



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 013

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

Chair: Ahmed Hussen



Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

• (1105)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 13 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) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 23, the committee is meeting to study Canada's response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

I would like to welcome our witness for the first hour. From the embassy of Ukraine, we have His Excellency Andrii Plakhotniuk, ambassador of Ukraine to Canada.

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

I now invite His Excellency Mr. Ambassador to make an opening statement.

Welcome.

[Translation]

H.E. Andrii Plakhotniuk (Ambassador of Ukraine to Canada, Embassy of Ukraine): Mr. Chair, distinguished members, thank you for inviting me to appear before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development to talk about the situation in Ukraine. It is a great honour and privilege to be here today.

If you'll allow me, I will continue in English.

[English]

Let me start with words of sincere gratitude for Canada's consistent and strong leadership in supporting Ukraine. Since the first days of the restoration of the independence of Ukraine, our two countries have been close friends and allies. Our friendship is deep and strong and based on shared values and warm people-to-people ties rooted in the Ukrainian Canadian community of almost 1.5 million people.

In this regard, we hope that members of the House of Commons will unanimously support the draft law sponsored by the member of the House of Commons, Mr. Yvan Baker, which would designate the month of September as Ukrainian Heritage Month.

Mr. Chair and distinguished members of the committee, since the start of the full-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Canada has been demonstrating strong leadership in supporting Ukraine, being the largest financial contributor per capita among the G7 countries. We are sincerely grateful to Canada's G7 presidency for prioritizing the Ukrainian cause. We will never forget that the first tranche of macro-financial support was received from Canada—the first Leopard 2 tanks delivered to Ukraine were also from Canada—and that the Canadian Armed Forces have trained over 46,000 members of the Ukrainian military in the framework of Operation Unifier.

Canada is a strong leader in continuous support for the sanctions regime against Russia, and we highly appreciate the recent decision announced by the Honourable Anita Anand, Minister of Foreign Affairs, on November 12 to impose additional sanctions under the special economic measures regulations. Canada is also a valuable participant in the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, as well as the coalition of the willing.

Canada is an active member of the PURL initiative, allocating \$500 million for strengthening the defence capabilities of Ukraine. Ukraine and Canada have launched the international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children, joined by 41 countries and the Council of Europe, as a part of the Bring Kids Back UA initiative. So far, 1,819 Ukrainian children have been successfully returned from deportation or forced transfer. In this regard, let me sincerely thank the members of the House of Commons for the adoption of a motion tabled by the former member of the Bloc Québécois, Stéphane Bergeron, in 2023, condemning the kidnapping of Ukrainian children and their deportation to Russia. We would appreciate it if you could renew the motion in the House, because diplomatic pressure on Russia is still very important.

Mr. Chair, distinguished members of the committee, Russian terrorists are shelling and bombing civilian areas far from the front line, including critical power infrastructure, which is a clear act of genocide and a war crime. Just throughout the last week, the Russians launched nearly 1,000 attack drones, about 980 guided aerial bombs and 36 missiles of various types against Ukrainians.

On November 14, during the large-scale overnight attack on Ukraine, Russia employed nearly its entire range of strike capabilities. Ukrainian cities were targeted with 430 attack drones, 18 ballistic missiles and cruise missiles, as well as the Zircon hypersonic missile. As a result of the attack, seven people were killed and 35 were wounded, including children and a pregnant woman.

The Russians strike our energy infrastructure every single day, targeting gas extraction facilities, coal mines and electrical power grids. Since the start of Russia's full-scale armed aggression, more than 50% of Ukraine's energy capacity has been destroyed, damaged or occupied. According to the latest World Bank assessment, the amount needed to restore Ukraine's energy sector is about \$68 billion.

Ukraine's urgent needs today are the restoration of its energy sector and critical infrastructure, as well as financial support to cover our gas shortages so that we can survive the winter. An immediate contribution to that is crucially important.

The situation on the front line remains tense. The armed forces of Ukraine continue defensive operations in the Pokrovsk direction in Donbass. According to our estimates, the Russians have deployed approximately 150,000 troops toward this specific area of Pokrovsk, from a total number of approximately 700,000 Russian troops operating on Ukrainian territory.

Our long-standing top priorities in air defence are missile defence against ballistic threats, deep strike capabilities, combat aircraft, artillery systems, long-range missiles, engineering equipment, drones and ammunition. Certainly we are talking about additional Patriot systems and missiles for Patriot and other air defence systems.

• (1110)

Dear Mr. Chair and distinguished members of the committee, Ukraine is ramping up arms production, both domestically and in co-operation with our partners. We invite foreign companies to establish production facilities directly in Ukraine. We want to multiply the results of the Danish model, built-with-Ukraine and built-in-Ukraine initiatives.

We are also considering controlled armed exports for overproduced weapons, such as naval drones. In this regard, Canada's continued military and financial assistance to Ukraine, in the framework of our bilateral security agreement, is crucial. We will be extremely grateful if the new packages of assistance, of at least the same size as we had last year, are considered and included during the next period.

Ukraine wants a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, like other countries in the world. We strongly support President Trump's efforts to stop the fighting immediately on the current contact line, yet it is Russia that continually obstructs the peace process.

This year alone, there have already been dozens of opportunities for a ceasefire, but Russia spurned all those peace proposals. Putin will stop the war when he has no illusion of an eventual victory on the battlefield, and when the price of continuing the war exceeds the price of stopping it.

Collectively, the international community has sufficient capacity to make this price unbearable for Russia. We should continue to strengthen the sanctions regime and target the shadow tanker fleet as well as key sectors of the Russian economy, its military-industrial complex, energy, nuclear and chemical industries and IT and financial sectors.

Further bold international steps to exclude the possibilities for Moscow to circumvent sanctions are also very important. We must develop mechanisms to use the full body of Russian immobilized sovereign assets so that Ukraine has the resources it needs to fight the war, to survive, and for post-war reconstruction. In this regard, we are certainly grateful to Canada for providing \$5 billion Canadian as a part of the G7 ERA mechanism for the profits of Russian immobilized assets.

Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, Russia must not prevail. Ensuring Ukraine's victory in the war is the central pillar of any credible strategy to address the Russian threat. Russia is weakened. Despite the Russian propaganda claims, Russia is not winning, and Ukraine is not losing the war.

In 2025, Russia has occupied less than 1% of Ukrainian territory. Due to the international sanctions and coordinated strikes of the defence forces of Ukraine on key military and industrial targets within the territory of the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine, the oil and gas revenues of the Russian budget are decreasing. By the end of this year, Russia will have lost at least \$37 billion U.S. in its budget from oil and gas income.

Therefore, we should multiply our joint efforts to put pressure on Putin and make him stop the war. This is the only way. The concept of peace through strength has proven its effectiveness multiple times throughout world history, and now it's time to use it once again.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Thank you very much. I'd be happy to answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your remarks, Your Excellency.

I will now open the floor to questions from colleagues on the committee, beginning with MP Kramp-Neuman.

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Your Excellency, for being here today.

I'd like to start by suggesting that the Government of Canada and the official opposition have consistently expressed their strong support for Ukraine, and they condemn Russia's illegal aggression.

I would like to speak specifically about the children. I attended the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe a few months ago. There was a specific session about the Ukrainian children.

Specifically, last year, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed Resolution 2529, which condemns the Russian government's illegal, deplorable abduction and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children.

Are you able to speak to how the rest of the European community has reacted, both to that resolution and, more broadly, to the deplorable actions of the Russian government against Ukrainian children?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: First, let me mention a couple of things.

According to our estimates, as of today we count around 20,000 Ukrainian kids who have been abducted by the Russian authorities. They're now on the territory of the Russian Federation. The biggest problem in this regard is certainly that Russian authorities are trying to change the information about these children, their personal data—they're changing their names and so on and so forth—so as to make it impossible for us to track their exact location and then to demand their return to Ukraine and to their Ukrainian relatives.

