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Chair: Ahmed Hussen



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number two 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 we continue, I'd like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio feedback incidents, and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You'll also notice a QR code on the card that links to a short awareness video.

I'd also like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: either floor, English or French audio. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Before hearing from today's witnesses, the committee must first address an important matter concerning its own business. Your subcommittee met on Thursday, September 18, to consider the business of the committee, and agreed to make various recommendations. The clerk distributed yesterday the subcommittee report with a proposed calendar for the next few weeks, until December.

Are there any comments on the report and the calendar? If not, does the committee approve the report?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Ms. Fortier.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for opening this meeting.

I'd like to say hello to my colleagues. We are starting our parliamentary work, and I am very happy that everyone is here today.

In two of the motions presented by Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe, I would like to add a friendly amendment requesting that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

I would simply like this amendment to be included in the motion on Canada's strategy for Africa and in the motion on the crisis in Haiti, to ensure that a response is tabled by the government.

The report is very good. I just wanted to propose a friendly amendment today.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Fortier.

Is there agreement on that comment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, we'll move to approval now. The clerk will follow up with members after today's meeting to solicit their witnesses for each study. The deadline to submit witnesses for the study on the Canadian Arctic strategy is this Friday. Please get your witnesses' names in before then. Deadlines for the other studies will be specified in the clerk's upcoming email.

On a side note, I'd also like to inform the committee that we've received an invitation from the Embassy of Finland in Ottawa for an informal meeting with the foreign affairs committee of the Finnish parliament, which will be visiting Ottawa on November 17 and 18. As discussed with the vice-chairs and MP Mona Fortier, an informal meeting will be planned with our Finnish counterparts on Tuesday, November 17, from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., and of course the clerk will follow up by email in due time with more information on this.

Please note that our committee has also received some additional invitations. There was one on Monday from the World Food Programme deputy executive director, Carl Skau, for a September 29 meeting. The president of the International Committee of the Red Cross will also be here on Friday, October 24.

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses, who are here to discuss the situation in Haiti and Canada's response. From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Mark Richardson, director general, Central America and Caribbean bureau; and Ian Myles, executive director, Haiti division.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks to each of you, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions. I now invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes. Please proceed.

• (1110)

[Translation]

Mark Richardson (Director General, Central America and Caribbean Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Good morning. My name is Mark Richardson, and I am the director general of the Central America and Caribbean bureau at Global Affairs Canada. As the chair said, I'm joined by my colleague Ian Myles, the executive director of the Haiti division.

Today, I will provide an overview of the situation in Haiti as well as Canada's response.

The situation in Haiti is dire. Since the assassination of President Moïse in 2021, the country has plunged into a deep and multi-faceted crisis. It is now at a critical point as gang violence and chaos continue to escalate.

Despite the courageous efforts of the Haitian National Police and the Kenya-led Multinational Security Support Mission, or MSSM, gangs now control over 90% of the capital and are expanding their hold to other parts of the country.

The gangs are exceptionally well funded and equipped through kidnapping, extortion and drug and weapons trafficking. They have become increasingly brutal. They recruit children and use sexual violence, massacres and intimidation to assert control. More than 8,700 people have been killed since 2024 alone.

[English]

The political situation is similarly challenging. The mandate of the transitional presidential council, established in April 2024, is set to expire in February. It is increasingly unlikely that credible elections will be held before then.

Haitian citizens are bearing the brunt of this crisis. Over half of the population urgently needs humanitarian assistance, and over 1.3 million are internally displaced by the violence.

The crisis also has impacts beyond Haiti, including for Canada's own national interests and those of Haiti's neighbours. Haiti's instability creates ideal conditions for transnational crime to thrive. Illicit flows of money, drugs and weapons are expanding, and Haitian gangs are building ties to criminal networks in the region and even in Canada. Desperate conditions are driving irregular migration as Haitians seek safety and opportunity elsewhere, and the extremely high-risk business environment is hindering economic recovery.

Canada's response to the crisis has been comprehensive and supported by multiple departments and agencies. Since 2022 we've invested over \$450 million towards peace and security, humanitarian and development initiatives. On the security front, both the Canadian

Armed Forces and the RCMP have played important roles in delivering equipment, initiatives, training and logistical support for the MSSM and the Haitian National Police. Despite the challenging operational environment, dedicated Canadian and international organizations continue to work hard to alleviate suffering, provide basic services and fight corruption and human rights abuses. Among other things, for example, Canadian international assistance helped deliver daily hot meals to over 100,000 schoolchildren last year.

