstrate that the merchandise was not made with forced labour? It's more or less a copy of the U.S. law.

Will your government finally follow through on the promise it made and support the Bloc Québécois's bill?

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you for your question.

First, I will say that we are examining the bill, its substance and next steps. I will also say that forced labour is unacceptable, and we need to make sure that our global supply chains are free of such violations. I discussed those issues with my colleagues the Minister of Public Works and Procurement, Mr. Lightbound, and the Minister of International Trade, Mr. Sidhu. We will protect Canada's interests while respecting labour standards for all workers.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Next we have MP Chong for five minutes.

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

Minister, as you know, oil and gas are Canada's single-largest exports. I'd like to once again focus on the Prime Minister's comments at ASEAN, where he said that Canada is an "unabashed energy superpower" and that he wants to expedite exports of oil and gas.

As you know, Minister, the Prime Minister has a special responsibility for the conduct of international affairs. I note that in "Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy", the word "oil" does not appear once, the word "gas" does not appear once, the word "LNG" does not appear once and there's no mention of increasing and expediting the increase of Canada's oil and gas exports.

My question is simple. Will the IPS be updated now that the Prime Minister has set this as a foreign policy priority, or is it dead letter?

Hon. Anita Anand: I have asked my department to provide me with an update to the Indo-Pacific strategy, period. I believe the Indo-Pacific strategy needs to be updated, because we have a new government, a new foreign policy and a new Prime Minister.

You rightly point out that there is a need to ensure that our bilateral relationships are raising the issues that matter to this country. The world has changed since the Indo-Pacific strategy was released, and we need to ensure that our foreign policy is responsive to Canada's needs now. That is why the Prime Minister recently announced that Canada is embarking on a new mission, which is to double our non-U.S. exports in the next decade. That is why the LNG exports we have seen from Canada's west coast will continue.

In my travels and in every bilateral conversation, I hear that the world wants more Canada. They want to find out how they can participate in the benefits of Canada's LNG exports and Canada's energy. This is absolutely clear from every conversation I'm in. I will always, in those meetings, connect the energy minister of the country I'm in with our energy minister, Minister Hodgson. That is why the issue of energy and Canada's ability to be an energy superpower figures so centrally in every bilateral conversation I'm in.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for that answer, and thank you for the information that the Indo-Pacific strategy has been updated.

Could you tell the committee the time frame that we're looking at for an updated Indo-Pacific strategy?

Hon. Anita Anand: I have asked the department to come forward with it as soon as possible.

Perhaps I could ask my deputy minister to provide us with some information related to timing.

David Morrison (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): My marching orders were for it to be as soon as possible, so it will be as soon as possible.

I would say, though, that strategies are not straitjackets. As the minister has said, the world now is very different than it was in 2022, when the strategy was released. We are not waiting, as recent events have shown, to take initiatives that are no longer completely in keeping with what we wrote in 2022.

I think that's why you've seen Minister Anand on the road and why you're seeing some of the things the Prime Minister is saying and doing.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you. I'll just finish with a comment.

We've long felt that Canada needs to increase its conventional energy exports, particularly liquefied natural gas. It would be good to see Canadian liquefied natural gas displace Qatari and Russian natural gas, particularly with partners in the Indo-Pacific, such as Japan, and with allies like Germany and other European allies.

I hope the government is going to deliver on this increase to expedite these exports. We believe that it's imperative, not just for our economy, but equally for our defence and security—both for Euro-Atlantic defence and security and for Indo-Pacific defence and security.

● (1615)

Hon. Anita Anand: That's exactly right.

Let's just go through the list. I've had this very conversation with my counterparts in Japan and India. I had it with my South Korean counterpart when I met him in New York, and I've had it in Mexico. The list goes on.

The reality is that Canada is already seen as a leader in LNG. What we need to do is continue our competitive advantage and leadership in this area. That is the intention of the Government of Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Next we will go to MP Bill Blair.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I give my personal welcome to Minister Anand and all of our officials from GAC. We're very grateful to have you here today.

I'm going to begin with a bit of an observation. I listened very carefully, Minister Anand, to your principled and powerfully expressed address to the UN General Assembly a few weeks ago, in which you reaffirmed Canada's commitment to multilateralism, peace and the international rule of law. Frankly, I was very proud, as I heard you emphasize that Canada's foreign policy was contributing to peace, defending democracy and strengthening global resilience. I believe the position you took was a very clear articulation of Canada's position and was equally a good reassessment of our long-standing history and commitment to those values.

Minister Anand, under your leadership, Canada's foreign policy has placed a great emphasis on striking a balance between our principled values, which you articulated, and pragmatic engagement. I note that you recently travelled for conversations with your counterparts in China and India, and of course you work very regularly with Secretary Rubio. We've seen you in the White House in conversation with the Prime Minister and the President of the United States.

How do you see balancing this complex relationship? You're engaging with major powers and attempting to promote human rights and democratic values, and yet, on behalf of all Canadians, you still have to be pragmatic in your approach when dealing with those countries.

Hon. Anita Anand: To my honourable colleague, thank you so much for the question.

I think it really speaks to the approach required of Canadian diplomacy at this moment in time in a geopolitical environment that is volatile—an environment that you know well—and at a time when the economic environment is under stress, both at home and internationally.