This is a very big issue for Ukraine, and we are using every opportunity, together with our partners. Canada plays a very important and leading role in these efforts within the international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children. Certainly, we are supported by European partners. We also enjoy good services, and we really greatly appreciate the strong contribution from other states and other international partners—like Qatar, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia—that have channels of communication with Russian authorities in order to bring kids back home.

This matter is truly very urgent. On the one side, the kids are growing. What we see is that it's about the brainwashing policy, about the curriculum in Russian schools, about military training camps—all in order to change their identity from Ukrainian to Russian. This issue is so important, and we really need constant and very bold action and efforts in order to get tangible results.

• (1120)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: This is disturbing and wrong on so many levels.

The resolution itself also mentions Belarus. Are they being forced by Moscow, or is Belarus a willing partner in the kidnapping of Ukrainian children? Even more specifically, what actions can Canada take? How can we help? As the Canadian government, how can we take action? Is it through sanctions? Is it through information sharing? What can we do on our end?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: You mentioned Belarus. We all remember that it's part of...a joint state with Russia. We had reports during the previous years that our kids were found in their so-called camps, where they were trained, educated and so on and so forth. We are tracking this information and certainly sharing it with our partners.

What can be done? There are numerous dimensions of this work. One is certainly about sanctioning. Another is to continue to raise awareness among all partners and the United Nations member states, so that they have this collective response to the Russian violation of human rights. We must do everything possible and impossible to return our children.

You mentioned the Canadian government. We have this initiative, the international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children. We had a very important conference in Montreal. We'll be working to have another one in order to bring as many participants as possible. Only by continuous efforts and by working with partners, imposing sanctions, putting collective pressure on Russian authorities....

The International Criminal Court issued warrants, we remember, regarding Russian officials. All actions that we have on the table should be implemented.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: What do we know about the lives of these children who are being kidnapped?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: We really don't have much information.

What we can do is use different resources. One resource that is always used is OSINT technology. Another thing is that we try to have these connections between relatives, because Ukrainians have relatives in Russia. Another area in which we are working is to engage the church, volunteers, veterans—so, civil society. We use every method that we have at our disposal in different ways to reach....

It's very difficult. It's very difficult, because they have changed their names, their ages, their sexes and so on and so forth—calling a girl a boy and so on and so forth.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: My last question is this: How can we ensure that the Russian officials who ordered and are facilitating these abductions and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children are held accountable whenever the conflict eventually ceases?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: Collect evidence, present it to the court and then bring perpetrators to justice. Justice should prevail.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to MP Vandenbeld.

You have six minutes.

Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here.

I want to start by saying that we all understand on this committee, and as Canadians, that Ukraine is not just fighting for Ukraine. You are fighting for all of us. You are fighting for freedom and democracy globally. We thank you very, very much for doing that.

In that regard, we know that because of the experience you're having, a tremendous amount of innovation is happening in the defence sector in Ukraine. Your needs have changed significantly from the beginning, when they were really just as a recipient of hard materials. You are now probably in a position of sharing expertise and sharing innovations in terms of how warfare is changing. This is on the ground in Ukraine.

I wonder if you could elaborate a little on how the requirements of Ukraine, and the potential contributions of Ukraine in the defence sector, have changed over the course of the war.

Andrii Plakhotniuk: This war is not only about the amount of equipment we have. It's also about the technological race. Certainly, we are trying to be very effective and very fast in our response to the changing environment on the battlefield. You mentioned the IT industry and the defence IT industry. That is really growing very fast, because it's about our survival. When it comes to defence IT, we are ready to share our knowledge and expertise with our partners who are supporting us on a daily basis by allocating financial resources, by making up enterprises and by working to make Ukraine and other foreign countries more resilient.

We have a number of agreements with partners. We have different initiatives. We have fast tracks when we are talking about just financial donations to certain programs, such as the Danish initiative and other initiatives, but we are also working to produce drones and other equipment in foreign countries that can get them produced faster. That will benefit not only Ukraine but also our foreign partners. We have such agreements with the Canadian government, which were signed during the visit by Prime Minister Carney on August 24.

We are working on that, but this requires a lot of effort and a lot of time.

• (1125)

Anita Vandenbeld: Because of that, have your needs changed in terms of what you are looking for from countries like Canada? Rather than sending the actual equipment, financial support is more needed now. Is that the case?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: Financial support is certainly needed. It's not only microfinancial support for the financial and economic system of Ukraine in the current situation. It's also to speed up and ramp up production. We need fast solutions, and we need effective solutions immediately. Drone technology changes drastically within a couple of months. In a couple of months, we will need different drones operating on the battlefield. To be able to respond to that, we need to ramp up production.

Anita Vandenbeld: At the same time that you're fighting this illegal invasion by Putin's Russia, there's sometimes a sense of needing to wait until the war ends to reconstruct, but what I've heard from a number of Ukrainian parliamentarians and others is this: We cannot wait. We need to start reconstructing even now, in those areas where that's possible, in terms of development but also in terms of the economy and manufacturing. These things have to happen in parallel.

Could you elaborate on that a bit?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: When we're talking about reconstruction, there are a couple of things that should be mentioned. First, we're talking about urgent repairs—for example, energy infrastructure, electrical grids, and so on and so forth. When we're talking about post-war reconstruction, it certainly will be a huge, huge project. It will require the strongest possible international coordination and support. We'll be talking about many industries that should be built as new ones in Ukraine. This work should definitely start immediately. We shouldn't wait, when the war ends with our joint victory, to then start with the planning, and so on and so forth.

In this sense, when we're talking about this megaproject, we should be talking about very good international coordination, where

we can coordinate European partners, Canadian partners, Japanese partners and all other partners. We need to build a new Ukraine. We don't need 24 or 25 different models for how the regions will operate or how the industries will operate. We need everything to be well coordinated.

Anita Vandenbeld: You mentioned energy infrastructure. I was going to ask about this. We're now in November, and it's getting cold. Can you tell me some of the immediate concerns, with winter coming?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: Immediate concerns are, certainly, that we need to buy gas abroad, because, as I mentioned, more than 50% of the gas production has been destroyed. We're working on that. The president recently announced an agreement with Greece, which will support us in receiving this gas, starting next year.

Certainly, when we're talking about even Kyiv, the capital city—my father lives in Kyiv—they have shortages of electricity for 12 hours. That's several hours with electricity and then seven to 12 hours without electricity.

This is very urgent. We need spare parts. We need equipment that is being delivered. That's what we're now thinking about on a daily basis.

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

Do I have more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, you are out of time.

I'll go next to Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes.

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

Your Excellency, thank you for joining us today.

You asked us to renew the motion put forward by my colleague Stéphane Bergeron in 2023, and it is duly noted. We will talk with the other parties to see whether it's possible.

You also talked about trading technology for greater drone production capacity. If I'm not mistaken, you've already concluded similar agreements with other countries.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Andrii Plakhotniuk: Yes, we have agreements with other countries, with European partners, like Denmark and other countries. Now, we are expanding this co-operation with other partners.

When we're talking about these most urgent needs for Ukraine to fight and win this war, we're talking about huge numbers. We need resources and need to ramp up production, as I mentioned before.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That means Canada could use those as models to simplify the conclusion of such an agreement.

[English]

Andrii Plakhotniuk: We could be talking about bilateral co-operation or trilateral co-operation. Whenever we can join forces to engage third countries, that would be great.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What do you know, or what do your intelligence services know, about drones of unknown origin flying close to major European airports? Some say they definitely come from Russia, but do you have any additional evidence of that?

[English]

Andrii Plakhotniuk: What we are doing on a permanent basis, since the start of the full-scale invasion by Russia, is sharing our knowledge and data with our partners, so we have the information being shared on a daily basis in order for them to be prepared for any kind of development that they might face.