As we approach the expiry date of the MSSM's mandate on October 2, the international community is at a crossroads and must chart a new path forward. To this effect, the U.S. and Panama recently tabled a UN Security Council resolution that would replace the MSSM with an expanded international force supported by a robust UN support office. The goal is to better leverage the UN's unique expertise in operational capacity to help stabilize Haiti.

Canada is currently engaging in intensive diplomatic advocacy to support the resolution. For example, later this afternoon the honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister Anand, will co-chair a high-level meeting on Haiti at the UN General Assembly to further galvanize international support.

I will now switch to French.

• (1115)

[Translation]

While building stability remains the immediate priority, Canada continues to work with its Haitian and international partners to address the root causes of the recurring crises in Haiti. This includes fighting corruption, as well as efforts to strengthen and reform the economy, the justice system and the security sector.

I want to thank the committee members for their attention and commitment to this important and ever-evolving issue.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your remarks, Mr. Richardson.

We'll now proceed to questions, starting with MP Ziad Aboultaif.

Welcome.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing today.

Obviously, the situation on all fronts.... There is nothing good to report about Haiti at any level—security, humanitarian or the state of the nation itself as a failed nation, as we learned.

We are talking about the situation but not mentioning why this is happening.

Who is the beneficiary? Who is feeding these gang groups? What is the political side of this that is really causing the international community to stand now and think about sending in international troops through the United Nations to sort of either settle the situation or at least ease a bit the pressure that is on the people and the international community at large?

The political question is this: Who is behind these gangs? Who is backing these gangs and who is the beneficiary?

Mark Richardson: Mr. Chair, I think that's an excellent question that the member has asked, in terms of who is benefiting.

What we do know is that the gangs themselves are obviously benefiting and that certain members of the Haitian elite have also been benefiting. For that reason, we have put in place autonomous sanctions against 34 individuals—that is the most of any member or any country around the world—which are having a positive impact.

Perhaps I'll turn to my colleague, Ian, who may be able to provide additional details.

Ian Myles (Executive Director, Haiti Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much. I hope you can hear me through the mask. I'm afraid I came down with a cold, and I don't want to share it.

Mr. Chair, the situation in Haiti has been complex since the country got its independence in 1804. Without going too much into history, it's been the history of a very small elite controlling economic and political power. That's been true to the present day.

The origins of the gangs are mostly in terms of armed thugs, essentially, who were put in place by those same elites, initially to compete with each other over control of territory, control of markets and control of regions. To put it simply, the gangs themselves realized at some point that they were the ones who had the guns. With the political turmoil with the assassination of the president and the subsequent turmoil, there was a political vacuum, and the gangs took advantage of that.

The status quo primarily benefits those gangs right now. I think the political and economic elite feel very vulnerable right now because of this situation. The gangs are becoming quite wealthy because of the extortion opportunities, the drug-trafficking opportunities and the arms-trafficking opportunities. The status quo right now is just very profitable for them.

Thank you.

• (1120)

Ziad Aboultaif: Thanks.

On the micro part of it, you've answered the question. The macro part of it is beyond the local players or the domestic players.

Now the United States and Panama are proposing to have United Nations troops. Canada is doing some diplomatic work to deter-

mine whether this will have consent or disagreement among the international community.

Is there any outside government that is backing these groups, that we know of?

Are we sure that forming the mission with troops and peacekeepers, in a way, is going to really go smoothly and is going to happen?

Mark Richardson: Mr. Chair, we are not aware at this time of any state-sponsored support for the gangs. Obviously, transnational crime has woven its own networks across the region, and that is being played out in Haiti.

In terms of any state-sponsored support, we are unaware of that at this time.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Canada has sent close to half a billion dollars—\$460 million or \$480 million. The last tranche is to enhance the security and to support the security mission to keep things under the MSSM under control.

How much further is Canada willing to go in supporting a future mission, if this is to happen? Has Canada talked about any commitment to that?

Do we have anything in mind for what Canada's commitment will be if the UN troops are going to be in place? Are we considering sending any or participating with troops physically on the ground?