What that requires is diplomacy that is pragmatic. What I mean by “pragmatic” is diplomacy that is intentional and can ensure that the country on the opposing side is able to listen to Canada's concerns, Canada's values and Canada's needs, whether those needs relate to public safety concerns, economic concerns or people-to-people ties. The list goes on.

That's the approach now. It is very much about ensuring that Canada is at the table and having the conversation while at the same time promoting the defence and security of our country and the economic resilience of our domestic economy.

What we will do is ensure that our core values are represented—our values relating to multilateralism and our values relating to environment sustainability, to women, to peace and security, and to gender-based violence. Those values need to find voice in our foreign policy as well. We are operating with multiple objectives in mind, and we are doing this strategically and intentionally.

One of the reasons I was so honoured to give the speech at the United Nations was that it was an opportunity to write down and say to Canadians, as well as to the world at large, what the foreign policy objectives of our country will be going forward.

• (1620)

Hon. Bill Blair: I actually had the experience of sitting down once with the Chinese defence minister. I think there's a tendency in the initial engagements to just simply *démarche* each other on all of the previous grievances, the history of grievances, we share with each other. My sense is that you're taking it well beyond that conversation and that you're doing a more pragmatic, mutual interest exploration with major superpowers.

Some of the earlier questions asked if you had brought up this or that. I think that is how we begin many of those conversations, but my sense is that you're taking it well beyond simply a *démarche* of our historical grievances.

The Chair: Unfortunately, there's no time for a response, so we will have to—

Hon. Anita Anand: I'd just like to thank my hon. colleague for his work as minister of national defence.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have an opportunity for only three interventions of three minutes each, beginning with MP Kramp-Neuman.

You have three minutes.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga, CPC): Thank you.

Minister, one of your department's three key, top priorities is to “protect the security and prosperity of Canada and Canadians by addressing international security threats which have direct implications on national and economic security, in close cooperation with allies”.

Earlier this week, there were two disturbing news reports about Canadian weapons being used by Russians in their illegal war against Ukraine. The first involved the use of Cadex sniper rifles. More concerning was the second one, from The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation, involving millions of dollars of Canadian defence products being legally—not through smuggling, but legally—exported into Hong Kong and subsequently from Hong Kong into Russia.

Could you answer if you are aware of these reports?

Hon. Anita Anand: I am aware of the reports. I have asked my department to provide more information relating to those reports.

I am also of the view that Canada has one of the strongest military export control systems in the world and that we take our obligations under the governing law very seriously. Anyone who violates Canada's export control laws will face serious consequences. Violating the Canadian Export and Import Permits Act can result in serious penalties, including fines, imprisonment and seizure of goods. Their severity depends on the nature and frequency of the offence.

As a former academic and lawyer—

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Just because of the—

Hon. Anita Anand: —I understand the law and take it very seriously.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: I'll go on, given the nature of the short time.

Losing track of these weapons is indeed a large deal. The report maps where Canadian parts are in service, who's moving them and why Canada's sanctions and enforcement architecture has failed to keep up.

Are there specific actions your department has taken specifically with regard to the Cadex rifles and the report itself?

Hon. Anita Anand: Given that the question relates to the department, I'll ask the head of the department, my deputy minister, to respond further.

David Morrison: I'll simply say we're continuing to look into it.

It bears saying, and it is borne out by what the minister has said, that Canada itself doesn't sell arms. Canada has a regime through which private companies sell arms, and it is up to the private companies to obey the law.

We are also party to the Arms Trade Treaty. We take that obligation extraordinarily seriously, as the minister said. We have an arms export regime that other countries use to model their own arms export regimes.

The answer to your question is that we're still looking into it.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Correct me if I'm wrong—

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're over the time.

Next is MP Anita Vandenberg.

You have three minutes.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much.

Minister, Canada has always been a country that has both benefited from and contributed to the international rules-based order, an order that has led to decades of prosperity and relative peace.

When it comes to the current geopolitical situation, we're seeing more and more polarization and we're seeing the rise of an anti-democratic narrative and authoritarianism that is challenging the values of gender equality, pluralism, democracy, human rights, and freedom of the media.

In what way is Canada continuing to contribute to and strengthen the international rules-based order, and particularly democracy?

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Unfortunately, the interpretation channel isn't working. I suggest giving the floor to a member in the room, because the health and safety of the interpreters is at risk. I want to let those following our proceedings know that there are gaps in the interpretation because of a poor connection. I want us to respect that.

Anita Vandenberg: It's the same connection as usual, though.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm no IT expert, but it's not working.

[*English*]

Anita Vandenberg: Actually, I think I'm finished my questions, so I'll just leave it with the minister.

Hon. Anita Anand: I believe the question related to the rules-based international order and what Canada is doing to support the multilateralism that underpins and has underpinned our foreign policy.

We're in an environment where countries are becoming more protectionist and retreating towards unilateralism to some extent. I want to reiterate here today, as I did at the United Nations, that Canada will not retreat. Canada will continue to uphold the values of multilateralism that have provided Canadians with prosperity since the end of the Second World War.

Whether it is the WTO, NATO, NORAD or the United Nations, Canada will continue to stand strongly, co-operatively and collabo-

ratively with countries around the world in support of multilateralism and the rules-based international order.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, you have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, next Thursday, the committee will be meeting to discuss Jimmy Lai's situation. His legal team will be here, as well as some international witnesses, including his son Sébastien Lai. Irwin Cotler, whom you know well, has also spoken out for Mr. Lai, who is being unjustly imprisoned in Hong Kong right now.

