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• (1535)

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 16 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

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.

Before proceeding further, I would like to request the Committee's unanimous consent to have Ms. Vandenberg chair today's meeting, given the Minister's presence as a witness, the importance of this session's topic of discussion and the absence of the senior Vice-Chair and the Chair.

Do we have the Committee's unanimous consent to pass the chair to Ms. Vandenberg?

Some hon. members: Yes.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.)): Welcome. Today we're meeting for two hours to discuss the supplementary estimates (B), 2025-26: votes 1b, 5b and 10b under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Development, and vote 1b under the International Joint Commission, Canadian Section.

First of all, we welcome the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Madam Anita Anand. We are pleased to have the minister with us. She will be joined by departmental officials.

We have Sandra McCardell, associate deputy minister of foreign affairs; Weldon Epp, assistant deputy minister, Indo-Pacific; Alexandre Lévêque, assistant deputy minister, Europe, Middle East and Arctic branch; and Shirley Carruthers, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer, people and corporate management branch.

We will begin with five minutes for opening remarks.

[Translation]

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Good morning, Madam Chair and committee members.

[English]

Thank you so much for the opportunity to address the committee at a time marked by economic upheaval, escalating geopolitical tensions and the pressures of rapid technological change. In the face of these challenges, Canada is focusing on what we can control. Even as fiscal constraints sharpen the trade-offs we face, our priorities are clear: protecting Canada's sovereignty and ensuring our long-term prosperity.

As I emphasized at the G7 foreign ministers' meeting earlier this month, our approach rests on building strong, resilient and purposeful global partnerships.

[Translation]

Canada's strength abroad has to be anchored in resilience, trust and clear objectives right here, at home. Our economic security is also our national security. Resilient economies create resilient societies, secure borders and real opportunities for all Canadians.

[English]

For this reason, our government's foreign policy rests on economic resilience, robust defence and security, and it remains guided by our core values. As Minister Champagne has said, "We are building an economy by Canadians, for Canadians." We are laser-focused on diversifying trade, strengthening supply chains and attracting targeted foreign investment to secure Canada's future.

My recent travel to Europe, Asia and the Americas has been focused on deepening partnerships in strategic markets. These partnerships strengthen our commitment to a stable, rules-based trading system, reinforcing both our prosperity and our resilience to global shocks.

Backed by budget investments, initiatives like team Canada trade missions and our work to position Canada as a top-tier investment destination are creating new opportunities for Canadian businesses and communities. Our network of diplomatic missions abroad has received clear instructions to deploy all necessary resources to advance trade diversification and economic diplomacy. Stable, rules-based trade and strong alliances are absolutely essential not only for economic growth but also for the protection of our borders, our rights and our democratic institutions.

We must also turn our attention to regions where we can deepen ties with like-minded states, including the Arctic. First and foremost, Canada is an Arctic nation. Forty per cent of our territory and over 70% of our coastline are in the Arctic, shaping both our domestic and our foreign policy. We have recently appointed an Arctic ambassador, along with planning the opening of a consulate in Greenland, both of which will expand our diplomacy vis-à-vis the Arctic.

[Translation]

During discussions with ministers of foreign affairs in Arctic states, a clear consensus emerged that it was now time to strengthen our northern presence and collaboration, especially in light of climate and geopolitical changes.

[English]

Canada's latest budget earmarked \$80 billion in defence spending, putting us on a path to reach 2% of GDP this year and 5% of GDP by 2035. A substantial portion of this will support dual-use infrastructure, such as new or expanded airports and ports and runways in the Canadian Arctic.

As foreign minister, my focus is on deepening collaboration with Arctic states and partners to ensure Canada's sovereignty and security.

I will move now to emphasizing our support for Ukraine. Over \$22 billion or so to Ukraine signals Canada's unwavering support for international law, sovereignty and security. We're also investing in cyber-technology and technology-driven defence modernization, recognizing the evolving nature of global threats.

[Translation]

Canada's foreign policy will always be guided by our core values, driven by pragmatism and sustained by budgeted investments.

[English]

That means expanded humanitarian support, efforts to advance a two-state solution in the Middle East, sustained support to help restore security in Haiti and efforts to reform multilateral institutions so that they remain fit for purpose and capable of addressing today's global challenges.

Our G7 presidency this year has placed Canada's priorities firmly at the heart of the international agenda. Canada is fully committed to working with partners in multilateral organizations to advance common priorities and address global challenges that directly impact Canadians. Our core values continue to define who we are and serve as a strength on the world stage.

In conclusion, as we face a global landscape marked by renewed strategic competition and economic coercion, we must recognize that our approach must be sustained commitments and focused investments that reflect the realities of today's global landscape. Our engagement on the world stage is deeply connected to the daily lives of Canadians. Every decision we take internationally is designed to deliver tangible benefits for all Canadians across the country, in every province and territory.

• (1540)

[Translation]

I'm ready to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you very much, Minister.

[English]

We will now go to the first round of questions.

Our first speaker will be Mr. Aboultaif.

You have six minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Minister, again to the committee.

Minister, you've said many times that Canada's export controls are among the strongest in the world, yet the CBC has credibly reported that Canadian-made rifles have now surfaced in Sudan's conflict not once or twice, but extensively.

Has our export control system failed to stop Canadian weapons from getting into the wrong hands?

[Translation]

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you for the question.

Canada has imposed an arms embargo on Sudan under the United Nations Act and the Special Economic Measures Act. That means that no Canadian company is allowed to export weapons to Sudan directly or through a third-party country.

Canadian residents who want to export or negotiate for controlled goods and technologies have to obtain an export or intermediation permit. All permit applications for these kinds of items are examined on a case-by-case basis, under Canada's strict risk assessment framework. Canada has not allowed any exceptions to this legal requirement, and we will ensure that anyone who violates the law will face legal consequences, including fines, seizures and criminal proceedings.

[English]

Ziad Aboultaif: Minister, the Prime Minister was recently in the U.A.E., where he praised their government. During his meetings, did he express his concern over the Emirates' role in supporting Sudan's Rapid Support Forces through the purchase of gold and other natural resources resulting in prolonging the Sudanese conflict at the cost of innocent civilian lives?

Hon. Anita Anand: To be clear in English, those who breach the law will be held to account. It is something that I take very seriously, and my department takes it very seriously also.

In terms of our meetings with the U.A.E., we do raise human rights concerns at every turn. In addition, I want to stress that we are supportive of the efforts of the Quad. The Quad, as you know, contains four members: the United States, Egypt, the U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia.

Ziad Aboultaif: Minister, with all due respect, the question is, has the Prime Minister raised this issue with the U.A.E., yes or no?

Hon. Anita Anand: As I said in our meetings with our counterparts of the U.A.E., we raise concerns relating to human rights, of course. I want to stress that Canada is the third highest bilateral donor in aid to Sudan. We are also very much in favour of the efforts of the Quad, a point I made repeatedly when the G7 foreign ministers were in Canada, in Niagara, just a couple of weeks ago.

• (1545)

Ziad Aboultaif: Minister, again, the question was about Sudan. I want to move on.

At the UN, you outlined a change in priorities for the new Carney government compared to the previous government. You said that the first priority is Canada's defence and security; the second priority is Canada's economic resilience, and third priority is Canada's values.

Is the PM's recent trip to the U.A.E. an example of prioritizing economic resilience over our values?