In this case, we've been supporting not only with information sharing but also with technical teams. We were talking about the drones that were spotted in Denmark's airspace. The president asked the armed forces to send personnel and specialists in order to, let's say, propose a number of responses for how to react to these kinds of situations.

This is work that is being conducted on a daily basis, because we want our partners to be prepared for any kind of situation.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

We talked about children earlier, and many of us were moved by the discussion. These are war crimes, no less. Didn't the Russians intensify their sick strategy of kidnapping Ukrainian children to russify them?

[English]

Andrii Plakhotniuk: The Russians are trying to erase the identity of our kids. They're trying to destroy our future.

When we're talking about these programs and curricula in schools, we're talking about the process of Russification, where everything that connected and connects those young kids with Ukraine is erased from their memories. This is their policy—their deliberate policy. Certainly, they will continue to do that.

As long as our children are kept on their territory, they will do everything possible and impossible to make them Russian citizens with a Russian mentality, with a Russian mindset and with a clear desire to destroy everything that connects them to, and is about, Ukraine.

This is a really important and urgent task—to bring our kids back.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In your opening statement, you thanked Canadian officials for imposing sanctions on specific individuals in leadership positions. Do you think the sanctions are working? You also talked about additional sanctions. Would you have any specific recommendations in that regard for the committee?

[English]

Andrii Plakhotniuk: Your first question was whether sanctions are working. Certainly, they aren't working, but we are talking about mid-term and long-term perspectives.

The Canadian government has always played a leader's role when it comes to sanctions, because we are talking about an autonomous or national sanctions regime. We're talking about 4,000 entities that are now under sanctions. The last and most recent package was very important, because it targeted major areas like the defence industry, the shadow fleet, drone production capabilities and other things. This is very important.

Certainly, we are aware that there are a number of issues that should be addressed properly, not only by the Canadian government and the Ukrainian government but by all the partners. One of them is how to avoid circumvention. Circumvention and sanctions require coordinated effort and strong coordination between the partners. We're talking about different jurisdictions, and we're talking about different legislation, regulations and traditions. That should be properly coordinated. In this sense, we see clear efforts by our partners, in particular by the Canadian government, to have these different rounds of consultations on how to make the sanctions policy more effective, to bring tangible and quicker results, let's say, for the benefit of Ukraine, and to make ourselves stronger.

About additional sanctions, if I may, I mentioned a couple of sectors in my presentation. One of them is certainly nuclear energy, and there are also defence production, the financial sector, and oil and the relevant industries.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have MP Ziad Aboultaif.

You have five minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Your Excellency, welcome to Canada, and congratulations. I'd like you to know that Ukraine will continue to have our support, the strongest support from all sides of the politics in Canada. I have a beautiful community in my Edmonton Manning riding, so welcome again.

The news about Russia's interest in the youth population of Ukraine is not new. There was reporting at the very early stages after the invasion that suggested that. That's definitely worrisome for all of us. The question is, do you believe that the international pressure on Russia is enough to achieve at least the release of those 20,000 children before it's too late? We know that this is somehow going to permanently damage the lives of these children, their parents and everything connected to them.

We are very worried about that. I would like to hear from you. How do you assess the international efforts in bringing those children home?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: First, we are grateful for all international efforts from all partners to support Ukraine, but we cannot talk about how they are sufficient, because our kids are still in Russia. We can say that only when we have enough pressure, enough assistance and enough effort, and Putin is made to stop this war, withdraw his troops and pay reparations, with all those accountable being brought to justice.

What has been done is very important. We are genuinely grateful to all partners for all their assistance and solidarity, and to you, politicians everywhere, for supporting Ukrainian families here. It's very important. It's about the lives of people, but certainly there's not enough pressure on Russia.

Ziad Aboultaif: The question also is on how Canada's sanctions against Russia have been working. We trust that this is the case, because we want our efforts to show some results. If anyone knows Russia, I think it's the Ukrainians. Do you believe that something else can be done?

Can you suggest something for Canadian politicians about what can be done? For the Canadian government, what else can be done to make our pressure more effective and to get better results, so that we advance somehow in solving, if not the whole conflict and situation, at least part of it?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: For Ukraine and for myself as a representative of my present government, first and foremost is to have more support and solidarity from Canadian politicians. In this sense, absolutely a priority for me and for us is to have unity on the Ukrainian cause when it comes to different political parties here, represented in Parliament. Unity is number one.

Second is to be very vocal within different international fora when it comes to talking about Ukraine, raising awareness and drafting resolutions. Then, it's voting for them and implementing them.

Certainly, we are talking about sanctions. Certainly, we are talking about your active participation when it comes to the campaigns of advocacy for prisoners of war and the hostages who are captured.

A lot of things can be done, and you're really doing that. We're really grateful for that, but we should continue to do it every day in order to put more pressure on Russia.

• (1140)

Ziad Aboultaif: You mentioned the number of 20,000 children.

We thought, a few months ago, that there was an agreement on the children. About 1,800 were returned. Is that correct?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: It's according to the number of people...of kids who have returned. It's 1,821 only.

Ziad Aboultaif: That's less than 10% of the total.

Do you have any indication about the safety of the children?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: When we're talking about 20,000, it's an approximate number, because we don't have access to temporarily occupied territories. We cannot verify that this is the exact and final number. It's very important to mention that here.

When we're talking about our kids, we are more than concerned about their safety and about the conditions of their lives. It's a question about their health care and about all other things.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to MP Karim Bardeesy. You have five minutes.

Karim Bardeesy (Taiaiko'n—Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Thank you, Your Excellency. Thank you for your strong engagement. Thank you for indicating how important it is that all parties here be very unified in support—I think you have this—and how important it is that this translates into international forums.

You made a number of statements in your opening around the kinds of additional support—resources and sanctions—that I want to stand behind and associate myself with as an MP with a significant Ukrainian Canadian and also Ukrainian community, with nationals who are in our part of Toronto as a result of the illegal war and occupation.

I also want to thank you for your engagement with the Ukrainian community at the recent Triennial Congress of Ukrainian Canadians.

With that preamble, I want to ask a couple of questions that are not associated directly with your remarks but I think are important to get some further information from you.

First, Canada's response to Russia's illegal invasion also involves support for Ukrainian nationals here in Canada, with a special visa and with other measures. Could you speak to what is needed right now to support those Ukrainian nationals who, because of this illegal war, are here in Canada?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: You have a number of questions. I'm writing them down.

Karim Bardeesy: Sorry, that's the first one. On support for Ukrainian nationals currently in Canada as a result of the war, what are you seeking from us?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: Certainly, we are profoundly grateful for all the support, assistance, programs and initiatives that are now implemented when it comes to Ukrainian nationals. We are talking about the number of 300,000. This is a huge number.

Everyone has issues that they're thinking about, like how to support their families and how to provide opportunities for their kids to study and to continue their studies. Everything that was done was really important. We are grateful for that.

When it comes to ways in which to support them, my mission as ambassador of Ukraine to Canada is to work—and the government is also working in Ukraine—to create conditions in the future, so that when security permits, with everything on the ground in terms of safety, they can return and participate in the reconstruction process. We will need each and every one, with all their new knowledge and expertise, to participate in reconstruction.

When that situation comes, we would really appreciate it if our people could continue with opportunities to study and work, with legal employment and building connections, and then they can bring this knowledge back to Ukraine.

We are certainly grateful for what has been done.

Karim Bardeesy: Thank you.

One of the influences that has helped the Russians in their cause has been their massive misinformation and disinformation apparatus, which I know does not just target North America. It's obviously targeted very specifically in Ukraine and eastern Europe. Could you share your latest sense of the Russian misinformation and disinformation operations and how Ukraine is seeking to counter those?