Besides his release, of course, Mr. Lai's legal team is mainly asking that he be granted Canadian citizenship. His son and Mr. Cotler have called for the same thing. I haven't heard where the government stands on the matter, however. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has not commented, the Prime Minister has not commented, and you have not commented. No one in the government has made clear what the government's position is.

Here and now, can you tell the committee and the witnesses we are meeting with next week whether the granting of Canadian citizenship is a possibility?

Hon. Anita Anand: I don't think that's true, because the Prime Minister specifically mentioned Jimmy Lai's case.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm talking about granting him citizenship.

Hon. Anita Anand: The Prime Minister said that this man's case was very important, but he said other things as well. I urge you to listen to his remarks. I can send you what he said.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Does that mean Jimmy Lai won't be getting Canadian citizenship?

Hon. Anita Anand: I don't have the Prime Minister's comments in front of me, but he talked about the support that was provided to him.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Is it support to grant him Canadian citizenship?

You said that what I said wasn't true, but what I said was that I hadn't heard anyone comment on granting Mr. Lai Canadian citizenship. That's what I was asking about. The main request from Mr. Cotler and others speaking out on Mr. Lai's behalf is that he be granted Canadian citizenship. Mr. Lai's entire legal team is asking for that.

Everything I said is true, because no one in the government has taken a position on that request.

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand: Questions relating to citizenship, as I'm sure my honourable colleague is aware, are not within Global Affairs Canada's mandate. They are within that of IRCC, and I encourage you to direct that question to my colleague responsible for immigration matters. I'm sure my colleague is aware that I am not responsible for immigration matters.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: When Mélanie Joly was the foreign affairs minister, we were asking about a similar situation involving someone you know quite well, someone who was imprisoned in Saudi Arabia. We were calling on the government to grant that person Canadian citizenship, and Mélanie Joly answered questions about the matter.

A Chinese government dissident is in jail in Hong Kong. He has ties to Canada, and his legal team is asking Canada to grant him citizenship so that he can have access to consular services, and I believe those services are your responsibility.

[English]

The Chair: We're out of time, unfortunately. I'll have to end it there.

Thank you so much, Minister, for coming in, and thank you to the officials, of course, for your appearance before the committee today.

That concludes the first half of this meeting, colleagues. The meeting is suspended.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

Colleagues, the clerk of the committee circulated three draft budgets earlier today in relation to the following studies: mandate of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, \$500; situation in Haiti and Canada's response, with a supplementary budget in the amount of \$1,500; and update on Gaza, in the amount of \$500.

Does the committee approve these budgets?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I would like to inform you that we have two opportunities for informal meetings with foreign delegations on Tuesday, November 18, prior to our regular meeting from 11 to one.

The first one is with the UNHCR. We will hold an informal meeting with the deputy high commissioner of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from 9 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. This meeting will be held jointly with the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The second informal meeting will be from 10 to 11 with the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Finland. Please note that this informal meeting had already been discussed in September. The clerk will send a confirmation email as soon as possible.

In the meantime, do I have the committee's approval to plan these two informal meetings in collaboration with the standing committees on immigration and national defence and to share with them the hospitality costs related to their organization?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you. We encourage you take part in these meetings in large numbers.

Next, colleagues, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 23, 2025, the committee is resuming its study of the situation in Haiti and Canada's response.

[Translation]

For our second hour, we have joining us André François Giroux, Ambassador of Canada to Haiti.

[English]

Up to five minutes will be given for remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

I now invite Mr. Giroux to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

[Translation]

André François Giroux (Ambassador of Canada to Haiti, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, committee members. My name is André François Giroux, and I am Canada's ambassador to Haiti. With me today is Ian Myles, executive director of the Haiti division at Global Affairs Canada.

Before I give my opening statement, I want to say that my thoughts are with the victims of hurricane Melissa. Twenty-eight people in Haiti, including 10 children, have died, mainly because of river flooding and landslides caused by heavy rains. More than a thousand people have been displaced, and 500 homes have been flooded. The situation is under control, but I can assure you that, both on our end and on the Haitian government's end, support has been mobilized to help victims.

My colleague Mark Richardson, the director general of the Central America and Caribbean bureau, gave the committee a presentation on September 24, and today, I would like to give you an update on Canada's ongoing efforts to support stability in Haiti.

My presentation will focus on the measures Canada is taking to support the implementation of the gang suppression force established by the UN Security Council under recently adopted resolution 2793. I will also talk about our efforts to encourage Haitian authorities as they undertake initiatives to implement the transition, and strengthen the justice system to combat corruption and impunity in Haiti.

[English]

After the appearance of my colleague Mark Richardson, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2793 on September 30, 2025, which sets out a new mandate to transition the multinational security support mission in Haiti into a new gang suppression force for an initial 12-month period.

With a robust chapter VII response to neutralize, isolate and deter gangs, the GSF mission will mobilize up to 5,500 military and police personnel and require major new contributions of troops and money. Canada has agreed to be part of the standing group of partners, which will provide strategic oversight, policy decision-making and the mobilization of international support for force generation and for voluntary financial contribution to the gang suppression force mission.

Let's be clear. This mission is critical to Haiti's stability. That's why Minister Anand announced an additional \$40 million of new funding to the GSF at the UN General Assembly high-level week. This is in addition to the \$86.2 million provided to the original MSSM. Canada's total international assistance to Haiti is now well over \$450 million since 2022.