Hon. Anita Anand: I want to be clear that while these pillars of our foreign policy are listed as one, two and three, they actually are interdependent. Our values infuse our diplomacy on the economic side as well as on the defence and security side. We have here a past minister of national defence not only in the chair but also on the other side of this room. It is the case that our values are core to our foreign policy, full stop. Those values include human rights, environmental sustainability, reconciliation and a commitment to multilateralism and gender equality overall. These are core Canadian values. They infuse our foreign policy, including in terms of our negotiations economically, including in terms of our defence and security, as exemplified by the women, peace and security initiative, which Madam Chair knows so well.

Ziad Aboultaif: Again, Minister, all this is good. The question is, was it raised at the U.A.E. summit, rather than in meetings, that the Prime Minister had with the leadership of the United Arab Emirates? People are questioning. Canadians are questioning. We hear concerns from around the world about that.

We need to hear from you. Has this been raised, yes or no? That's what I'm asking.

Hon. Anita Anand: Yes. We raise human rights concerns across the board in all of our bilateral meetings, especially, as needed, to express the values that Canadian citizens hold close to their hearts. Those values include human rights.

Ziad Aboultaif: What was the reaction of the leadership of the United Arab Emirates?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anita Anand: The importance of our Canadian values needs to be underscored.

As minister, I'm here to say, once again, that we always discuss human rights, not just with one or two countries, but in all of our bilateral or multilateral conversations.

The Government of Canada is there for Canadians and on the issues that concern.

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you. That is our time.

We will now go to Mr. Blair for six minutes.

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

Welcome to the minister and her team.

We note, frankly, with gratitude and admiration, how busy you have been over the past several months travelling all over the world, most recently with a rather lengthy but, I think, vital trip to Africa.

Minister, I'd like to return to the topic of the supplementary estimates. There's approximately \$847 million included in the supplementary estimates that we've invited you here to speak about. It includes some \$673 million for our international finance program, \$67 million for reinvestment in revenues, just under \$28 million for the management of the Canada-U.S. softwood lumber file, the crisis pool quick-release mechanisms, which I'd like to also speak to you about, and the presidency of the G7 summit in Canada.

Minister, I would like to give you an opportunity to explain to us how the allocations that are included in these supplementary estimates are going to align with Canada's broader foreign policy priorities that you outlined for us earlier. Then I have a number of specific questions about how each of those allocations might impact our efforts.

Hon. Anita Anand: I want to thank you for asking me a question about the supplementary estimates, as I believe they are the reason I've been called to the committee in the first place.

With regard to the supplementary estimates, Global Affairs has sought an increase of \$847 million to our current authorities. The funding requests are primarily for some of the climate programs, such as Canada's international climate finance program, as well as for the reinvestment of revenues from the sale or transfer of real property.

There is also an allocation requested for the crisis pool. That crisis pool allows us to undertake a crisis response, which is a file you know so well. We know that many humanitarian issues have occurred recently because of climate disasters throughout the world. I'm thinking of the Philippines, for example, but there are others.

I will also mention that the supplementary estimates are important in enabling us to continue the operations we undertake, not only under my administration at Global Affairs Canada but also through sub-departments providing support in response to humanitarian and other disasters around the world.

• (1550)

Hon. Bill Blair: Minister, certainly, we've had a number of discussions at this committee about the efforts of the foreign affairs department to broaden our diplomatic outreach and to provide significant consular services around the world, including opening new embassies in Greenland and Anchorage, all of which we believe to be entirely appropriate and important.

I have a question with respect to these estimates and the impact of the comprehensive expenditure review the government is currently undertaking.

Perhaps you could share with us how you're planning your staffing approach in order, first of all, to respect the fiscal responsibilities that are being imposed on every department in the government, and also how you will maintain the key foreign policy development priorities and consular priorities you have outlined, while at the same time balancing the requirement for greater fiscal responsibility.

Hon. Anita Anand: That's again a very useful question, because it is complex.

The budget, which was passed last week, is a very important document. In that budget, Canada's new government made a clear commitment to Canadians to bring fiscal discipline to the federal budget. That is what we are delivering in budget 2025.

Global Affairs Canada, like all departments, is reviewing measures outlined in the budget for implementation. These proposed measures mean refocusing Canada's international presence and finding efficiencies across Canada's mission network, including re-vamping emergency preparedness and modernizing consular services.

We're also reducing expenditures at missions by consolidating embassies with multiple properties into fewer buildings, acquiring Crown-owned properties in certain cases and co-locating some offices with allies where appropriate.

I'm confident that these reductions will have no impact on the services on which Canadians rely while abroad and will not impact the government's ability to diversify its trading partners and bring more investment here at home. I will have more information to share with this committee as the next weeks unfold.

I also want to say that with every new government, with every set of new foreign policy priorities, there is also a necessity to readjust the places of focus, especially in terms of missions. I will be opening a consulate in Nuuk, Greenland, as well as in Anchorage, to accord with our Arctic foreign policy.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have six minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Minister.

We are very pleased to have you with us in committee.

You said that Canada's international relations are guided by Canadian values. You spoke to us about gender equality and international human rights.

How are women's rights doing in the United Arab Emirates at the moment?

Madam Chair, is my time still counted when someone doesn't answer my question?

Hon. Anita Anand: I apologize. I was listening to the interpretation but it's a bit slower than your words.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We are going to add that to my time.

Hon. Anita Anand: I think your question concerns human rights.

Is that right?

• (1555)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's right.

Where do things stand on the status of women situation in the United Arab Emirates?

Hon. Anita Anand: I want to be clear that Canada's commitment to empowering women and girls, removing barriers to gender equality, condemning all forms of discrimination and ending gender-based violence is unwavering, and that will never change.

As I outlined in my speech this fall, Canada's foreign policy will be guided by three principles, which are defence and security, economic sovereignty and our values. Feminism is one of our government's core values.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In fact, that was on full display when Mr. Carney said that Canada's foreign policy was no longer feminist. So it actually is very important.

You said that you raised the issue of human rights and women's rights. However, practically speaking, Mr. Carney's trip to the United Arab Emirates led to the signing of contracts worth \$70 billion. This is a country that restricts women's rights.

Have the restrictions targeting women living in the United Arab Emirates been relaxed?

In your opinion, is this a perfect example of a feminist foreign policy?

Hon. Anita Anand: I'd like to make a small correction. The amount was \$70 billion. I think you said \$60 billion.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I said "\$70 billion". You can look it up in the blues, if you like.

Hon. Anita Anand: I'm sorry.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If you're happy at the thought of Canada signing contracts worth \$10 billion more with a country that restricts women's rights, that's your problem.

Hon. Anita Anand: Our foreign affairs policies there are complex. It's possible to be in favour of human rights, gender equality, women, girls and families and still engage in these kinds of economic conversations, because it's necessary for our economy.

It's necessary for building our economy, and we are going to keep doing things like this with various countries as soon as the opportunity arises because it's necessary for our values.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you know how the apartheid regime fell? At the time, Brian Mulroney refused to sign contracts with South Africa. He didn't think to himself that he'd raise the matter but sign contracts worth \$70 billion anyway. He said that Canada would stop doing business with South Africa, and he asked our allies to do the same.

You are doing the exact opposite. You've decided to encourage the United Arab Emirates, a country that restricts women's rights. That's mentioned in a number of reports, including reports by Amnesty International and, closer to home, by the Raoul Wallenberg Centre. According to these reports, the UAE funds entities that are currently committing crimes against humanity and acts of genocide. That's a known fact.

If you can't get those reports, I'll send them to you. Not only does this country not respect women's rights, it's also funding acts of genocide in Sudan. What happens? You sign \$70 billion worth of contracts with this country. You're doing the same thing with China.