Mark Richardson: Mr. Chair, while I can't speculate in terms of what Canada's future engagement might be, I can say that currently we are working very hard to help support the passage of the resolution that the United States and Panama have passed. To date, the more than \$450 million that we've provided in international assistance has been focused predominantly on security, humanitarian and development needs. That's since 2022. We provided roughly \$140 million in 2022 and approximately \$170 million in 2023. Although the data from our CFO is still coming in, the 2024-25 numbers are around \$150 million, from what we understand.

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

We will move to the next questioner.

Mr. Blair, you have six minutes.

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

Welcome to our guests from Global Affairs.

You have one of the most challenging tasks. I think there's a long and proud history of Canada's contribution and involvement in the support of the Haitian people and in the response to both their security and their humanitarian requirements, but it remains a very significant challenge.

My area of inquiry this morning will basically centre on three areas.

Mr. Richardson, you just spoke about the fairly significant financial commitment Canada has made to both security and financial assistance for Haiti—some \$450 million over the past three years. I would like some understanding, because I think there are many countries that have been contributing—none, quite frankly, to the extent that Canada does in many respects—but at the same time, there is a level of coordination you are able to provide.

We are concerned with civil society in Haiti. It does not really possess a functional government, and although the PNH struggles valiantly in an effort to maintain security, it remains a daunting task. As you've indicated, 90% of Port-au-Prince, for example, is under the control of the gangs.

Could you share with us, perhaps, a little about the effort you're making to make sure that, with our financial contributions, both humanitarian and security, there is some level of coordination with others who are contributing and with Haitian partners, if they do exist, in Haiti?

• (1125)

Mark Richardson: Mr. Chair, thank you to the member for recognizing how challenging the task in front of us is with Haiti, because it is indeed incredibly complex and challenging.

In terms of coordination with other countries and other donors, we've been leveraging our presidency of the G7 in order to try to coordinate efforts under that remit. We actively work with the OAS and obviously within the UN construct as well.

On the ground, we have also traditionally played a leadership role in the last number of years, particularly in terms of helping to coordinate assistance on the security front.

At this point, I'll turn to my colleague, Ian, to perhaps give some more details on that.

Ian Myles: Thank you very much.

The coordination efforts have actually gone better than I expected in the sense that there are not that many actors involved in Haiti, and that's one of the challenges. The lion's share of the support on the security side is coming from the U.S. and from Canada, to a lesser extent from France, increasingly from the Organization of American States, and of course from the UN.

The current international security force is led by Kenya. It's about 1,000 individuals, primarily police. They're endorsed by the UN Security Council, but it's not UN-led, which means that both the troops and the funds to cover their costs are through voluntary contributions. There are some key players in that. The primary contributing country is Kenya; it's about three-quarters of that force. There are also significant contributions, or at least important symbolic contributions, from countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, Jamaica and the Bahamas.

In terms of the MSSM itself, the multinational security support mission, there's coordination internal to that. We're also working at the OAS and at the UN to try to ensure that that continues.

Canada played a coordination role in the country itself, particularly to ensure coordination between the support going to the Haitian National Police and the support going to the multinational

force, trying to ensure interoperability of the equipment—things like radio, ammunition, weapons, etc. We play the key bridging role there. There's a very good direct line, but the HNP in particular is quite weak as an organization. I think they struggle to play that convening role.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much.

I'm aware that the Canadian Armed Forces has contributed through Operation Helios in the training of the MSS contingent from Kenya. As well, the RCMP has been very much involved in providing training in Jamaica to the PNH. At the same time, with the proposal for this gang suppression initiative that the United States is now bringing forward, the MSS has been chronically understaffed and underfunded since its inception.

I don't disagree, by the way. My sense is that it's because it is a voluntary contribution rather than a chapter VII UN resolution that might have made it a UN mission.

Is it anticipated, with what the United States is proposing for a gang suppression initiative, that it would become something that would be funded through the UN instead of just a voluntary contribution?

Mark Richardson: What the resolution has proposed is actually a hybrid approach whereby the successor to the MSSM would be the gang suppression force, which would rely on voluntary contributions, as the MSSM has done so far in terms of personnel, equipment and stipends to cover the costs of the personnel. It would be further supported, as proposed in the draft resolution that we've seen, by a UN support office, which would be funded through assessed contributions, meaning that it would have financial stability in order to help with procurement, transport and a variety of other costs.