As U.S. leadership will be key to the success of the mission, we are working closely with the U.S. and other SGP members to operationalize the resolution and mobilize the resources required for it to deliver on its robust mandate.

● (1640)

[Translation]

At a political level, from the beginning, we have been encouraging the transitional authority to work with all the groups that established the body, in order to deliver on the major transition initiatives. I am referring to restoring security and tackling the root causes of the problem, namely corruption and impunity, breaking up monopolies to foster economic recovery and organizing elections.

Unfortunately, the authorities have not managed thus far to deliver the expected results or to show a willingness to serve the interests of the Haitian people. As we speak, more than half the population is in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 1.3 million people have been displaced within the country because of violence.

With the end of the transition period just a few months away—February 7, 2026, to be precise—pursuant to the April 4 agreement signed by all the stakeholders, the transitional authorities have yet to lay out a timetable for elections to be held in the next year.

In that context, in line with Canada's priorities, we continue to work closely with our main partners to demand tangible progress, while strengthening our dynamic sanctions regime.

The condition of our engagement with Haiti is that we work together to make sure that our investments make a difference, by ensuring that current and future Haitian authorities work seriously to address the root causes of insecurity in the country.

[English]

While stabilization remains the immediate priority, Canada continues to work with Haitians and international partners to address

the root causes of insecurity in the country. This includes combatting corruption and impunity, as well as efforts to professionalize and modernize the judicial system.

To this end, Canada has been actively supporting initiatives led by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Lawyers Without Borders Canada and the United Nations Development Programme aimed at enhancing Haiti's capacity to investigate corruption, reinforcing judicial independence and integrity and expanding access to justice for the country's most vulnerable populations.

As long as ill-intentioned members of the Haitian economic and political elite and criminal actors continue to benefit from the impunity that has been in place for the past decades, nothing will change, and our security efforts will have a very limited impact over the longer time.

As G7 president, Canada has sought to mobilize international support for the establishment of specialized judicial units focused on financial crimes and mass crimes through the adoption by the transitional authorities of a decree on April 21, 2025, aimed at better framing the fight against impunity and corruption and addressing human rights violations. Through a monitoring committee that we have established with diplomatic missions and international partners, we continue to closely follow the process of setting up these units, as well as the adoption of operational rules that can ensure their effectiveness, transparency, security and sustainability.

Through our international assistance program, we are funding initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacity of Haitian authorities to investigate and prosecute cases and are providing tools and resources to help the Haitian population report instances of corruption and seek justice. In this regard, the active involvement of civil society actors remains a key factor for success and for genuine ownership of anti-corruption efforts by the Haitian society as a whole. Canada encourages and supports the collective action of the country's vital forces in this area.

Our solidarity and purposeful action are key for the success of these special tribunals. There are strong forces on the ground—including individuals sanctioned by Canada and others—that will work to ensure these special tribunals do not deliver their intended results. It is only with vigilance and strong accountability measures binding the Haitian authorities of today and tomorrow that we will succeed.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're also joined by Ian Myles, who is the executive director of the Haiti division at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

Thank you, sir, for being here in person.

We will start the rounds of questions, beginning with MP Ziad Aboultaif.

You have six minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair.

Your Excellency, welcome to the committee, and Mr. Myles, welcome to the committee.

Ambassador, you mentioned that Canada's role is mostly advisory in trying to find solutions and trying to talk to probably a vast circle of influential parties from across the world. It could be countries, groups or maybe NGOs. What advice is Canada giving? What is Canada's message to these parties in order to find a solution or a path forward for Haiti's situation?

I sense from your speech that this is going to be a very long recovery, if there's a way to recovery. Again, so that I don't get lost in the details, what advice is Canada giving to parties around the world? What does Canada believe the remedies can be to find solutions for Haiti?

André François Giroux: As the honourable member said, we do have a view, but I would add that we do a lot more than just advising. There is the \$450 million we have been investing in rebuilding the national police and supporting the multinational mission, as well as all of our development programs. These are concrete actions we're taking every day to help sustain life in Haiti.

Our main advice at this point is that there is a crisis. We need to address it. If we don't, the whole region will be suffering. If Haiti falls into the hands of gangs for good, it will be not only a Haitian problem, but a regional problem. This will have repercussions for Canada's security and interests.

We need to do something about the crisis, but we will never succeed over the long term if we don't address the root causes of that insecurity. The gangs have been created by a corrupt elite—political and economic—and they have been able to do this because there has been total impunity in Haiti over the last few decades.

What we are doing right now, obviously, is making sure that we are giving the Haitian people the tools to once and for all start addressing that impunity, but we have to be very lucid about the task ahead of us. That's why, through the G7, we have mobilized partners, and on the ground here in Port-au-Prince, we are also mobilizing partners.

This will never happen if we don't hold accountable Haitian authorities, because the many actors who are benefiting from the impunity will do everything to make sure the special tribunals never produce results.

We are working on addressing security, but we are also making sure we are addressing the root causes.

Ziad Aboultaif: Ambassador, it seems like this is a situation between our world and whoever is behind the gangs and groups. There is other feedback telling us that it's bigger than that, that it could be an international conflict between different countries that seem to find Haiti a place for reconciliation of some kind.

Do you agree with that? What will be the approach if that is the case?