Is doing business with authoritarian regimes guilty of torture and genocide the Canadian government's new way of doing things?

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand: That's actually inaccurate to put the frame to me in that way because that is not what our foreign policy represents. Our foreign policy actually represents Canadian values, including in the area of feminism, gender equality and work that we are doing for LGBTQI+ and other minority groups. We are continuing to advocate for those groups in our foreign policy.

Our women, peace and security initiative is continuing. We are able to further the Elsie initiative as well, which has doubled the number of women peacekeepers since our initiation of this in 2015. The work that we will do on our feminist foreign policy continues. As well, we are going to make sure that our commitments to gender equality, human rights and women and girls will continue in a way that recognizes the new geopolitical and fiscal context, both of which demand a different frame.

Our foreign policy is complex, but we are making sure that we stand up for Canadian values. We are also making sure that we do what is necessary to build the Canadian economy, which is a platform on which we were elected.

• (1600)

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): Thank you.

Our next question will be from Ms. Kramp-Neuman.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

In June 2024, we were told that it would take one year to implement a foreign influence transparency registry and commissioner. We're past that point.

I know you have previously stated that this falls to Public Safety, but in your department's 2023-24 departmental results, under "Core responsibility 1: International Advocacy and Diplomacy", it states:

Canada continued to coordinate the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism to identify and respond to diverse and evolving threats to worldwide democracies, ensuring that countering foreign interference remained at the top of the G7 agenda.

Additionally, under the 2025-26 developmental plan, under the same core responsibility, in "Results we plan to achieve", it says:

Democratic principles are protected and furthered, including by scaling up the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism and progressing collective responses to foreign information manipulation and interference.

Why do we still not have a foreign agent registry in place?

Hon. Anita Anand: We have been clear that Canada's sovereignty must be respected, and our government is vigilant in its efforts to combat the scourge of transnational repression.

We know that these threats are constantly evolving, and that's why I am working closely with the Minister of Public Safety and why my department is working with the Department of Public Safety. We've created initiatives at GAC, such as the rapid response mechanism that you mentioned. All diplomats must respect the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and we will never tolerate any form of foreign interference or meddling in our democracy.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: There was a bill adopted in the House, the Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act.

We're running out of time. You stated that it would be one year. We now have less than two or three weeks left in the session. We keep saying it's going to be by the end of the year. Prior to that, there need to be consultations with the Leader of the Opposition, leaders in the Senate, leaders of all parties.

Where are we at, and will it be done by the end of the year?

Hon. Anita Anand: I appreciate the point, given that we are all trying to ensure that our business and our work get done in good time.

The Minister of Public Safety has said that it would be ready by the end of the year. He has told that to me personally.

I want to say clearly that we are moving forward with implementing a foreign influence transparency registry and that we will give our national security agencies more tools to combat modern threats and remain vigilant against foreign interference to protect our security and to protect our democracy and our safety and security. Our top priority is the safety and security of Canadians writ large across this country.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: According to GAC, “The G7 Rapid Response Mechanism...strengthens G7 coordination to identify and respond to foreign threats to democracies. Canada and other G7 democracies can better safeguard our democratic values and institutions by sharing information and analysis”.

Lately it seems as though Canada has become a playground for foreign interference. We have weak laws and we have a lack of transparency, and in fact this government has actually acknowledged that the People's Republic of China poses a real threat to Canadian democracy.

If the government is acknowledging that China has attempted to meddle in our last two elections, why should Canadians simply accept the assurance that it's coming and that results are coming and that the results will still be free and fair without Canadians getting a true accounting of what has really happened?

Hon. Anita Anand: I want to respond with two points.

First, under the G7 presidency this year, Canada hosted the first-ever conference on transnational repression. Participation of officials from G7 countries and beyond was part of this conference, and there were subject matter experts there. Essentially, Canada is showing leadership at a crucial time right here in our own country, including with our G7 partners.

To address the second part of your question, Canada continues to underline that there is no tolerance for foreign interference, including transnational repression targeting Canadians or individuals on Canadian soil. Canada's sovereignty must be respected, full stop. We will work closely with our security and intelligence partners, including our allies, to counter foreign interference, including transnational repression, to safeguard our national interests and to lessen its impact on Canadians.

• (1605)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Can we anticipate by the end of the year that we can have some direction?

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you.

That is already our time. I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Fortier, you have the floor for five minutes.

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you very much for being with us today to answer our questions.

You mentioned in your presentation that we are adjusting our foreign policy to the current geopolitical situation and enlisting approaches to keep Canada active on the world stage.

Canada has long advocated for a feminist foreign policy approach grounded in feminist international assistance. You mentioned the women, peace and security agenda. Again, we are a world leader in health and in sexual and reproductive rights.

Can you explain for the committee how this framework and the current geopolitical situation are guiding the department's initiatives?

For example, can you tell us about the ways we ensure that our programming, whether it's related to development, humanitarian assistance, peace and security or even multilateral engagement, promotes gender equality, protects the rights of women and girls and produces concrete results aligned with our feminist foreign policy commitments?

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you for the question.

I'm pleased to present the ways that Canada is meeting and will continue to meet its gender equality commitments under the women, peace and security agenda. Let me emphasize that supporting gender equality, supporting women's rights and supporting this agenda is entirely in the national interest.

It's not a matter of cherry picking our priorities, but combining them. We can have a foreign affairs policy that includes Canadian values, as we do now.

That's why we brought in former ambassador Jacqueline O'Neill at the end of her term to join Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, where she now plays a leadership role as head of the women, peace and security agenda.

We've worked tirelessly for many years to incorporate this priority, expertise and practice, necessary across all of government, into our policies.

We've known for a long time that by adapting this approach and taking concrete action, we would achieve tangible results. We've put the necessary framework in place, and we're committed to implementing it. It matters to me, for us and for the people of Canada, especially women, families and girls.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I want to talk a bit about Haiti.

You just got back from your meeting with G7 countries in the Niagara region. You had the opportunity to discuss this issue when the budget was being prepared.

I'd just like to clarify things a little, to know where we stand on Haiti. I believe that we're still leaders when it comes to ensuring that work is being done with other countries.

Can you explain where we're at?

• (1610)

Hon. Anita Anand: On September 23, Canada announced \$60 million in new funding to support multilateral efforts to stabilize the situation in Haiti.

The Government of Canada remains extremely concerned over the humanitarian and security situation in Haiti and the risk that the crisis could spread across the entire region. Canada seeks to restore security in Haiti by supporting the gang suppression force and building capacity within Haitian institutions, including the Haitian national police.

We therefore continue to work with our partners on the situation in Haiti and in the surrounding region. We made the announcement that I mentioned, we supported the United Nations Security Council resolution and we worked on it with our G7 partners.

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

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

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, if I'm summarizing Canada's new foreign policy correctly, we're moving closer to China, although in the House of Commons we've recognized that Uyghurs are currently the target of a genocide perpetrated by the Chinese political regime.

We're forming closer ties with the United Arab Emirates by signing lucrative contracts worth \$70 billion, even though reports mention and we know that the UAE is currently funding armed groups in Sudan — the Rapid Support Forces — which are committing acts of genocide.

Are you listening to me, Minister?

Hon. Anita Anand: Yes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Furthermore, Canada is reducing its international aid by \$2.7 billion over four years, even though it has just extended \$100 billion in tax credits to oil companies until 2040.

How can you honestly tell us that Canada is a leader in human rights and that it's making a difference in the world, when it puts its chequebook ahead of its values?