As I understand it, one of the main constraints on the success and the ability to galvanize or attract contributions from other members has been the lack of logistical support and instability there. As proposed now, the resolution would seek to address those main challenges.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

You have six minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Richardson and Mr. Myles, for being with us today. We greatly appreciate it.

As my friend Bill Blair said, the situation in Haiti is complicated yet urgent.

On Tuesday, September 16, the Trump administration urged Canada to play a greater role in stabilizing Haiti. Ms. Anand's response was that it was premature to talk about sending Canadian soldiers there. She also said that she was continuing discussions in New York, on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly.

Do you know if your department or another department has developed a strategy for sending Canadian soldiers to Haiti?

Mark Richardson: Thank you for your question.

What I can confirm is that, in terms of the resolution, we need to do our best to support the Americans and the Panamanians. That's really what we're trying to do.

It's still too early to comment on what happens in the future. Right now, our efforts are focused on the resolution.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand that you can't tell us what will be in Ms. Anand's announcement today in New York, or even the reason she is there, but I know that there will be something on Haiti.

Without revealing what we'll be hearing this afternoon, will there be an answer to the question I just asked you about sending in Canadian soldiers?

Mark Richardson: To date, this is not something that has been discussed within the government. It's not something we've been asked by the Americans. Our efforts are focused on the resolution.

I can tell you that in the past, there was a request to deploy military personnel to Haiti. We held consultations on this suggestion with stakeholders, including the Haitian diaspora here and Haitians in Haiti. We then determined that our efforts had to focus on member contributions, support for Haiti and the possible solutions for the country in the multilateral forums.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You're talking about the diaspora, which is extremely large here, particularly in Quebec, but also in Ontario. There are many people of Haitian origin in Canada. That's why we have a very special relationship with Haiti.

I was already vice-chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights when we did a study on the human rights situation in Haiti in 2023. We saw that it was complicated, and that no one agreed on whether or not Canada needed to intervene or how to go about it. We heard a lot of conflicting testimony. That pretty much sums up the situation in the diaspora.

That said, one quote stuck with me. One of the witnesses told us, "It is essential for Canada's approach to reflect its own values, its own vision of human rights, security and the world. It must not lag behind the United States in trying to solve a problem in Haiti." One thing we should take away from the 2023 study, because it comes up often, is that Canada must resume the leadership it once had, especially on the Haiti issue.

Do you feel as though Canada is aligning itself directly with the United States' position or that it is actually developing its own foreign affairs position on Haiti?

[English]

Mark Richardson: I'll respond to this question in English.

Thank you to the member for sharing that quote and asking that question.

I think that in all things, we are guided by Canadian national interests. We look at this in terms of what we're doing in Haiti cur-

rently and, obviously, what will be considered for the future, as well as the situation in Haiti and the situation of the Haitian people.

We are thankful to the United States and, I would say, encouraged by the leadership position they have recently taken in proposing a hybrid approach to try to bring security and stability to Haiti right now. We are particularly encouraged that it involves a multi-lateral element. A UN support office has been proposed by the Americans.

I come back to the point that we're supporting this because we believe it is in the Haitian interest—this proposal has been supported by the Haitian government—and because we believe it will help us protect and advance Canadian interests as well.

• (1135)

[Translation]

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[English]

We will now proceed to the next round of questioning, starting with Mr. Majumdar.

You have five minutes. Welcome to the committee.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for your testimony so far.

Canada has contributed more than \$400 million to Haiti since 2022. As best as possible, knowing that gangs control 85% of Port-au-Prince, what safeguards are in place to make sure that aid is not being diverted to the gangs and their political backers?

Mark Richardson: Part of our work as we look at our international assistance to Haiti is to pick the right partners and make sure that they have robust mechanisms and controls in place to ensure that the funds the Canadian taxpayers are providing are, in fact, being dedicated to the ends that we envisaged for them. This is one of the reasons we tend to work with multiple large partners like the UNODC, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the OAS and other recognized partners.

For our own specific programs, where we give directly to Canadian or Haitian NGOs, we regularly have audits of their programs in order to ensure that the funds are spent as we have been told they will be.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you.

For the kind of capital that goes through the MSSM and other UN agencies, what safeguards are in place, that you are aware of, to ensure that aid diversion is not happening through UN agency aid distribution? If you could get granular, I'd appreciate it.

Mark Richardson: For that, I'll turn to my colleague, Ian Myles.