André François Giroux: That's not what I'm seeing on the ground, if I can be honest.

There are games being played at the UN when it comes to forces—maybe those are the ones you are referring to—but we don't see that impact on the ground. In all fairness, we have to recognize that despite the fact that some permanent members of the Security Council were not keen on passing the resolution, they abstained and let it go through.

Right now, there is not a major power struggle with Haiti being caught in the middle. It is very much a local security problem that has repercussions around the whole Caribbean region and will continue to, and even more, if we don't address it.

• (1650)

Ziad Aboultaif: I have one final question. I asked the Ambassador of Haiti to Canada this question. In fairness, I would like to ask it of you. Do you believe the church or the religious community has a role in solving the problem in Haiti?

André François Giroux: I would say yes, definitely. I know some faith-based organizations in Canada would like to be helpful. The church is well represented throughout the country here, so I would definitely encourage our religious groups to reach out to the Haitian-based....

The country really does need a lot of help. Right now, a lot of energy is going to security. Security is key. We can't move forward if we don't address security, but at the same time, everything else needs to be rebuilt: hospitals, community centres, etc.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ambassador.

Next we'll go to MP Auguste.

[*Translation*]

We now go to Ms. Auguste for six minutes.

Tatiana Auguste (Terrebonne, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us today, Mr. Giroux.

To begin with, can you explain how Canada's embassy in Port-au-Prince works with Haiti's civil society actors, women's groups and community leaders to ensure that Canadian aid meets the biggest needs of people on the ground?

André François Giroux: Thank you for your question.

Most of our efforts involve working with Haitian civil society because it's really our eyes and ears on the ground. One example is the monitoring committee that we set up to help the government establish special courts.

Civil society plays a key role because it knows the various players, hears corridor conversations and understands which judges would be good candidates and which judges would be less suitable. We work closely with civil society, including groups of young people, women and human rights advocates. Our regular contacts include all these players because, as I explained, they're our eyes and ears in Haiti.

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you.

What mechanisms are in place to monitor and assess the impact of Canadian aid, in particular to prevent corruption and ensure accountability?

André François Giroux: I often say that it isn't easy to spend \$100 million. I say this with a touch of humour. It really isn't easy to spend such a large amount responsibly. The processes are painstaking, but necessary. The best way to achieve the desired results and to track the money is to work with responsible partners already vetted for reliability.

For example, we use the United Nations Development Programme extensively. The Organization of American States, or OAS, is one of our partners. As I said, we work with non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, such as Lawyers Without Borders Canada. We're very familiar with this organization. We work with these partners because they know our processes and requirements and they can ensure that Canadian taxpayers' money is being put to good use in the programs that we designed.

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you.

My next question concerns the fact that, as you said, you haven't received a transition plan from Haiti's transitional presidential council.

What will be the Canadian embassy's next step if no transition plan is submitted?

• (1655)

André François Giroux: For a year now, we've been encouraging the transitional presidential council to reach out to stakeholders—to the sectors that created the council in the first place—and to other Haitian stakeholders. It has recently begun to do so.

You could rightly argue that this comes a bit late, but the council is doing it. We met with the members of the presidential council, a collective council, to tell them that their successes and failures will be judged collectively and that their role now is to ensure a smooth transition and appropriate action. There can't be any gaps in the management of the state.

The council has started consultations with stakeholders to bring them back into the government structure. The stakeholders have been excluded over the past year. The members of the presidential council will need to show a great deal of humility in this effort. I think that they understood the message. They will also need a plan for the elections. The action plan must be clear and must include dates and deadlines so that we can see the light at the end of the tunnel well before February 7, 2026.

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you.

Can you provide an update on how Canadian humanitarian aid is being distributed safely and effectively, despite security challenges, throughout Haiti rather than just in the capital?

André François Giroux: Good question. We're working with the United Nations team, which has a humanitarian aid distribution network across the country. For example, the World Food Programme is a key partner. I actually had the opportunity to visit their warehouses during my few short trips outside Port-au-Prince. They're well equipped and they have warehouses all over the country. They're always ready to take over. They're really our partner organization for these issues.

The presence of gangs also makes everything more complicated. However, let's be honest. The gang members are business people. Their business model, meaning their source of income, involves setting up roadblocks where they demand a toll from people. Without necessarily needing to negotiate with them, we can still reach different parts of the country despite their presence. Obviously, it's complicated. Our partners are the ones handling this.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Auguste.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Thank you, Ambassador.

Mr. Myles, thank you as well for joining us today.

This week, the committee met with Mr. Dessources, the Ambassador of the Republic of Haiti to Canada. He told us, for example, that the key lay in preventing weapons and ammunition from entering the country, not with a view to fully resolving the situation, but to improving it quickly. I've also been hearing this for a long time. I don't know what you think about this.

In 2023, I participated in the study carried out by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. I'll read you a recommendation from the subcommittee. We'll then start the discussion.

That the Government of Canada work with international partners, particularly source countries, to prevent and stop weapons and illegal drugs from being smuggled into Haiti, and assist the Government of Haiti to enhance its border controls. This includes helping the government to increase the number of border service agents, provide better training and tools, as well as make long-term investments of time and resources in Haiti's security infrastructure.

This recommendation is found in the report released in 2023. This means that we've been aware of this issue for a long time. When we talk about source countries that export weapons, the United States obviously comes up a great deal. It's estimated that 90% to 95% of ammunition and weapons come from the United States.