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you for your question.

This question gives me an opportunity to mention how our foreign policy incorporates every necessary component.

My job is to leverage Canada's diplomatic and strategic relations for the good of all Canadians, including people concerned about human rights and people who need Canada to have a functioning economy. It's a way of combining priorities, and something we can do.

Right now, different forces are attacking our multilateral institutions—

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Minister. I think you've answered the question.

Hon. Anita Anand: They are also attacking our values. We're going to respond to their attacks.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If you had been in Brian Mulroney's shoes, you would have signed contracts with the apartheid regime. That's what you would have done, because that's exactly what you're doing when you say that you're bringing up human rights issues while at the same time doing business with these countries.

I have not seen any improvements on the issues of women's rights, ethnic minorities in China or LGBTQ individuals in those countries with which you have signed lucrative contracts.

Based on your current performance, you would have done business with South Africa during the apartheid era. Mr. Mulroney stopped the contracts, but you would have signed them outright.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): We're out of time, so give a very quick answer.

[Translation]

Hon. Anita Anand: I completely disagree with my colleague.

We are not compromising on human rights when we sign contracts. That's not the case. We continue to stress the importance of our values, human rights and feminism in our foreign affairs policy.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you.

• (1615)

[Translation]

Hon. Anita Anand: We take into consideration what Canadians want. Canadians have told us that we need to build Canada's economy, especially during these challenging economic times.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You're right.

Thank you.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you.

We now go to Ms. Rood for five minutes.

Lianne Rood (Middlesex—London, CPC): Minister, thank you for being here today.

Around the world, from Nigeria's middle belt to parts of the Middle East, Christians are being killed, kidnapped and driven from their homes.

What concrete actions has Canada taken this year to protect threatened Christian communities, and what measurable results can you point to?

[Translation]

Hon. Anita Anand: Canada is aware of and closely monitoring reports that the United States is considering actions against Islamist militants in Nigeria.

We recognize that violence is unacceptable and that it is the result of terrorist or criminal acts. That is the case in Nigeria, and it affects the entire population.

Last weekend, I had a conversation with my Nigerian counterpart, Minister Youssef Tougar. I told him that Canada will always stand up for human rights and for the people who suffer from this violence.

[English]

We stand for religious freedom. We are monitoring the situation closely. I have spoken with my Nigerian counterpart about this, and we are remaining in close touch.

Lianne Rood: Minister, witnesses told Parliament and the subcommittee on human rights that impunity and weak early warning systems fuel the violence against Christians.

Will the government commit to funding faith-based partners on the ground for rapid warnings, trauma care and safe return programs, expand religious freedom expertise and training for our diplomats, and work with an allied effort to trace and choke financing from militias?

Hon. Anita Anand: To begin, in communities worldwide, Canada closely monitors instances of hatred and intolerance toward faith and belief. We oppose all religious hatred, discrimination and xenophobia wherever they occur, and we support peace and security efforts in Nigeria and wherever they occur.

In terms of the work that the department is doing at Global Affairs Canada, since 2019, Canada has invested \$23 million in Nigeria through its counterterrorism capacity-building program to address the root causes of violent extremism. We've been working on strengthening resilience against radicalization, and we have supported judicial capacity in terrorism prosecutions.

All Nigerians deserve to live in safety and security. That is why, in addition to the program I just mentioned, we have a peace and stabilization operations program of approximately \$2 million that is supporting projects throughout Nigeria, and we have allocated \$10.7 million under the weapons threat reduction program to counter chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear proliferation. We also have bilateral development programming that aims to reduce extreme poverty. This program amounted to about \$16.5 million in 2023-24.

I will just say in response to the questions about Nigeria that we are there with different forms of aid to address not just the issues of violence and counterterrorism but also to address the developmental issues that have been mentioned to us by the Nigerians themselves. We have been there on the ground to support them every step of the way.

Lianne Rood: Minister, could you table with this committee the measurable results of those things that you just talked about?

On November 24, the Leader of the Opposition asked the House to recognize the genocide in Nigeria and the persecution of Christians around the world.

Minister, do you recognize and condemn the persecution of Christians around the world and the genocide of Christians in Nigeria by fundamentalist groups like Boko Haram, the Fulani militia and the Islamic State West African Province?

• (1620)

Hon. Anita Anand: I thank the hon. member for the follow-up question. I want to mention that we will table information as requested, and I have my departmental officials here to do so.

I will reiterate that all Nigerians deserve to live in safety and security, and that will always be at the heart of Canada's foreign policy vis-à-vis Nigeria and every other country. Religious hate is absolutely unacceptable.

Lianne Rood: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): We will go to Mr. Oliphant.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister.

There are four things I want to bring up.

First, you have officials with you, and we don't get to thank them often enough. To the associate deputy minister and the assistant deputy ministers, thank you for the work you do, and thank you to those people behind you and around you who support Canada and the world.

The second thing is just following up on the last question on the freedom of religion or belief. I know we've had some really profound officials working for you, Minister, who are raising those issues. Canada's responses are always coordinated with those of other countries, and that's often through officials, so again to the officials, thanks for that work.

The third point is the consular area. It's not my area of responsibility, but I'll ask about it.

We've had expenditure review. Obviously, every department is facing cutbacks. When most Canadians, average Canadians, interface with Global Affairs, it's because they're travelling in the world, and they're concerned. Can you assure Canadians that consular services will be maintained and that Canadians can travel the world knowing that if they lose their passports, if they need to get a prescription filled, if they end up in jail or if they are the victim of arbitrary detention, this government will have the resources to support them?

Hon. Anita Anand: I agree wholeheartedly that the public service, and especially the public service in GAC, has been extraordinary during very difficult times internationally.

The bottom line is that our level of service will not be compromised. Canada's network abroad consists of 181 missions in 112 countries. The mission network is broad, and our top priority is the safety and security of Canadians. We will continue to ensure that wherever Canadians need assistance, our consular services will be engaged and will continue to work toward individual safety and security for the benefit of our country.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: That's perfect. I just want to want to make sure that Canadians know that. They're all watching at home today, so I'm sure they'll be reassured.

The last point is that it seems to me that opposition members are setting up a dichotomy between security, sovereignty and prosperity as overwhelming goals, and human rights, democratic institutions and a rules-based order as the things Canada stands for. To me, they're not dichotomous and are actually totally entwined.

I want to give you a chance to reflect on how our human rights work actually builds prosperity and supports security and sovereignty, and that they're not either/or and are actually blended together. I see that in you, and I want to make sure the committee gets to hear it.

Hon. Anita Anand: That's exactly what I was trying to say throughout this testimony.

In indicating that economic resilience and diversified supply chains are important and in indicating that Canada is focusing on the defence and security of our country, we are undertaking those objectives always with our core values at the forefront of our diplomacy and our foreign policy. Those core values relate to human rights; gender equality; environmental sustainability; non-discrimination, generally speaking, across multiple demographic groups; and reconciliation. In fact, ensuring that our policy is infused with our core values provides strength to our foreign policy.

I think the question is astute for that reason. We have to remember that we're in a time of stress globally. The geostrategic environment has changed substantially and the world trading order has changed substantially, and Canada's foreign policy must respond.

That does not mean we are sacrificing our commitment to human rights and our core values. What it means is we will take on the objectives of defence and security and economic robustness domestically and with our core values at the forefront of our foreign policy.

• (1625)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you, Minister. I think that's well articulated.