Ian Myles: It's a good question. It's one that gets attention around the world in terms of safeguards within the UN system. There are billions of dollars that get provided through the UN in terms of international assistance, particularly on the humanitarian side.

One advantage of that is that we're not the only ones looking for accountability, ensuring that there are safeguards in place, both financial in terms of program value for money, as well as in questions of abuse of power and sexual exploitation and abuse. There are good safeguards in there. There are processes for investigation that can be done to verify facts when allegations are made. We have quite a high degree of confidence in those, because they're something that are not Haiti-specific. They're really from around the world.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you.

If I might drill a little deeper into this with the time I have with you, what new oversight or monitoring tools has Canada advanced since 2022 to make sure our taxpayer money is not repeating the same mistakes you just described?

Ian Myles: We're all acutely aware that there have been lessons learned along the way in terms of how our aid is delivered. In that sense, I can say confidently that there have been no incidents in terms of misuse of Canadian resources, that I'm aware of, since 2022.

In terms of the security missions themselves, we're aware that there have been issues that have come up in the past. There have been additional mechanisms that Canada has pushed for, particularly in the area of sexual exploitation and abuse.

We've co-located a gender adviser with the force commander to advise the force commander on making a safe environment, first and foremost for the women who make up part of the MSSM who have come from other countries, but also on mechanisms to ensure safeguards against exploitation of Haitian citizens.

We also have a specialist deployed at the MSSM support office in Washington whose specialization is investigative resources for sexual exploitation and abuse. It's to ensure that the mechanisms are in place to respond quickly should any incidents occur, as well as to prevent incidents from happening.

• (1140)

The Chair: Please ask a short question.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: With elections in two months, do you believe the conditions exist for a credible vote?

Mark Richardson: Just to clarify the question, are you referring to elections in Haiti?

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Yes. Am I wrong?

Mark Richardson: As I understand it, the transitional presidential council's mandate is set to end in February. At this point, there are a number of challenges and concerns that we face with the situation in Haiti. There does not actually seem to be a viable path forward in terms of having elections before that date. Therefore, to the best of my knowledge, no date has been set for the next election in Haiti.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richardson.

We'll now proceed to Madame Fortier.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Richardson, for being here today, despite the short notice we gave you. We are pleased today to be having this discussion on the situation in Haiti, which we very well understand is highly challenging.

I'd like to talk more about how we involve the Haitian diaspora here in Canada in any solutions, or how we work with the diaspora. I am privileged to have many members of the Haitian community in my riding, and I know there are many in Montreal as well. They want to make a difference because they're concerned about what's happening back home.

Do you have an idea of how the Haitian diaspora has been involved, since the beginning of the conflict, obviously, but also now?

Mark Richardson: Our strategy of collaboration with the diaspora includes regular discussions with organizations that help immigrants integrate, with Haitian churches, with international aid partners, with organizations that advocate for political dialogue and with Haitian student associations. This is in addition to the ministerial commitment.

For example, this afternoon, Minister Anand is meeting with her Haitian counterpart on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, or UNGA, to discuss the crisis situation in her country and reiterate the importance of engaging in dialogue with all segments of society.

I also want to point out that Canada's ambassador to Haiti, André François Giroux, is in regular contact with representatives of the Haitian diaspora in Canada.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Is there anything else we can do to continue that engagement in the near future?

We are well aware that the minister is going to give a speech and we can't discuss it.

To ensure progress, how can we continue to work with the Haitian diaspora, which is still putting so much pressure on the government, and even on Haiti?

As has been said, the situation is still very critical, verging on abhorrent.

Do you have any suggestions for us today?

Mark Richardson: Unfortunately, I can't give advice to the government, because that would be a political matter.

However, I can tell you what we have done so far and talk to you about our engagement. I can also give you some food for thought on the need to involve the diaspora in the thought process.

To date, we have engaged in discussions with the diaspora. The last one was conducted by Minister Joly in November 2024, before the election.

Right now, as you said, it would be a good idea for the department and officials to engage with the diaspora to talk about the UN resolution after it is adopted.

• (1145)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Is there anything else you would like to report to the committee?

We may be able to make some recommendations. This is a good time to make suggestions to the committee about the situation.

Mark Richardson: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask my colleague Ian Myles to answer that question, because he worked for a long time in the archives of the Haiti file. He might have some comments on that.

Ian Myles: Ms. Fortier, you are already helping us by showing interest in the situation in Haiti and asking the right questions.