Ambassador, has your embassy made any efforts to address the issue of weapons imports in its discussions with the Americans?

André François Giroux: Thank you.

You really hit on a critical issue. Gangs are better equipped and better armed than the police force. This is a real problem. There are two ways to address this issue. One is to cut off the supply at the source. The other is to try to intercept the weapons as they arrive in Haiti. We're working on both fronts.

We've regularly raised this issue with our American partners. They know full well that the weapons are mainly coming from their country. They don't deny it. However, they have their own regulatory regime, which makes things quite complicated. All things considered, they clearly understand that this factor is a big part of the problem.

The United Nations has implemented a sanctions regime and an embargo on the arms trade in Haiti. This is also a way to regulate the whole process.

Importing weapons into Haiti legally remains difficult, but illegal channels obviously exist. As a result, we're working with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, or UNODC. We're actually funding the training provided to customs officers. We also purchased scanners to help them inspect containers coming into the port.

This approach is truly multi-faceted. However, you're absolutely right. This factor remains a major source of the problem and a constant concern.

• (1700)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The percentage may vary, but approximately 80% of the capital is occupied or controlled by gangs. Generally speaking, this is the area that we hear about most often. You said earlier that an election plan was vital. However, you also used the word "lucid", which I greatly appreciate in light of the situation at hand.

When 80% of the capital is controlled by gangs that continue to illegally obtain weapons from the United States, how can the country's elections be organized in a lucid manner?

André François Giroux: I can't predict the future. However, I think that everyone agrees that no elections will be held before the transitional presidential council's term ends on February 7, 2026. Nevertheless, we need to put a plan in place that allows us to work in parallel. The adoption of Resolution 2793 for the gang suppression force gives us hope that, in a few months, we can start to see a much stronger impact on security to help restore a minimum level of security. At the same time, progress must also be made on the elections. This is necessary to show the credibility of the process, but also to keep up the hopes of the people. They're starting to feel a bit discouraged about these issues. That's it.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The gang suppression force is funded through voluntary contributions. Many people are concerned about the sustainability of the funding, since it's voluntary. We know that, when people become accustomed to a problem, sometimes the populations of countries that fund these organizations abroad may suddenly decide to stop funding them. Does this worry you?

André François Giroux: I'm not as concerned about this as you are. Around 80% to 90% of the mission's key costs will be covered

by mandatory assessments for peacekeeping. The new resolution is great because it creates this United Nations support office. This office will provide logistical support to cover all costs related to equipment, the establishment of bases, food and medical coverage. The voluntary contributions will be limited exclusively to staff costs. We estimate that the United Nations' mandatory assessments will cover 80% to 90% of the costs. Therein lies the beauty of the new resolution. Not only do we have five times the number of staff, but we've also found a viable and sustainable source of funding.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you for your response, Ambassador.

[English]

The Chair: Next we have MP Rood.

You have five minutes.

• (1705)

Lianne Rood (Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you very much, witnesses, for being here. I appreciate you taking the time to be here today.

Since 2022, Haiti has been the recipient of over \$890 million in development aid, of which \$450 million has come from Canada. Canada has again announced another \$60 million toward stabilizing this failed state.

We hear of rampant corruption and that money is getting lost constantly. I'm wondering if you could name the three biggest corruption risks that GAC is concerned with regarding Haiti's government right now and tell us what safeguards are in place to see that the funding is properly used.

André François Giroux: For the reasons I explained earlier, we take so many precautions to make sure our money is well spent and accounted for that I'm not worried so much about corruption when it comes to Canadian funds. We're not immune to that, and something could happen, but I feel very confident that we have the proper systems in place.

So far, we haven't been able to find any disruptions. It slows things down and makes things more complicated, but in one of the most corrupt countries in the world, it is necessary, unfortunately.

There are, however, major corruption risks, and this is not an easy message to convey. We are here for the 95% of Haitians who are suffering and being held hostage by an elite. I'm not saying that every member of the elite is corrupt, but a small number of members of the economic and political elite are completely disconnected from the rest of the country and honestly don't have much of an incentive to see things differently.

That's not why we're here. We're here for the poor Haitians who are taken hostage by the insecurity and who need hope for a better life for themselves and their children going forward. That's why we are investing so much effort and energy into trying to end the root cause of the insecurity, and the root cause of the insecurity, as I explained, is impunity.

That's why Canada is a leading partner when it comes to sanctions. We have taken 34 autonomous sanctions against members of the elite. Some of them are business people. Others are politicians. Obviously, there are some members of the gangs among them. We are acting at that level because we need to break the cycle and make sure that effort in governance is moving towards rebuilding the country and not just maintaining the status quo once security comes back.

Lianne Rood: You talk about corruption. Is anybody performing audits of Canadian aid in Haiti this year? What happens if partners fail on basic accountability?

I'm also interested in what you can tell us—what indicators are available—about whether Haiti is functioning or failing. Is aid funding accomplishing anything at all in Haiti, and how much of Canada's funding goes directly to the Haitian people?

André François Giroux: For the first part, I will turn to my colleague Ian, who is more attuned to all of the processes we have in place.

On the second part of your question, it's not as if the money is going directly to Haitians. It is going directly to programs that support their well-being. Putting aside security, rebuilding, helping the PNH to re-equip itself and providing technical support, a lot of the money is going to *cantines scolaires*—meals for kids—women's health, assistance for legal procedures and so on, but—

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much. I'm sorry, but—

André François Giroux: —for the first part of the question, I'll turn to Ian.