• (1145)

Andrii Plakhotniuk: First, we have been under constant attack by cyber-attack disinformation campaigns since long before this big war started. We're not talking about 2022; we're talking 2014 and previous years. We have been a constant target for their campaigns.

Certainly, we try to respond to these campaigns together with partners for their support—technical support and financial support. Now, what we see in the Russian budget for the next year is that they have increased the amount of money to be allocated for such kinds of campaigns. It means only one thing, that they will continue to work in each and every resource in order to disseminate propaganda and disinformation, with one very clear goal: to create chaos, to create a situation in which the countries are not united, and then to deal with each and every country using hybrid methods. This is a very important case.

Karim Bardeesy: Maybe I'll just give you an opportunity to get this on the record. The invasion and occupation of Crimea came before this most recent illegal invasion. Could you just reiterate your government's position on the occupation of Crimea?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: It started in 2014, with the occupation of Crimea and the occupation of certain areas in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Your Excellency, how would you describe the impact of foreign soldiers fighting for Russia in this war?

[*English*]

Andrii Plakhotniuk: We're talking about a number of things in this regard. First is that the Russian side is negotiating with foreign countries, and they're using different methods to bring in as many people as possible, sometimes selling lies and also conducting this disinformation campaign.

When we're talking about foreign nationals fighting on the side of the Russian Federation, certainly we are referring to several African countries. We have cases with participants from Cuba, but the most important one is the DPRK. When we are talking about DPRK soldiers who are participating officially and within their military alliance with Russia, we're talking about a very dangerous situation. We're talking about people who get new knowledge and new understanding of modern warfare and how drones operate. This means only one thing—that they will bring back this knowl-

edge to their area, to the Korean peninsula. It certainly creates new risks and very, very big challenges. People are trained, and they return trained, like mercenaries, or whatever we call them.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Talking about North Korea is like talking about China, right?

[*English*]

Andrii Plakhotniuk: When we're talking about China, there are a couple of things I would like to mention. First and foremost, we need literally each and every country on board when it comes to making Russia stop the war. If we could have the Chinese government working with the Russians to deoccupy our nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia, it would be a good sign of such an approach. When we're talking about other things, certainly they are co-operating very actively, because they are strategic partners, co-operating on technologies, in economic regional co-operation, on buying natural resources, and so on and so forth.

Many countries continue to support Russia with foreign currency revenues through trade, investment and participation, but we are trying to work with each and every country in order to decrease such co-operation and to show that it's our joint mission to stop the war.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have MP Kronis for five minutes.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you so much, Your Excellency. Thank you for being here and for your candour.

Like my colleagues, I am grateful for the deep and excellent friendship between our countries, and I am also grateful to the Ukrainians who have chosen to call Canada, particularly my part of Canada, on Vancouver Island and in Nanaimo and surrounding areas, their home.

I know there will be people in my community who are going to be watching things like this because they're so eager for news from home, to get updates and to hear how things are. I want to thank you for alluding to the human side of this conflict in your remarks. I know people here will be reassured that work is being done by Canada and other partners to help bring the Ukrainian children home and to help make things as comfortable as possible for people at home.

Could I ask you to put on your most optimistic hat for a moment? It's natural that everyone also wants to know when and how this might end and when the just, comprehensive and lasting peace you spoke about in your opening remarks might come about. Could you share what the progress is on the peace talks and where you see the best opportunities to move those forward?

• (1150)

Andrii Plakhotniuk: Thank you very much for this question.

If I may respond to this, I will refer to the message my president communicated recently. There were a number of opportunities during this year to start genuine negotiations. We remember different initiatives, including American initiatives that started long ago, but there is only one thing missing: There is no desire on the Russian side to get engaged and to start genuine negotiations. We don't see it from any perspective. From what we see on the ground, he tried to make advancements on the battlefield, and he continues to target critical infrastructure and residential areas. It means we support different international initiatives, and we are ready to talk. We are talking about the leaders' summit, because we understand that there is only one person in Russia who makes decisions, and it's Putin.

We are ready for any kind of negotiation, with the participation, certainly, of our most reliable and true friends. We are strongly coordinating with the United States, with Canada and with European partners in order to find opportunities with these negotiations, but, frankly speaking, I don't see any immediate desire from the Russian side to start these negotiations. They still think they have time and that they can use this time to get a better and stronger position when the real negotiations start. For that not to happen, we need a strong Ukraine: strong institutionally, militarily, financially, and so on and so forth.

Tamara Kronis: Where that leads me, then, is to the coping while you wait for negotiations that will bear fruit. I'm wondering if you could share with us what the state of the Ukrainian economy is: how people are coping and how they're managing to try and build that imperfect life that people unfortunately have to try and find in wartime. If you could share a little about how that is going, I'd be grateful.

Andrii Plakhotniuk: When it comes to the economic situation in Ukraine, certainly we are grateful for all the microfinancial support we get. It's vital for the Ukrainian economy to continue to function properly, but when it comes to people's experience, when this full-scale invasion started, our banks continued to work and to provide services, and our people continued to get salaries. The state and the people have shown tremendous resilience. The system responded properly, but we're talking about the necessity and urgent need for us to receive more microfinancial support in order to keep the economy moving. The expenditures on defence are really huge, and everything is about that now.

Tamara Kronis: I have one last question in the time that I have. The plight of Ukrainian children is very much on the minds of both the Ukrainian diaspora community and Canadians. This is one of the things I know I would be wondering if I were connected to this: Are there ways for people to report someone missing? Are there ways for people here, who might be getting some information, to report that? Is there a registry of some kind that people can contribute to?

Andrii Plakhotniuk: We are conducting our national investigation. We have international partners and national governments that are also conducting national investigations, thus supporting our investigation teams in Ukraine by collecting evidence. They are talking to people who are temporarily staying in Canada and other countries, thus contributing to the evidence collection and then to the processing.

We have this twin partnership, and all of our relevant agencies are working with law enforcement agencies. As always, we are grateful for everything that is being done.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have MP Bill Blair.

You have five minutes.

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

Your Excellency, welcome. We very much appreciate your attendance here, and congratulations on your appointment. You're most welcome here, of course.

Throughout this discussion, I think there's been, quite appropriately, a lot of focus on the military situation in Ukraine. We're watching, with some concern, Russia's activity in the Pokrovsk region right now. As well, there's a focus on the missing children, which is an important and necessary focus.

If I may, I'd like to build on Ms. Kronis's comments about what's next for Ukraine. We are watching the American efforts at some diplomatic intervention. Occasionally, we are optimistic, and then I think we all suffer a bit of frustration with the pace and with Mr. Putin's inability or unwillingness to participate.

However, I'm thinking about other ways that I believe Canada could contribute to the support of Ukraine. We talk about military support, and I agree. We talk about some of the liquidity supports and the economic supports that Canada has provided. We think they're important.

By the way, let me take the opportunity to assure you that support for Ukraine is not a partisan issue in this country. It is my very strong belief that all parties support Ukraine's valiant struggle against Russian aggression, and we want the best for the Ukrainian people.

That's where my question goes. How do we continue to support Ukraine? I know there's been an application to join the European Union since 2022. There's a lot of work that needs to be done there, including a number of economic and civil reforms in Ukraine.

There has also been some discussion—a little on the back burner right now—about Ukraine joining NATO, but historically, I think Canada has a role and could be of some help to Ukraine. What more can we do to support Ukraine?

Then, I want to follow up on that question. I believe there are some economic opportunities for greater collaboration in trade, and in our work among our military industries in particular, because there's a great deal of money about to be invested there. Ukraine's excellence and expertise in that area also provide great opportunities for us to build on in our relationship together.

I'm going back to a “what's next” story. That's where I'd like to pursue your perspective on things that Canada can do to help Ukraine.

Andrii Plakhotniuk: Thank you so much for your kind words.