The difficulty is that our system of government is not the same as those in other countries. There are many different styles of government, many different regimes. The American style is different from the Canadian style, which is different from the Chinese style and different from a kingdom and others. We go to those places with strength and with humility to say that we have to have these conversations, because Canada and Canadians want you to have these

conversations. It will be our prosperity and security and our sovereignty that are at stake.

Hon. Anita Anand: The way in which I frame it is that diplomacy isn't about hiding under a rock and pretending the world's problems are going to vanish: Diplomacy is about actually sitting at the table and having conversations that may be difficult, but that are important to advance Canada's interests.

That's exactly what our foreign policy approach rests on. It's my personal approach that in a professional and diplomatic manner, it is important to advance Canada's interests on defence and security and on economic prosperity in terms of our core values. We can do that, and we must do that, on behalf of all Canadians.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): Thank you.

I want to thank Minister Anand for being here today.

I thank the officials, Mr. Lévêque, Ms. McCardell and Mr. Epp. I understand that Ms. Carruthers will be staying with us for the next hour.

As we bring in the officials for the next panel, I will briefly suspend the meeting.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): I call this meeting to order.

Thank you very much for being here. I want to thank Ms. Carruthers, who was here for the previous panel and is still here.

I want to welcome Catherine Jobin, who is the assistant deputy minister for strategy, policy and public affairs, and Leslie Norton, assistant deputy minister for international assistance partnerships, programming branch. Thank you very much for being here.

We will go immediately to the first round of questions.

Ms. Kramp-Neuman, you will have six minutes in this first round.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

Thank you for being here.

The first question is this: How will the new budget calendar affect the estimates process? I mean the traditional spring schedule change.

Shirley Carruthers (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, People and Corporate Management Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Actually, as far as I'm aware, there won't be any major impacts in terms of the overall calendar, but the new process will allow items that are actually announced within the budget to make it into the main estimates.

Right now, as you would be aware, a lot of the items that we see within the supplementary estimates would have been announced during the budget of the previous cycle, so when the main estimates are actually tabled, parliamentarians wouldn't necessarily have a good view of what was actually announced in the budget.

What it will mean for departments is basically that we will have to bring our different submissions to the Treasury Board a little bit earlier in the cycle in order to make that deadline.

• (1635)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Can you share when the main estimates will be available for the fall budget?

Shirley Carruthers: Typically, the main estimates are tabled, I'm going to say, within the—

[Translation]

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

For the benefit of the people listening to us across Canada, perhaps Ms. Kramp-Neuman could ask her question again, since the interpreter couldn't hear it. The microphone was off.

Thank you.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): I'll ask you to repeat the question. I will take that off your time.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

When will the main estimates be available for this fall's budget?

Shirley Carruthers: Typically, the main estimates are tabled before the beginning of the new fiscal year, so it's anywhere between the end of February and early March.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: This year's departmental plan was significantly shorter than last year's, as we can appreciate. How did the truncated timeline affect GAC's ability to submit their developmental plan, at 51 pages compared to 73? Last year's is 44.2% longer than this year's.

Shirley Carruthers: Look, it's always a bit of a challenge, I'm going to say, for our department or for any large department to submit these reports on time. Folks work very hard on making sure we have the right information available to Canadians and to parliamentarians, just with respect to all of the good things the department is doing.

There are a lot of consultations, as you can imagine, within the department and, I think, a lot of additional complexity when you have departments that are run by more than one minister. Of course, it is very welcome that the Treasury Board Secretariat developed a new, more concise departmental plan format for departments to follow. It does reduce the overall administrative burden within the department and the red tape, so it's great.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Can we assume that the truncated timeline for this particular budget means more activity in the supplementary estimates?

Shirley Carruthers: That would be what I would be anticipating to see, certainly for our department in particular. We had some an-

nouncements within budget 2025. I know the department is working very hard to have those items approved in time to be included within the main estimates.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: With regard to the departmental plan, the government has indicated a renewed interest in diversifying trade, mentioned as one of the five core responsibilities in the plan.

If you could explain this to me, by my math, the average dollar per employee being spent on core responsibility two is the lowest of the five. If we remove the other smallest responsibility, it is definitely the lowest, with around \$182,000 per employee. Responsibility one, international aid, gets \$416,000, and others are higher.

Is there an explanation for this? Perhaps you could get back to me in writing.

Shirley Carruthers: I'd probably prefer to get back to you in writing. I believe that core responsibility one is actually advocacy and diplomacy, but I may be mistaken, so we can definitely get back to you in writing.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

Who is it that determines the criteria for the departmental result indicators and are they verified by an independent party, a third party?

Shirley Carruthers: Actually, my team is responsible for determining those indicators, working very closely with the programming branches just in terms of what it would be that would again help parliamentarians to assess whether or not we've been able to meet our objectives.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: The number of investor visits to Canada facilitated by the trade commissioner services plummeted between 2022-23, and 2023-24, from 206 down to 142. Do we know why?

Shirley Carruthers: I don't personally know why, but I can check with the departmental officials and find you that answer.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

There was some additional interesting language that I found on page 15:

Results we plan to achieve

Canada's trade relationship with the United States is redefined and focused on outcomes that are mutually beneficial for both countries.

Collaboration with reliable trading partners and allies around the world is strengthened.

Does your department consider the United States to be a reliable trading partner?

Shirley Carruthers: I'm probably not the best person to answer that question, given my role within the department, but I think that obviously most Canadians would believe that's an important trading relationship.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

If I understand correctly, the government is spending the last of its \$5.3 billion in climate finance commitments. For the beneficiaries of GAC programming under this fund there is a target of \$10 million. That's on page 21. The actual results to date are just over \$1 million.

Could this money not have been more effectively spent by GAC on what appears to be the far more successful prevention of gender-based violence programming, where targets were actually met in that particular one? Additionally, why was 2050 chosen as a target date? There was no explanation given on the database.

• (1640)

I'm just curious how this data would be tracked after the funding ends in 2050.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): Give a very short answer, please.

Shirley Carruthers: I would have to go back to the report to find the numbers you're referring to, but what I can say is that in these supplementary estimates, we actually have \$673 million that we're bringing in, in order to complete the climate finance commitment.

Overall, we have seen really great results from this program. We provide loans through the climate financing program. To date, we've provided 21 different loans for a total value of \$5.4 billion, and we've been able to actually bring back into the department \$863 million.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): Thank you very much. That is our time.

We will now go to Mr. Blair for six minutes.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much.

I'd like to echo my colleague's comments and express our gratitude to all of the officials at Global Affairs for their excellent work. I know this has been an incredibly busy time, and the world is becoming an increasingly challenging place, so your work is vitally important to all of us. I wanted to take the opportunity to say thanks.

I spoke earlier with the minister with respect to the supplementary estimates and was quite pleased with her response.

I'd like to talk about trade diversification. In particular, in the 2025 budget, we have included very significant new funding for the trade diversification strategy and for the new strategic export office that will be stood up at Global Affairs. I think this is entirely aligned with Canadians' desire to diversify our trade around the world, to trade with many partners and not to rely, as we have done historically, on a single trading partner.

Acknowledging the efforts the Prime Minister and the foreign affairs minister have made in places like India, the Middle East, Africa most recently, and also with China, can you tell us what you anticipate will be accomplished through the new strategic export office and under this new strategy?

Shirley Carruthers: I don't have all those details with me. I may turn to my colleagues to see if they have some additional information to offer.

I would say, in terms of the trade diversification strategy, yes, we were allocated some new funding, which we hope to bring in through the main estimates this fiscal year. In terms of the trade export office, we will find internal resources for that through reallocation from within.