Lianne Rood: —we're almost out of time. I'd really like to have Mr. Myles answer the other part of the question, please.

Ian Myles (Executive Director, Haiti Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Just to clarify, there's no funding going through the Government of Haiti. There's support to the Haitian National Police; that's mostly in the form of equipment or training.

All the other funding coming from Canada is going through trusted partners. Some of those are international—

• (1710)

Lianne Rood: Are audits completed on those partners, then?

Ian Myles: Yes. We have Canadian partners and international partners. The international partners tend to be part of the multilateral system—UN agencies and so on—and they have rigorous safeguards and regular audit processes.

On the Canadian ones, we're more involved in the organizing of audits. They report normally on a quarterly basis. We look at those carefully. There are project evaluations. If there's something we

spot as a problem or if we think it's high-risk, we'll conduct more intensive audits for it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have MP Bill Blair.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador, I want to thank you for joining us here today and also for your service in a very complex environment. We appreciate your efforts to represent Canada in that particular environment.

I have a few questions about how Canada can really help here.

For over 30 years, Canada has participated in virtually every UN-led mission in Haiti, yet a number of the systemic and structural issues that perplex that poor country continue to persist.

As has been mentioned already, we've made a fairly significant contribution since 2022 of about \$450 million. I appreciate that a significant portion of that funding was through humanitarian aid, but we've also contributed fairly significantly to the multinational security support mission through Project Helios, just as an example.

The RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces have been training members of the CARICOM nations participating in that mission, as well as the PNH, on equipment. I think it's an important contribution, and it is strengthening our allies on that deployment.

There's some general consensus, obviously, that the multinational security support mission was not a success. One of the challenges they faced was that ultimately they were hoping for as many as 2,500 people in that deployment, as I recall, but they reached their maximum at about 990, which did not reach the critical mass that was required.

The United Nations, in its resolution just a few months ago in September, has now appointed a new gang suppression task force. This is really where my questions arise. As my colleagues have already mentioned, the support for the gang suppression task force is voluntary, but they're suggesting they need as many as 5,500 individuals. The infrastructure currently in Haiti.... The barracks, for example, at which they would be deployed has a capacity of about 1,000 people right now.

I think a very significant investment will have to be made to make this successful. As my colleagues have already mentioned, we have some concern about the transitional presidential council that has been in place. It has been seen to be somewhat ineffective and, in some respects, corrupt. Their mandate ends in February, and I think there's a legitimate concern about what comes next.

How do we ensure that we've learned some lessons about what has been taking place not just over the past few years, but over the past 30 years? In terms of Canada's many efforts to help and support the people of Haiti, we remain committed to that task, but we want to make sure that our investments have some real impact. For example, we've tried to support the PNH. We're now including in the gang suppression task force Haiti's armed forces. There are some concerns with how it's constituted. There's the necessity for judicial reform to make sure they have an effective judiciary and prison system to support the work of the police.

All of these things, I think, require a very complex response. I would ask if you could perhaps reflect on any lessons you think we could draw upon to make sure that our very significant contributions and commitments to the people of Haiti actually produce the results that country so desperately needs.

André François Giroux: Thank you to the honourable member for the questions.

You are right that there's a lot of experience and, despite all of it, poor results. We are so lucky to have had the Kenyans step up and come to Port-au-Prince. The MSSM, despite all its shortcomings—nothing to do with the Kenyan forces—was lacking sustainable financing and equipment. It's a force that was asked to hit the ground running while it was still in deployment mode.

It has helped in stabilizing the situation, but I can tell you that gangs are learning. They're wise, they're clever and they're well armed. For that reason, we are bringing all of our experience into the new gang suppression force. That's why we have insisted that it be based in the UN support office. That will cover the vast majority of the costs so there's a sustainable source of financing going forward.

We are bringing in the experience of the previous force to make sure we are making it bigger so that it will have more impact. We are providing it with a more robust mandate. It's going to be mostly military, not policing.

All of these experiences are being brought into the new force. There will still be a need for voluntary contributions, but they will be marginal—I wouldn't say insignificant—compared to the assessed contributions we'll be bringing in. A lot of lessons learned will be brought into the new force.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have MP Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I have less time than the others, Ambassador. Let me ask you a few quick questions.

Some experts are concerned about a lack of clear rules of engagement for the gang suppression force. Does this concern you too, or do you think that the guidelines are sufficient?

André François Giroux: Thank you for your question.

As a member of the standing group of partners, Canada is currently reviewing these rules of engagement. I can assure you that the Canadian Armed Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Global Affairs Canada have analyzed these rules. They're currently working on making them clearer and more robust.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I imagine that this must be done quickly in order to set up the gang suppression force without delay.

André François Giroux: This document will keep changing. We need a good plan, but it will be adjusted as we go along.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That makes sense for this type of force.

Lastly, Ambassador, do you think that Canada has learned from the past with regard to its involvement in Haiti?