I would like to mention one specific area: reforms. That's the area where we desperately need international support when it comes to capacity building, when it comes to your expertise and your knowledge in different spheres. We really need it because, when we're talking about membership in the European Union and membership in NATO, it's the strategic course that was determined not only by the leadership of the country but also by the genuine will of the people. It's about the values that we share with our European and international partners.

When it comes to our reforms, we will need further support, and we will need a further strategic view and strategic vision on how to proceed with them.

When we're talking about what Canada can do to support Ukraine, I mentioned in my remarks that Canada has traditionally played a leading role in many issues when it comes to Ukraine. Certainly, being the first country to recognize independence and to provide assistance after the full-scale invasion started, with so many issues, you were, and still are, the leader. We really count on that strong leadership and that strategic vision continuing, and we count on you initiating different formats when it comes to specific areas.

You are so active when it comes to Russian foreign assets, like the well-known fact with the Russian airplane. In many cases, you have shown strong leadership, so please continue to do that. Please continue to support Ukraine.

We are talking about, for example, the coalition of the willing. You are actively participating in the coalition of the willing and supporting it in different formats. The PURL initiative is another one. There are a number of things. There is the sanctions policy. There are many other things we can discuss, and they can appear in the future, when we see how the situation develops, for example, in a month or two.

However, we are talking about the leadership, about these strong bonds of friendship and co-operation that are so deeply rooted between Canada and Ukraine.

• (1200)

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you, Ambassador.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ambassador, for your remarks and your appearance today in front of this committee.

We now briefly suspend the meeting to welcome our next set of witnesses.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1200)

The Chair: I call this meeting to order.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses for the second hour of this meeting. From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Jocelyn Kinnear, director general, Ukraine task force; and Eric Laporte, acting director general, international security policy and strategic affairs bureau. Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions.

I now invite Ms. Kinnear to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

H.E. Jocelyn Kinnear (Director General, Ukraine Task Force, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the committee for inviting me to appear today. This meeting comes at the right time. At one o'clock today, parliamentarians will commemorate the Holodomor, the Ukrainian genocide in the USSR.

More than 90 years later, Ukrainians are threatened once again. Air strikes against civilian targets have intensified. Millions of Ukrainians are without power with winter on their doorstep. Slowly but surely, Russian forces are gaining ground. Despite the fact that Ukraine has agreed to an unconditional ceasefire, Russia continues to make maximalist demands. Meanwhile, Ukrainians continue to push back Russian forces, and to take care of their communities.

Canada has been supporting Ukraine since the start of this brutal war, as Ukraine defends its territorial integrity, its sovereignty and its security. This support is essential to maintain a rules-based international order, and to stop the use of force to define borders. That's why, since 2022, Canada has committed nearly \$22 billion in various types of aid to Ukraine, helping the country meet its immediate needs and long-term priorities. We are working with the Canadian government as a whole to send our best tools where they are most needed.

[*English*]

What does this look like in practice?

To address the urgent humanitarian needs, Canada has committed over \$396 million for emergency and life-saving services and protection and support for displaced populations.

To support Ukraine's priorities in recovery and reconstruction, Canada has committed over \$700 million, including in development assistance.

Canadian funds are supporting Ukraine's energy supply, governance reforms in line with EU accession, and essential services for civilians, including responding to conflict-related sexual violence.

To help meet Ukraine's urgent balance-of-payment needs and support its macroeconomic stability, Canada has committed \$12.3 billion in financial assistance, comprised primarily of loans.

To respond to Ukraine's immediate military needs and support long-term security, Canada has committed \$6.5 billion in military assistance and nearly \$230 million in peace and security programming. Funding from this type of programming strengthens the resilience and capacity of Ukraine's security sector in areas like protection of civilians, humanitarian demining, and cybersecurity.

Beyond funding, Canada facilitates trade and technical co-operation with Ukraine, enacts sanctions to hold Russia and its enablers accountable and increase economic pressure on Russia, and uses bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to coordinate support for Ukraine and increase pressure on Russia. Notably, Canada is leveraging our G7 presidency this year to all of these ends, as well as participating actively, as discussed in the previous session, in the coalition of the willing and the NATO-Ukraine Council.

I would like to share one example of how Canada and Ukraine are working hand in hand—it was raised in a number of interventions in the previous session—as it relates to Ukrainian children and how we're identifying the urgent needs and mobilizing the tools we have at our disposal.

Since 2014, Russia has removed thousands of Ukrainian children from their homes, unlawfully transferring or deporting them, often to Russian families or facilities, where they undergo re-education. Returns of these children remain complex, with legal, political and logistical barriers.

Recognizing the need for international support and coordination, Canada and Ukraine launched in February 2024 the international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children. This coalition has now grown to 44 members. In September, Prime Minister Carney and President Zelenskyy co-hosted a meeting of the coalition on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

On the ground in Ukraine, Canada's international assistance is also going to work to support these ends. We are funding AI-driven open-source intelligence to locate and identify victims, and supporting the reintegration and rehabilitation of returned children.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Like our full support to Ukraine, this work is a moral imperative for Canada, in order to support a partner in crisis. However, it's important to stress that in supporting Ukraine, Canada also seeks to defend a world order based on peace, prosperity and international co-operation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for those remarks.

We will go to questions from members, beginning with MP Aboultaif.

You have six minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif: Your Excellency and Mr. Laporte, welcome to the committee.

You've been talking to our partners, our allies, about what we can do better to make sure we put some pressure on Russia and increase that pressure. The sanctions against the Russian regime are one of the measures we have been taking in Canada.

In your own assessment, how effective were those measures, those sanctions? Is there anything you've learned from our partners in the world that we can use in Canada to make sure that we will be more effective against Russia's aggression against Ukraine?

Jocelyn Kinnear: As I think also came out in the previous sessions, this is one of the most important areas where we can try to exert the pressure needed to bring Russia to the negotiating table.

As you heard from Ambassador Plakhotniuk and from me, Ukraine has accepted an unconditional ceasefire. Russia continues to press for its maximalist demands. Putting that pressure in place to bring Russia to the table is important. It is not an easy job, and it is not a wave of the magic wand.

I would say that it remains a top priority for Canada. Certainly, within our G7 presidency this year, we've done a lot to increase coordination among the G7 partners on sanctions.

Sanctions are tricky. They have not caused the Russian economy to completely collapse—let's be honest about that—but they have exerted pressure in important ways. You're seeing growing inflation in Russia—huge levels of inflation. You've seen them having to draw down quite significantly on their sovereign wealth fund, which was very sizable going into the war. They've been forced to decouple from western economies. They're now much more limited in where they can get both revenues and parts, etc., to fund and to continue their war against Ukraine. We need to keep turning the cranks on this.

Of course, you put sanctions in place and the first thing that happens is Russia tries to find ways to work around them and evade them, so it's also a process of constantly refining and strengthening the sanctions, together with our partners, to be able to do that.

I would say that one of the key pieces in there relates to the oil price cap that has been put in place and that we recently lowered together as the G7 this summer. Of course, Russia is working very hard to try to find other ways to sell its oil and gas, which are a huge revenue generator for it, around those sanctions.

Again, Canada has created, through the G7 this year, a shadow fleet task force to find ways of working together with partners to list specific vessels. Canada has listed over 400 now, to ensure that those vessels face ever-larger challenges in trying to—

● (1215)

Ziad Aboultaif: Ukraine agreed to an unconditional ceasefire with Russia in order to stop the war and maybe start some kind of negotiation toward the rest of the many details that need to be solved around this whole conflict.

I'm not asking you to read a crystal ball, but if you can help us, it would be good for the study. I want to know what makes Russia, besides the personality of Putin and his way of doing things.... What makes Putin change his mind, basically at the last minute? There has to be some agreement. When Ukraine agreed to the ceasefire unconditionally.... I mean, what else can you do in order to show the goodwill that you want to go for that ceasefire?