Perhaps, Catherine, you may have some additional details to offer with respect to the strategy.

Catherine Jobin (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategy, Policy and Public Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I will say a couple of things in terms of what will be accomplished.

The budget sets out a target to double non-U.S. exports within the end of the decade. That's \$300 billion a year. The strategic export office will be a key part of that by helping to curate the engagement that will achieve deals, with government-to-government engagement and support of the private sector.

The last piece is trade diversification as a whole-of-country enterprise. It's the product of business decisions that will be supported by some of the measures outlined in the budget.

Hon. Bill Blair: We've also been studying the issue of a new focus, a renewed focus, in the high north. Given global circumstances, we are also reaching out to other trading partners and other national security partners, inasmuch as Global Affairs has plans, as the minister outlined, to open up new consular offices in both Anchorage and Greenland. The relationship with other Nordic and Arctic countries is also critically important.

I would also note that the Arctic Council has been absent in the presence of Russia for a considerable period of time, but there are still some very significant diplomatic efforts that need to take place there. In the context of these estimates and your future plans, perhaps you could explore with us a bit of the direction you see us taking.

Shirley Carruthers: Again, I don't think I have the details you are looking for with respect to the strategy.

I can turn to my colleagues to see if they have anything additional, or we'd be happy to come back.

• (1645)

Catherine Jobin: I think we can come back maybe with a written answer. I will say that many relationships are important to achieve trade diversification.

Hon. Bill Blair: I also spoke about some challenges of the comprehensive expenditure review. I know all government departments are seized with that. Given the increasing demands upon your department in the new global environment, perhaps you could share with us how you envision managing the challenges of demonstrating fiscal responsibility at a time when we're asking so much more of you.

Shirley Carruthers: You're right. Like all government departments, we did take a lot of time within the department over the summer months and into the fall to develop proposals to meet the \$1.12-billion target the department had in terms of identifying savings.

When we were looking to identify savings, we focused on a couple of different things. One thing was to focus on what we could reduce, to look at areas where we could find efficiencies and areas that were of lesser value to the department. We took an equally hard look at what we needed to maintain within the department in order to deliver on the minister's mandate.

Obviously, with a reduction of \$1.12 billion, the impacts will be felt in terms of our international assistance, for example, which does have the biggest portion of our budget. The reduction is close to \$2.7 billion. Again, we have taken a lot of measures to make sure that what we're able to maintain will leave us in a good position to be able to deliver on the minister's mandate.

Is there anything you'd like to offer?

No. Okay.

Hon. Bill Blair: Apparently I'm done, but thank you.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Things will be smoother this time, you'll see. I promise I'll be good. I want to talk about Steven Guilbeault. No, that's not true. I'm just kidding.

Budget 2025 underscores the need to ensure that funding allocated to Global Affairs Canada aligns with "current strategic priorities and the geo-political context". That's what's in the budget. However, as you just said, Canada's international assistance will be reduced by \$2.7 billion over about four years.

How was that amount determined? How did you arrive at \$2.7 billion?

What were the criteria for arriving at that number?

What was specifically targeted?

[*English*]

Shirley Carruthers: In terms of the \$2.7 billion and the criteria that we looked at, I may turn to my colleagues for some additional information. Again, we really did look to minimize the overall impacts on the portfolio.

Leslie, I'm not sure if you have those with you, the criteria that we looked at in order....

[*Translation*]

Leslie Norton (Assistant Deputy Minister, International Assistance Partnerships and Programming Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): When we carried out the review over the summer, we looked at a number of princi-

ples. We recognized the fact that key partners and Canadian partners were able to produce significant results for Canada's international assistance. It was a multilateral, global and Canadian approach.

We also wanted to look at projects that were under way and those that had not yet started. Lastly, we wanted to reduce the impact on our international assistance, our international partners and the recipients of our assistance.

As part of that approach, we tried to minimize as much as possible the impact on the front lines and on communities. We also needed to keep up with the global context, with what was happening with our multilateral partners and with the impacts of cuts that have been implemented around the world.

● (1650)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, has been scrapped. Europe and Japan have drastically reduced international assistance. My understanding is that this is a trend now, yet the UN is asking us to do the exact opposite.

I generally agree with what you're saying. For example, I would assume that UN agencies are partners. Through their efforts, we know that the money is going to the right place and that they will deliver tangible results.

Among the policies implemented by the government, in addition to the cuts, is the policy of maintaining our partnership with UN agencies. That said, these agencies are asking us for more funding.

There seems to be a paradox implicitly connected to this issue. Indeed, although cuts are being made and UN agencies are being funded more systematically, these same agencies are asking us for more funding.

I don't know how we can solve this issue. It's a vicious circle, in a way.

Do you agree with me on that?

Leslie Norton: Yes, it's a paradox. I agree with you.

In fact, we're doing the same thing around the world with all of our like-minded partners.

At the same time, a certain reform within the UN is required, as well as a review of priorities for our UN and multilateral partners.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Has the department considered relying on smaller international solidarity centres?

For example, in Lac-Saint-Jean, an international solidarity centre has been doing exceptional work for 40 years. Not only is it providing assistance directly on the ground, in carefully targeted countries like Burkina Faso or in Latin America, but it also helps communities in the regions to embrace what is happening around the world and to take part in this type of international co-operation, even though they are far from large urban centres.

Over the past three years, federal funding for this centre, which is located in Alma, has gone from \$600,000 to \$5,000. It should be noted that the \$5,000 amount comes from the Canada summer jobs program, so we cannot consider this to be a Global Affairs Canada initiative.

Have you considered working with smaller centres to a greater extent?

Leslie Norton: We are in fact already working with small centres as well as small and medium-sized businesses all across civil society.

As we focus on delivering results through our programs, we look at comparative advantage. Often this can involve a multilateral organization that is well positioned to achieve those outcomes, or a Canadian organization or international non-governmental organizations.

We also work closely with governments in specific countries.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): Thank you.

[English]

Our next five-minute round of questions will go to Mr. Strauss.

Matt Strauss (Kitchener South—Hespeler, CPC): Hello, foreign affairs officials. It's my first time at the foreign affairs committee, so please go easy on me.

I have here the record of a \$3.8-million grant from Global Affairs Canada that went to the Lebanese armed forces' mountain warfare ski soldier school last year. The purpose of the grant, from my understanding of the text, is to build multigender occupancy at the Lebanese ski soldier school.

Canada is undergoing an affordability crisis. Food bank usage in my region of Waterloo has gone up five times over the last few years. I've had people at the door telling me they're worried about paying their rent and how nobody under 35 can afford a house.

Could you explain to hungry taxpayers why it would be a good use of their money to send \$4 million to the Lebanese ski soldier school for multigender occupancy?

Shirley Carruthers: I'm not aware of this particular agreement. I think there are a lot of benefits that we could cite for why we actually provide money internationally.

Perhaps I could turn to my colleagues, who could provide a bit more detail on some of that rationale.

Leslie Norton: Supporting international development is not about choosing between helping others and helping ourselves. It's really about recognizing that we live in this interconnected world where global stability, health and prosperity directly affect Canadians. We take the perspective that by addressing issues like poverty,

inequality and conflict in countries around the world—whether it's in the global south or other countries where poverty or security challenges exist, as they do in Lebanon—Canada's international assistance directly supports Canadians' security, prosperity and well-being.

• (1655)

Matt Strauss: Thank you. I have limited time, so I'll take your answer to be that multigender occupancy at ski soldier schools is going to help Canadians pay for their rent somehow. I wonder, then, when these accommodations will be available for the ski soldiers in Lebanon.