André François Giroux: As I explained, the challenge lies in the fact that Canada isn't the only partner. However, I can say that we've really learned from past mistakes. As a result, we're pushing for the Haitian national police, or PNH, to play a key role in all activities. We're well aware that the gang suppression force must eventually pack up and leave. We want to ensure that the PNH will then be in a position to take over. We pushed for the inclusion of the second last paragraph of the resolution. This paragraph calls for the Secretary-General to make recommendations on indicators to hold the Haitian authorities accountable for how they develop and strengthen their own security forces, meaning their armed forces and police services, in particular with regard to the necessary equipment. The international community shouldn't need to constantly take matters into its own hands.

We've learned a great deal from past mistakes in order to try to pave the way for a better future.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Next we have MP Kramp-Neuman.

You have five minutes.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

Thank you, Your Excellency, for being here with us, and thank you as well, Mr. Myles.

I'd like to build on the earlier testimony with regard to the transitional presidential council's mandate, which ends on February 7.

You spoke briefly of the contingency plan, of the what-if. There's a lot of speculation as to what happens next. I'm just curious if you could share your thoughts or concerns about the gangs' involvement and whether they'll be intimidating...or altering the results.

In addition to that, is Canada sending any observers to the election? There are a lot of what-ifs and questions on what will happen. Could you touch on that?

André François Giroux: Unfortunately, the transitional presidential council was not able to produce that plan. They've used the lack of security as an excuse, and it's a valid one. At the same time, we feel that we should be more prepared; more effort should have been put into planning.

You've highlighted some of the risk. We need a minimum of security. We need to make sure that the gangs do not use the democratic system to get into influential, powerful positions as part of parliament or even the presidency.

These are definitely concerns. The Haitian authorities are looking at how they can make sure there are some minimum criteria when it comes to registering for office or just running for the elections, for example.

Those are some of the measure being discussed. Will Canada be observing the elections? I don't know. Once we have a date and once we have a clear plan, we will look at what Canada can do in that context.

• (1720)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

I think the million-dollar question is this: What happens, then, on February 8, from a Canadian perspective?

Also, I was reading that there was a judicial anti-corruption review of three members of the transitional presidential council. Can you share with us the outcome of that?

André François Giroux: With regard to what happens on February 8, this is the question we have asked the presidential council to address as a priority. We see it as their key legacy. The situation on the ground did not allow them to deliver an election, so we've said that now they need to make sure they put in place not another transition that will go on for two years, but something that will maintain stability going forward and will have the support of the vast majority of stakeholders. That's the key. It can't be just—

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Is there stability now?

André François Giroux: I'm sorry?

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Is there stability now?

André François Giroux: Well, it is not perfect, but there is a government in place running affairs. There were allegations against three of the nine members of the presidential council. Judicial procedures were advancing, but these members sought a decision from the appeal court, which gave them immunity while they are serving. At the end, on February 8, they will lose their presidential immunity, and the judicial process will be able to carry on at that time.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: I guess we have the “what” and the “how”, but do we have the “who”? Who will then be recognized as government?

André François Giroux: This is what they are looking into. Again, it has to be a Haitian decision—Haitian-led.

We encourage them to reach out to the various stakeholders. They did it two years ago when they created the presidential council. There's not a lot of appetite from anybody to create yet another structure of that type, but at the same time, we need a solid consensus and an inclusive structure that everybody will embrace.

There are many options on the table, many solutions. At the end of the day, it will be for the Haitians to decide amongst themselves.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is MP Lalonde.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you.

I would also like to thank you for your service, Ambassador.

[*English*]

Mr. Myles, thank you for being here.

[*Translation*]

I would like to speak a bit more on a personal level. I represent a community in the national capital region, the community of Orléans. The national capital region is home to many individuals who come from Haiti. You spoke about the fact that we hear a great deal about decisions “by and for” the Haitian community.

We spoke about what will happen on February 8 and about gangs and illegal firearms entering Haiti.

I believe that Canada is well represented, that we're doing our job and that we can have an impact. I would like you to address our committee, but also the community in Canada that I represent and the Haitian community. Can we do anything else? Would you like to share any other ideas today so that we can spread this message in Canada and in our communities?

• (1725)

André François Giroux: Thank you for the question.

I've been in Haiti for two years now. It's a complex situation. My two years here have taught me one thing for sure. We must persevere in our quest for justice and break the cycle of impunity and economic monopolies. The country is being held hostage by a small and corrupt group of economic and political elites who have no interest in change. The Haitians have lost control of security and they need our help. Clearly, we have a vested interest in restoring security in Haiti for the sake of the suffering population. I'm also thinking about the potential regional impact. Once security is restored, our perseverance, consistency and ability to hold the Haitian authorities accountable for justice will put an end to the impunity.

This elite group created the anti-corruption unit. This unit has been operating for 20 years now and has released 100 reports. However, it has handed down only one conviction. I don't need to say more. At this time, the justice system is subject to interference and it lacks oversight. This is where Canada must take action.

My greatest wish is that the people who come after me will focus just as much on these issues. That's how we can get the country back on track.

Marie-France Lalonde: I'll finish by expressing my gratitude. I would like to say that I, too, am thinking of the Haitian people. They're suffering not only as a result of the geopolitical situation, but also because of hurricane Melissa, which has wreaked havoc. Unfortunately, as you said, there have been deaths. I would like to offer my condolences to the entire Haitian community here in Canada and in Haiti.

We always feel sad when we talk about Haiti. I hope that, as a result of what is happening today and what Canada is doing, we'll see a glimmer of hope for this community that so desperately needs it.

Thank you again, Ambassador.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for your testimony and for appearing for this study.

That concludes the meeting.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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