What made Russia change its mind or not really listen to any of those efforts or respond to it?

Jocelyn Kinnear: I certainly can't profess to be able to get into the mind of Vladimir Putin, nor would I want to, but I would say that the work that Canada and like-minded partners need to keep doing is to continue that economic pressure. They should continue also in terms of accountability measures, looking at different international measures that could be put in place to bring Putin to justice and also engaging diplomatically with partners on whom Russia has become increasingly dependent.

Have those conversations and continue to underscore to all partners and all other countries that this is an atrocious and egregious war, a violation of the UN charter and of international law, and that it can't be let to stand.

We need to have those conversations with our like-minded partners and then also with other countries—non-traditional partners—to make sure we're working toward that.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have MP Bill Blair.

You have six minutes.

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

Welcome, Excellency.

Mr. Laporte, it's good to see you again.

Ms. Kinnear, in your experience at OSCE, as our ambassador to that organization, you led, on Canada's behalf, multilateral approaches to security and sanctions and a number of important measures. We often see our relationship with respect to Ukraine in a bilateral sense, but I think Canada's role in facilitating that multilateral approach and bringing other like-minded countries together is also quite significant.

I might ask you to reflect a little on your experience at OSCE and some of the things that happened most recently at the 80th UNGA, where the Prime Minister took a leading role on the issue of the return of children and some other measures that have been taken on the state of multilateral support for Ukraine, with President Zelenskyy.

Jocelyn Kinnear: I was our ambassador to the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, from 2020 to 2024. As I arrived, the Belarusian elections had just taken place, and there were massive protests in the street. There was a massive war between Armenia and Azerbaijan soon thereafter. I thought it couldn't get busier than that, but I was wrong. Those four years proved very busy.

It was clear to me from the beginning that among all of these different crises that were going on, Canada's partnership with Ukraine was always at the forefront of what we were doing. That gave us the role as trusted partner to Ukraine. As well, Canada has a very strong convening power. We have used that.

We definitely used that at the OSCE. I wasn't expecting to talk this much about that today, but certainly Canada was among a core group that used something called the Moscow Mechanism, which commissioned a report in early 2023 about the deportation of Ukrainian children, as well as reports in 2022 on human rights abuses committed by the Russians in the course of their invasion, as well as the treatment of civilian detainees. Canada has been engaged and really has had a leading role in this human side of Ukraine's war—the return of prisoners of war, detained civilians and children. There was a high point to that last October, when 73 countries, I think it was, and organizations came to Montreal and went away with many signatories to something that is now called the Montreal Pledge, which is a commitment of a global community of countries and organizations to keep these issues in the forefront. As you mentioned, in the UN we're also co-facilitating with Ukraine right now a resolution in the General Assembly, which is currently in consultation with other partners, and we expect that to be tabled in the coming weeks.

Again, Canada does have a strong convening power and ability to listen and engage with other countries to bring and build the tent, so that we can get as broad a support for Ukraine as possible.

● (1220)

Hon. Bill Blair: Thanks very much.

In fact, your experience at OSCE in a very multilateral environment, I think, informs and benefits Canada significantly in that convening role that we are capable of playing. It strikes me, as an observer, that this multilateral capacity to respond appropriately to Ukraine is under constant challenge. We often used to think of it as a bipolar type of thing, but it becomes multipolar, which you see with coalitions of the willing and different discussions and different partners. I think Canada's role in that is significant, and your experience in that environment is very helpful.

Mr. Laporte, Canada has been involved since 2014 in Operation Unifier, which we do not just one-on-one but in collaboration with Operation Interflex in the United Kingdom, and others. There has been a lot of discussion about the possibility of moving some of that work in Unifier either into or near Ukraine. I know there has been some indication from our defence minister that it's very much under consideration. I wonder if you might be able to provide us with any update on where you think that may be going.

Eric Laporte (Acting Director General, International Security Policy and Strategic Affairs Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Certainly. As the member pointed out, Canada's been deeply engaged in training Ukrainian forces. Since 2014, over 47,000 members of the Ukrainian armed forces have been trained in a whole manner of capabilities. We've modified our training. First it was in-country. Then the invasion happened, so we moved out, and training is happening in multiple locations in Europe.

The discussions of the coalition of the willing and the Prime Minister have made it clear that Canada would be willing to consider scalable options, including potentially putting troops on the ground, boots on the ground, if and when required. That's all part of a conversation that is ongoing in terms of Operation Unifier and how we progress it further. There is certainly an active conversation about how we continue to provide the best training possible for Ukraine in co-operation with allies and partners.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

You have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

Ms. Kinnear, thank you very much for joining us today. As Mr. Blair so aptly put it, we will benefit from your experience.

The ambassador talked earlier about additional sanctions Ukraine would like to see friendly countries like Canada impose on Russia. The energy, and the oil and gas sectors, among others, were brought up. Discussions also revolved around imposing sanctions on foreign entities helping Russia in this illegal conflict.

Does the government plan on imposing new sanctions targeting these sectors and entities?

Jocelyn Kinnear: Thank you for the question.

[English]

I'll respond in English, because I'm just a bit more clear that way.

I can tell you, certainly, that we definitely focus our sanctions, exactly as the ambassador was speaking about previously, on eroding and degrading those Russian capabilities or Russian revenues, etc. There's a strong focus on energy. The most recent sanctions that were announced on November 12 specifically target energy, LNG companies and revenue streams.

It also looked at financial sectors, so there was some focus on banks there, as well as cryptocurrency.

Then, finally, on Russia's military capabilities, there were specific entities added that relate to drone manufacturing and cyber actors.

• (1225)

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Everyone seems ill at ease talking about China lately. However, every international neutral observer will tell you that China is playing a big role in this conflict, whether

it's supplying Russia with natural resources or enabling dialogue, mainly with North Korea, which is sending soldiers to Russia.

What is the government's position on China's role in this conflict?

Eric Laporte: That is a very good question.

We know that, in this conflict, China considers itself a neutral actor that wants to be constructive. As others have pointed out, however, we know that China is providing financial support to Russia as well as components that can be used militarily. Further, it often raises Russian positions in international or multilateral forums.

As to Canada's position, we attempt to make those points fairly often to Chinese authorities, simply asking them to use their influence to achieve peace. We also point out that Russia's actions in Ukraine are contrary to the Global Security Initiative that China proposed in 2022 and that it wishes to implement multilaterally. Since this initiative includes important principles such as the territorial integrity or sovereignty of nations, we point out those contradictions in China's position.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Our work also involves asking sensitive questions at times so that our analysts can help us gain an overview of the situation.

You have no doubt heard recently about the scandal involving people close to President Zelenskyy. We have to mention it since it has happened. To what extent will that scandal undermine Ukraine's credibility and its relations with other countries including Canada? I would like to hear the department's opinion on that.

Jocelyn Kinnear: Thank you for that very important question.

[English]

I thought in this respect that the Ukrainian ambassador's response to the final question that was put to him was quite interesting, specifically the important role that Canada can play in democratic governance and strengthening it in Ukraine, a role that Canada has actually played. We have a very long-standing bilateral development relationship that has been focused since 1991, effectively. Well, it probably didn't start in the first three weeks after we recognized Ukraine's independence, but really since the 1990s. Governance has always been a part of that. We are certainly following the issue very closely. I can't comment, obviously, on any specific things, but it is an important issue to address.

It is important that the two anti-corruption agencies remain independent and at arm's length. This will be an important test for the Ukrainian government to see how those organizations and agencies can function independently. Right now, we are seeing the right signals from the Ukrainian government that they are moving to address this quickly. They are moving towards an investigation. What we would expect to see is that this investigation be done in an independent manner that will result in clear findings and corrective measures as appropriate. As I said, I can't speak to the specific allegations or the specific case, but we definitely see this as a top priority.