Leslie Norton: We'll have to get back to you with that information.

Matt Strauss: It would be fantastic if you could please table that in writing with us. If you're tabling some things in writing, I'd also be interested to know how many spaces are going to be made at the ski soldier school.

I'm interested in the language, because reading further into the grant, it says it is multigender occupancy, but then it talks about integrating women. I take it that men and women will be at the ski soldier school.

When Global Affairs Canada gives money for multigender occupancy, are any genders other than men and women going to be accommodated?

Shirley Carruthers: I'm not aware.

Matt Strauss: If you could table that as well, I would be interested in it.

In your experience at your department, are grants like this under any sort of political direction?

Shirley Carruthers: Before the beginning of every fiscal year, the department goes to the minister to seek strategic direction on where we're going to allocate our resources. Going to the political level for every single grant, I'll say, is not required, depending on the dollar value. We have certain thresholds and authorities. We have different levels for different types of instruments that we need to go and seek authority for.

For example, in these estimates, you would see large amounts for our climate finance projects. Those projects are over \$100 million each. Those require us not only to go directly to the minister to sign off, but also to go to the Treasury Board Secretariat. Projects under \$5 million would be under the authority of an assistant deputy minister.

Matt Strauss: I see.

Over the last year, would you say there's been any change in policy or political direction, or can Canadian taxpayers, like the people in Kitchener who are having trouble affording groceries, look forward to seeing similar grants like this going out this fiscal year?

Shirley Carruthers: Since the new government's been formed, the department has been looking at its foreign policy, as well as its international assistance policy. In terms of specific projects, I couldn't really specify.

I don't know, Catherine, if you have anything to add.

Catherine Jobin: I think if the question is just about this year in particular—

Matt Strauss: I'm just asking if there has been any other major policy direction change that would apply to grants like this that would cause grants of this nature to be more or less likely to be disbursed in this fiscal year compared to last.

Catherine Jobin: I think we'd have to get back to you about the specific programs or initiatives that this grant would have been granted under to—

Matt Strauss: Thank you very much. I'll look forward to that documentation.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): Thank you very much.

Now we will go to Mr. Oliphant for five minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our guests today, our witnesses from Global Affairs.

It's been a really challenging time for you folks as you've been managing cost-cutting. It has been a huge issue to try to maintain the work of Canada in the world while facing the realities of all Canadians who are worried about their financial well-being. Thank you for your diligence in doing it.

I want to follow up on the last question. The voters in my riding might be quite different because they're actually concerned about security around the world—insecurity anywhere affecting security everywhere. There's a new regime in Syria after a coup. There's political instability in Lebanon, which has gone on for many years. I would say that support of military operations, particularly in a mountainous country, that are going to be staffed by women and men would be an important value that the Canadians in my riding and the residents in my riding would care about.

With regard to the security in the Middle East, the Middle East strategy came to an end. Is it continuing to be an object of concern and care that we will continue to invest in through our development side, our trade side or our diplomatic side?

Shirley Carruthers: Yes, the Middle East strategy did come to an end in March 2025. Under that strategy, we did invest \$4.75 billion to respond to the crisis in the region between 2016 and 2025, of which \$2.96 billion was disbursed by Global Affairs Canada. I believe the remainder was through DND.

Through the strategy, we promoted stability and prosperity through international assistance, as well as diplomatic engagement, at a time when the biggest threat in the region was the rise of ISIS. Any new policy on the Middle East strategy will be oriented to Canada's global and economic priorities, while reinforcing Canada's commitment to peace and stability in the region.

We do continue to have programs in the region. For example, if we think about Sudan, we have issued \$44 million in humanitarian

aid, development and peace and security over the last number of years, and we will continue to provide funding in that area.

• (1700)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: While we can't claim full victory or success in the Middle East, we do have what appears to be a new, stable government in Syria. We appear to have controlled extremist elements, and we have a government in Lebanon that is forging ahead. I think that is an investment Canadians are proud of. We have many Canadians who are very concerned about this, so thank you for that work.

Switching gears, I'd like to talk about cultural diplomacy. It may not surprise some in the room that I would care about this.

In budget 2025, we talk about protecting Canadian culture, values and identity, but when we protect it, can we also promote it? Is there a way that we can find in this budget, in our supplementary estimates particularly, avenues through which Canadian identity is promoted throughout the world, which would, I believe, lead to greater trade, greater understanding and greater people-to-people ties through the brilliant artists, musicians, visual artists, sculptors, filmmakers and others who may be able to be promoted in the world?

Shirley Carruthers: I'm going to turn to my colleague, Catherine Jobin, who can provide an answer.

Catherine Jobin: Historically there have been different approaches to how we engage in cultural diplomacy as part of Canada's diplomatic activities. Certainly, it's very core to the work that our diplomats and our missions abroad do every day. They are posted with an understanding and a mission to exemplify Canadian culture.

There are also some funds that are available to our missions abroad to undertake initiatives, the post initiative fund in particular, that would allow them to expand the reach.

I would say that, yes, it's very much part of the mandate, and it's very much part of what our colleagues who are in our network of missions abroad do every day.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Am I right in saying that it may not all be cash transfers, but that it may be diplomatic activity in those countries to help artists show their work, or for an opera company like Opera Atelier going to Paris, or for other things that I think people in my riding would care about?

Can I understand that it's not always cash transfers, but also dedicated staff to help those groups do their work? Yes would be okay.

Catherine Jobin: It would depend, I would say, on the circumstances. What I was talking about in the answer I provided the committee were the general activities of our diplomats abroad, not specific programs that serve to fund certain activities.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: That's it. Thanks very much.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you very much.

Now we go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Since 2017, Canada's international assistance policy has been guided by feminism. That was Mr. Trudeau's idea, and it is what he put in place. The Bloc Québécois has always supported this way of doing things.

Recently, following a statement by Mr. Carney, we realized that this is no longer the case. He clearly said that Canada's international development assistance policy is no longer feminist.

Why do you think that is?

[English]

Shirley Carruthers: What I would say is that feminism will always be a core value of Canadians and something that is a long-standing commitment for us. I would turn to my colleague, Catherine Jobin, who can add a bit more detail. You would have heard the minister speak a bit about this, and I know that she also spoke about it this morning at a separate committee.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I realize that my question was of a political nature.

Ms. Jobin, have you looked at the tangible results of this policy on the ground?

Can you tell us if it worked and to what extent?

What are the results of this type of international development policy?

• (1705)

Catherine Jobin: I want to begin by saying that I believe that the minister had an opportunity to address some of the elements of your question in the first hour of the meeting.

The question of results was addressed in the most recent report on international development assistance, which was tabled in Parliament. There was indeed a report by the Office of the Auditor General, as well as a response, and we also published an annual report regarding spending on international assistance. This report outlines the results that are attributable to the feminist international assistance policy.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: However, the Auditor General told us that it wasn't easy to describe or quantify the results on the ground because there seems to have been a lack of accountability on the government's part.

Although Mr. Carney may have decided to abandon this policy, we still don't know whether this policy worked or not because the Auditor General told us that she was unable to demonstrate that it worked.

Where are you in this process at the department?

[English]

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Give a very short answer.

[Translation]

Catherine Jobin: I don't want to rephrase what the member said. However, I think that the minister talked about some of the nuances of Canada's foreign policy, which continues to be based on feminist and pragmatic values.

To answer your question more specifically, I would say that the report on Canada's international assistance provides those answers by taking into account the feedback given by the Office of the Auditor General.