Canada sees Ukraine's future as being within the Euro-Atlantic family and strengthening its rule of law and governance. Having a robust European-style rule of law and governance with EU standards is going to be critical for Ukraine's EU accession. It's going to be critical to unlock investment after the war. These are the messages that we share with Ukrainians and that I think resonate with them and that they understand. This is why these types of things need to be addressed very seriously.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have MP Holman. You have five minutes.

Kurt Holman (London—Fanshawe, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Your Excellency and Mr. Laporte, for attending the committee meeting today.

As a member of Parliament with a riding in London, Ontario, with a large Ukrainian population, many of whom have settled there recently due to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, I am quite concerned by the unlawful deportation and forced transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia.

We know that 20,000 Ukrainian children have been illegally deported or forcibly transferred to Russian-occupied territories. Earlier, the ambassador of Ukraine said that only around 1,800 have made it home so far.

What more can Canada and its partners do, practically and urgently, to find these children, prove their identities and reunite them safely with their families and communities?

Jocelyn Kinnear: As I was noting earlier, this is really one of the key areas in which the Government of Canada has been engaged with Ukraine.

Let me take a step back. In the context of about two years ago, President Zelenskyy had created a 10-point peace formula in which the Ukrainian government identified 10 different areas where we need to move forward if we're going to have a just and sustainable peace. Of course, Canada is very much in favour and supportive of Ukraine's efforts in that area.

This included things like accountability and the environmental impacts of the invasion. The fourth point of the plan was called the human dimension, which is about working towards the return of Ukrainian prisoners of war, detained civilians and children. Canada, together with Norway, took on the co-chairing of that particular group.

Around the same time, Canada and Ukraine together also launched the international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children. I spoke a bit about the Montreal conference, obviously, at the UN General Assembly, in high-level week. I also mentioned that Prime Minister Carney and President Zelenskyy co-hosted. Canada has been at the centre of really keeping international attention and focus on this issue.

One thing Canada can't do.... Well, I don't want to say that, because I shouldn't be the one who decides, but Canada's not particularly well placed to have conversations with Russia or make Russia return these children. What we are doing is using our convening role to bring together different countries that care about this issue and are motivated to work on it in different ways.

What's happened in this group is that we have several different countries each working to their strengths. I don't want to use too many metaphors, but it's like having a strings section. You have lots of different countries that bring different strengths. Some of them are neighbours to Ukraine and can help with things around returns by being close by. Some of them are in a better position to have conversations with Russia and bring moral suasion to the table with Russia, and that has resulted in many returns.

It's really about bringing all of these players together to do things that Canada can't do by ourselves and to try to move forward on this. I agree with you; those are 1,800 important lives that have been changed for the better, but there's more to be done.

• (1235)

Kurt Holman: I have an additional question.

Ukrainian children are being unlawfully deported and forcibly transferred to Russia, where many are subjected to re-education and pressure to abandon their language and identity. When these children are finally brought home, what long-term psychological, educational and cultural support do they need to heal from the indoctrination and reclaim their Ukrainian identity?

Jocelyn Kinnear: It's actually an area that we focus on quite a bit.

One thing I'm responsible for is our bilateral development program with Ukraine. Through that, we do many different things. As I mentioned earlier, we have a number of programs to strengthen Ukraine's governance, rule of law and civil society. One of the things we try to do with that program is provide supports to Ukrainian children as they return.

It's about the psychosocial support, reintegration and supporting families who are receiving their children when they come back. We do this through a number of different partners. UNICEF is one of them. We also do it through another multi-donor platform. This is definitely a crosscutting theme in a lot of the work Canada does through its bilateral development.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have MP Vandenberg.

You have five minutes.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much.

Thank you for being here today.

I want to pick up a bit on this question of governance. I know that Canada has been doing quite a bit of governance and capacity-building in Ukraine, even before the war and the illegal invasion. I want to follow up on what this could mean ongoing, particularly for things like parliamentary strengthening, elections and parliamentary diplomacy. I know that Canada has supported networks of women legislators, including Ukrainian legislators, to engage with one another.

In particular, about elections, I was speaking with a Ukrainian MP last week, who was telling me that what will happen immediately after the war is that you'll have to have elections at every single level of government very quickly. The capacity to do that may be limited, so it's something we should be thinking about right now. I wonder whether you could talk a little about these programs, particularly the democratic institutions, parliaments and elections.

Jocelyn Kinnear: Mr. Chair, the development program includes a number of different projects. As the honourable member mentioned, we're not in a situation right now in which there are going to be elections in Ukraine imminently, but it is very much the case that, when the war is over, it will be important to move in that direction.

Canada's programming currently does a great deal of work. One main governance focus within our program is around decentralization. That's actually about building the capacity of the different levels of Ukraine's government to work together. There are what are called the *hromadas*, the municipal levels; oblasts, or regional levels; and then the national level. Of course, funding often goes through the national level, and the different municipalities are looking for ways to plan their own recovery and deal with their IDPs—internally displaced persons. Frontline communities have different needs from others, so a lot of our programming is actually around building the governance at the local level.

It's not only about building the Ukrainian government side of it; it's also about strengthening civil society. One thing that really has been critical to Ukraine's path, since 1991, is the very vibrant civil society that it has, so, through our development program, Canada is working to continue to strengthen that.

Elections are certainly something.... We're in regular contact with the Central Election Commission, through our embassy, looking at different forms of partnership there. As you say, it's a little further down the road, but we're thinking about it already to make sure we're passing the right messages so that all are prepared for when the time comes.

• (1240)

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

Actually, you anticipated my next question, which is about civil society and, particularly, women's civil society. We know that, throughout, even before...Ukraine had a very strong civil society. Right now, much of that is being carried out by women, and much of the support that we're providing, even in such things as demining and, certainly, SRHR, but also just carrying on the institutions—the education, health care, sexual reproductive health.... How is Canada supporting civil society? How are we supporting women's organiza-

tions? In particular, what are we doing to ensure that women and women's civil society will be part of the reconstruction, the peace processes—I'm thinking, in particular, about women, peace and security—and also at the political and negotiating levels?

Jocelyn Kinnear: Definitely, the role of civil society—as I mentioned or as I anticipated—is, indeed, a really important one that we have seen for decades now, and I would say that it has only become even more important in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion.

As the honourable member rightly pointed out, Ukrainian women, often through civil society organizations, have really had a super important role in terms of coming together to bring the resources together to provide the support that communities need, particularly in the context where many of the men in the community are fighting.

You mentioned demining, and I'll just give you one example of that. We have many projects funding demining, which is one of the core priorities in our security and stabilization fund, but oftentimes we need the women to be there and to step up and do some of these demining projects. In addition to that, it's an economic opportunity that women can engage in; it's also the women who are the ones who are there.

One of the challenges we have is that the equipment that is used for demining is often actually built for men, so women who engage in this are at a higher risk of being injured through these demining activities. We do have a project where we're working to try to refit the equipment or to restructure and reorganize all of the equipment that's provided, so that women can engage without being at increased danger.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Laporte, I would like to pick up on what the ambassador said because I found some of his comments very interesting. He mentioned the foreign forces that are fighting alongside Russian forces that then bring technology and expertise back to their country, specifically as regards to training.

Is that something you have identified? If so, what is our response to that?

Eric Laporte: First, we are certainly aware of that. We agree with all of the ambassador's statements. We know that the foreign soldiers who are fighting in Ukraine, if they survive, can then return to their country and share lessons learned and information, among other things. So that is really on our radar.

For example, more than 15,000 North Koreans went to Russia, to Kursk oblast. Many of them were killed but some returned to South Korea and will no doubt provide information to their government.

Canada has nonetheless already imposed fairly strong sanctions against North Korea given its nuclear program and its evasion of sanctions. So that is taken into account in that context.

• (1245)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you. I hope they returned to North Korea and not South Korea.

Eric Laporte: Yes, my apologies if I said “South Korea”.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Does the department currently have targeted policies to counter Russian disinformation in coordination with other allies?

Eric Laporte: Indeed, Canada works closely with its G7 partners on disinformation issues. The last time Canada chaired the G7, we created the G7 rapid response mechanism that is designed to detect disinformation. We continued to work hard on this initiative during our presidency, and the other G7 members have continued that work. That is a good example of what is being done to counter disinformation.

We also work very closely with our NATO and European Union allies to counter disinformation. We know that Russia uses those tactics to strengthen their position or to divide people, so a lot of effort goes into that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have MP Kronis.

You have five minutes.

Tamara Kronis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I want to use my time today to touch on the topic of accountability and the role that Canada often plays in the investigation and enforcement of international criminal law. The situation we're in is that we know of the occurrence of a number of war crimes in connection with children and with others on the ground. There are ICC warrants. I'm a bit of a hawk on sovereignty and the principles of complementarity in jurisdiction, but let's assume for a moment that Russia does not prosecute its own crimes, and it becomes necessary for the international community to step in.

Way back when, I was at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. One thing I really learned there was that the quality of the evidence makes an enormous difference, not just for the investigation and enforcement of international criminal law but also for the ability of people to get on with their lives and have their story told and be seen. Canada has often played a really important role.

That's a long-winded introduction, but in the context of the convening role that Canada is playing with Norway in the context of the missing, kidnapped Ukrainian children, what are we doing? Are we doing anything in the investigation space that will help preserve the kind of evidence that's needed? Of course, these things happen several years onward.

Jocelyn Kinnear: The point about the need for evidence and the very particular requirements for making sure that evidence is gathered correctly is a really important one. Canada was actually among the small group of countries that referred the situation in Ukraine to

the ICC in March 2022, immediately after the full-scale invasion began. Canada supports investigations, including arrest warrants for President Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova. More broadly for the ICC and ICJ and what they're looking into on Ukraine, we've contributed both funding and personnel to support investigations into war crimes, sexual violence and crimes against children. Those are things we've directly funded with the ICC and ICJ.

I would also mention that more broadly, through a number of different multilateral mechanisms, we have also.... I can say that at the OSCE, we've provided funding through the ODIHR, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which is part of the OSCE. The ODIHR was undertaking a very important project of gathering, in a trauma-informed way, information, evidence and testimonials of what had happened.

Again, these cases aren't being prosecuted right now. I share the honourable member's supposition—I'm not super optimistic that they're going to be prosecuted in Russia—but having that body of evidence and collecting it immediately, or as soon as possible, in a responsible way that will preserve its judicial integrity and relevance is very important.

• (1250)

Tamara Kronis: Thanks very much for that. That body of evidence will be useful to whoever prosecutes these crimes. The most important thing, of course, is that the crimes are prosecuted.

I want to ask you a question that I asked the ambassador earlier. Putting on your most optimistic hat for a moment—and I appreciate the facial expression that I just saw from your end—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Tamara Kronis: —what do you think the most likely pathway to peace would be? Is there anything on the horizon that we can draw hope from in the current international climate around this particular conflict?

Jocelyn Kinnear: I apologize. My mother has always told me that I need to work on my poker face.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Jocelyn Kinnear: I guess I would say that I draw optimism from the stories of resilience that we hear from Ukrainians all the time.

This is a war, and I remember my Ukrainian counterpart at the OSCE, in the days immediately following the full-scale invasion in 2022, saying, “Jocelyn, one of the things that are so terrifying right now is that everybody is just assuming that Ukraine is going to fall.”

He believed, and it is quite a remarkable thing—considering the assumptions that I think one would draw based on the relative size of the militaries, etc.—that the Ukrainians are still going. That's where I draw my optimism from. I don't have a ton of optimism about President Putin, but I do think that we all need to be determined in exerting whatever pressure we can to bring him to the negotiating table and bring an end to the war.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have five minutes for Madam Lapointe.

Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I will be sharing my time with my colleague.

Director General, thank you for being here today. I was glad to hear you reference the OSCE, because I think my question is going to draw from your experience there as well as in your current role.

I was part of a Canadian delegation that went to the Baltic regions. We met with Estonia and Latvia when we were there last year, in November. We met with military and defence officials there. One of the recurring themes we heard in all our meetings was that a weakness in the defence of one was a weakness in all of our defences. We learned about how they're doing military exercises together and a lot of planning together.

How significant is that in terms of an approach to military preparedness and defence? How important is it that we view that beyond just the Baltic region when it comes to Russia?

Jocelyn Kinnear: I realize it was directed to me, and I have views, but I think that actually my colleague Eric is far more expert and able to answer that.

• (1255)

Eric Laporte: I think the honourable member mentioned that the weakness of one is the weakness of all, in a sense, and that is at the core of NATO and article 5, and of article 3 of the Washington treaty, which really forces all allies to make sure they have the capabilities to defend themselves, simply because of that.

In the case of the Baltics, of course, there you have a number of countries that are very close to the Russian border often feeling very threatened, but they're part of the NATO alliance, and they have benefited from assurances of article 5 security guarantees and the presence on the ground of other allies. Canada, for example, is leading a battle group in Latvia with 2,500 personnel, along with 11 other NATO allies that are contributing to that battle group. That is replicated in the other Baltic states as well.

The fact that they're there means that on a daily basis they're training, they're exercising, and they're ensuring interoperability and communications. They're also signalling and messaging to the adversary that there is, frankly, "no success for you here if you come in the area". That works for NATO.

In the context of Ukraine, of course, Ukraine is not an ally and not a member of NATO, but that said, NATO allies are providing considerable support to Ukraine and wanting to ensure that it is able to defend itself, as it has been. My colleague mentioned how amazing the Ukrainian defence has been over the past almost four years, and it continues to be so. There are commitments out there from allies in terms of long-term security commitments to Ukraine that guarantee, if you will, a continued support ongoing over the long term—military, political, economic, etc.

Viviane Lapointe: I have another question. I know this question was posed to the ambassador, but I would also be interested in hearing your thoughts on it, on the effectiveness of the sanctions that have been placed upon Russia. You hear some experts say that they've been effective. You hear others say that their economy is still as strong as ever. In your opinion, how effective have the sanctions been?

Jocelyn Kinnear: Anybody who thought that the sanctions were going to suddenly cause the Russian economy to collapse, that by putting these in place everything would just sort of immediately fall apart, would have had a mistaken belief back in 2022, but I would say that sanctions are a marathon and not a sprint, and over the course of the last three years, the sanctions have played an important role in degrading Russia's economy.

As I mentioned earlier, by narrowing Russia's options considerably, sanctions have caused inflation to rise. I also referenced the sovereign wealth fund, which they've had to draw heavily on in order to continue financing their war. They have pivoted their entire economy to a war footing. That means that other sectors of the economy are suffering. Is it completely degraded? No, but is it somewhat degraded? Absolutely. Should we continue working in that direction? Absolutely, and when I say we, I mean Canada, as well as all of our partners.

As I also referenced earlier, it's a bit like a game of whack-a-mole. You put sanctions on, and there's an immediate effort to try to evade them. Then we have to pile on more sanctions or measures to work to counter those evasion strategies as well, but the work, the coordination that is happening between Canada and its G7 partners on this, is unprecedented in nature.

We all have very different legislative systems and evidentiary thresholds. We've each built our own separate types of sanctions regimes, which means that you can't just press a button and it automatically goes out, but the work includes regular calls—I was on one this morning—around making sure that we're coordinating, sharing information, sharing evidence with one another and working to make everything as coordinated and effective as possible. It's definitely been an important factor over the last few years.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you very much to both of you for your appearance before the committee today.

That concludes our meeting. Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>