It is true that, for some areas of international development, it can be a bit more difficult to measure results. However, that does not mean that these areas do not have value to Canada.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you very much.

We now go to Ms. Rood for five minutes.

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much for being here today.

Budget 2025 reduced planned international assistance by \$2.7 billion over four years. What exact programs, countries and multi-lateral envelopes are earmarked for cancellation and decreases?

Shirley Carruthers: You're correct. The budget will reduce international assistance by \$2.7 billion.

In terms of the exact bilateral development programs, for example, that will be reduced, the department is still undertaking some exercises—I'm going to call them that for lack of a better term—but we're still having discussions in terms of where exactly those programs will be. I can't share them with you here today, but there's a lot of great work.

I don't know if Leslie has anything else to add.

Lianne Rood: When those exercises are complete, could you perhaps table that information with the committee?

Shirley Carruthers: Absolutely.

Lianne Rood: Which results in the 2024-25 Global Affairs departmental results framework will now be missed because of budget 2025 reductions? What revised targets and delivery dates will replace them?

Shirley Carruthers: It's too early, I would say, for us to understand exactly which specific indicators will be reduced. As you can appreciate, this exercise was done over the summer months, so we've just recently had our proposals confirmed. The department will now move forward in terms of making all the adjustments we need to make from a budgetary perspective and a reporting perspective and other things.

Rest assured that we are in a good place in terms of being able to meet the target reductions that will be part of our main estimates for 2025-26.

Lianne Rood: Your new Africa strategy leans heavily on innovation, blended finance and modern delivery models, and yet the department's own 2025-26 plan shows that only 1% of international assistance initiatives actually implemented innovative solutions last year.

Why is the real number 1% if innovation is supposedly central?

Shirley Carruthers: I would have to go back again and have a look at the departmental plan to better understand exactly what that 1% is indicating. I think there was another question that was very similar in terms of innovation. Unless other colleagues have anything to offer, we'd be very happy to get back to you with something in writing.

• (1710)

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much. I would appreciate it if you could bring that back to the committee.

The department promotes the value of multilateralism in crises and warns that underfunding worsens displacement, famine risk and instability. Was the impact of the cuts on global food security and Canada's own security modelled out before the decision was made?

Leslie Norton: I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question?

Lianne Rood: Was the impact of the cuts on global food security and Canada's own security modelled out before the decision was made?

Leslie Norton: Thank you for the question. If I understand it correctly, each department was given a target in the expenditure review. We had to look across all programs. We took into consideration the global context as well as the various envelopes or buckets of funding that existed. We then tried to take a very careful look across the board at operational projects versus those that had not yet started. We then also wanted to make sure we were protecting some areas like humanitarian assistance, where food assistance falls under that, as an example of part of the food systems rubric or the food security rubric.

I would just stop there and leave it at that. We were very seized with the context of the millions of people in the world who are facing severe food insecurity at this time. It's been recognized by our minister and by Secretary of State Sarai that it's very important to continue with humanitarian assistance given the global context and the number of people who are in need in the world right now.

Lianne Rood: Thank you.

Your plan shows that people benefiting from climate adaptation fell from 4.8 million to 1.18 million, year over year. Which programs were cut or under-delivered, and what drove the drop?

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): Please give a very short answer. We're out of time.

Shirley Carruthers: Maybe we can answer that question by just saying that in terms of these supplementary estimates, we are actually seeking \$673 million. Once this funding is brought into our overall reference levels, when we do the year-over-year comparison we won't have the same kind of drop.

Really, that reduction is more about a timing issue because of the way we allocate and increase our budget within the department.

Lianne Rood: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenberg): Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Fortier, you have the floor for five minutes.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you again to the witnesses for being with us today. I also want to thank them for the work they do. We have all said this because it's very important. We know you have a lot to do, sometimes with limited resources.

You recently had to carry out a rigorous exercise, that is, an expenditure review. This review would help the department to maintain core services and quality services for Canadians.

I am the member for the riding of Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester in the national capital region, home to 40% of federal public servants. I am seeing that people are anxious as a result of the review exercise that was carried out.

The government will continue to operate, but it will stop the alarming increase in the hiring of public servants. Some of my constituents have asked me about this. We need to know how the next steps will unfold.

Can you explain to us how you carried out this challenging exercise?

How will this affect Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada?

We certainly want to have a presence in the world, but that takes people. How are we going to move forward with the next steps, which is necessary?

Shirley Carruthers: Thank you very much for the question.

[English]

I'm going to answer in English, because it's going to make it easier for me. I'm sorry.

Yes, it is a very difficult situation, obviously, when people are impacted. We take that very seriously.

We are taking a very deliberate look within the department to better understand our workforce. As you know, there were measures announced within the budget for an early retirement incentive program and other things. People will be impacted by the reductions. What we're planning to do within the department is make the first announcements in January. We'll start with our executive cadre and then we'll have to move to our other employees.

We are recognizing mistakes as lessons learned from the past. We have had previous reduction exercises. One thing we learned from those previous exercises is that we can't stop recruitment completely. When you stop recruitment completely, there is an impact on refreshing and renewing your workforce. Within the department, prior to the exercise, we put staffing measures in place to ensure that we weren't bringing in people, knowing that we were going to have a budget reduction following that.

If I think about the composition of our workforce, about 92% are indeterminate employees, which gives us a bit more flexibility when it comes to those reductions. Again, with a reduction of this size, we can't escape the fact that positions will have to be reduced.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

I understand that efforts are also being made to ease the transition for those who will not be staying in their current positions. They will be directed to other positions within the government, or they will be encouraged to find jobs in other sectors. I am particularly concerned about public servants in the national capital region, naturally.

Another concern I have is with the budget and the changes regarding consular services. We need to make sure that we maintain these services abroad for Canadians who travel.

First, are these services affected by the measures in the budget?

Second, we know that there has been an increase in demand for consular services in recent years.

How are we going to ensure that these services are provided, given the current situation?

[*English*]

Shirley Carruthers: I would start by saying that when we were undertaking the exercise to identify reductions within the department, it was necessary for us to look across all of our business lines. It is true that we had to make some reductions to our consular program. The reductions that we have put forward for our consular program are in the spirit of modernizing how we deliver our services.

Certainly, those more complex cases that we have will continue to receive in-person support. However, some of our services will be moved to an online portal.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you very much.

That is our time, and that is the end of our second round.

Is it the will of the committee to dismiss our witnesses so that we can move to the vote on the supplementary estimates?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you very much to our officials for being here and for answering questions today.

We will move forward with the supplementary estimates.

There are four votes in the supplementary estimates (B) for 2025-26. Is it the will of the committee to do all of the votes at once?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....\$41,808,956

Vote 5b—Capital expenditures.....\$67,500,000

Vote 10b—Grants and contributions.....\$692,400,000

(Votes 1b, 5b and 10b agreed to on division)

INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION (CANADIAN SECTION)

Vote 1b—Program expenditures.....\$1,399,990

(Vote 1b agreed to on division)

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Shall I report the votes back to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

• (1720)

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): Thank you very much.

I do have one short announcement before we adjourn.

At the end of our next meeting, from 5:30 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. on Thursday, December 4, there will be an informal meeting with three members of the foreign affairs and trade committee of the Irish parliament. That will be right after our meeting. The clerk has informed me he will send that to everybody very shortly, so you'll have that in your emails.

That would be Thursday, December 4, from 5:30 to 6:15.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair (Anita Vandenbeld): We are adjourned.

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