This is an extremely complex situation for which there is no simple solution. In that regard, we welcome all existing discussions, including with the diaspora, to flesh out ideas, share our analyses and diagnoses, and identify potential solutions. It helps us a great deal in our work.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: There is one topic that everyone wants to avoid when talking about the situation in Haiti, and that is arms trafficking. The main reason gangs are so powerful in Haiti is that they have access to weapons and munitions. It's estimated that about 90%—if not 100%—of those weapons and munitions come from the U.S.

First, I think we could target the gangs' access to weapons. However, if our American partner doesn't take action to prevent access to these weapons, we'll never solve the security problem resulting from the power of gangs in Haiti.

Is the Canadian government putting pressure on its American partner to do everything in its power to stop arms trafficking?

Cutting off the gangs' access to weapons and munitions is probably the key to making the entire country of Haiti safe.

Mark Richardson: We know that arms trafficking is a very serious problem, a huge challenge in Haiti.

The efforts of the Government of Canada so far have focused on training customs officers to help them find and—

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm so sorry to interrupt. I don't mean to be rude, but unfortunately I only have two and a half minutes.

The problem comes from the United States. I think the way to halt arms trafficking is through political pressure from the Government of Canada on its American neighbour.

First, do we know if the Government of Canada is in talks with the U.S. government about arms trafficking?

Second, in your opinion, is cutting off the gangs' access to weapons the key to a safer Haiti?

Ian Myles: I thank the member for his question.

I think it's no secret that a large portion of the weapons, almost all of them, in fact, come from the United States. The U.S. government doesn't deny that. I think the Americans are becoming more and more aware of it. They hear about it from us, as well as from everyone around the table. I think that on the U.S. side, the solutions are also complicated.

In the meantime, as part of Canada's G7 presidency, we are working to strengthen our joint efforts in support of the Caribbean countries to improve maritime surveillance.

We know it's only part of the solution, but we believe it's really an important part.

• (1150)

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

[*English*]

We have next MP Lianne Rood. You have five minutes.

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

Thank you so much, witnesses, for being here today.

I know some of my colleagues have asked this question previously. We know that resources are scarce, and I think we can all agree that what aid is present should not fall into the hands of criminals. Along those lines, we know that nearly half of all Haitians are facing acute hunger.

How does the government assess whether its current contributions to food assistance are effectively reaching the most vulnerable populations and actually improving food security on the ground?

Mark Richardson: International assistance has been a key part of our effort up to right now. Through the more than \$450 million that we have provided Haiti since 2022, a key element of that has been focused on food security in terms of delivering emergency food assistance to over one million people; providing daily hot meals to schoolchildren, as I mentioned in my opening statement; and also providing training to Haitian farmers to help them increase their productivity of a variety of key products.

Ian, I don't know if you would like to add to that.

Ian Myles: I think nuance is important as well. We often speak of the gangs controlling 85% to 90% of the capital. It really is influence that they have in that area. In terms of the actual space, it's estimated that it's 40% to 50% that they control fully. The others are areas where they're active and where they can actually pose a danger and an influence. That does mean that there are parts of the capital we can access through humanitarian assistance. Some are easier than others.

It also is important to remember that most of the country is not under the control of the gangs. It's really concentrated in the capital and some of the outlying areas. In terms of our development assistance and our humanitarian assistance, much of it is targeting people in other parts of the country who otherwise will be cut off because they also rely on the capital for their ports, imports and so on.

Lianne Rood: It's great that you mentioned the fact that the ports are in the capital and that the capital is controlled by the gangs. I'm just curious.... There have to be ongoing food supply chain disruptions because of the gang violence in the ports, and that obviously is causing instability with the supply chain.

What steps is Canada taking to ensure sustainable access to food rather than just providing short-term emergency aid?

Ian Myles: The supply of food is a critical area. There's food that comes in through ports, but there's also food that's grown within Haiti, and they're both important. The ports are not all located in Port-au-Prince, though the biggest ones are, and they're not fully controlled by the gangs either. They're part of that territory that is highly subject to risks in getting in and out. There is, however, food coming in and out of that port—mostly into that port—and that's been critical. It's the same thing with other essential supplies. That's been one of the advantages of this multinational support mission that's helped the Haitian police to secure some of those routes, but they're not fully secured, and that's definitely a source of concern.

We do have longer-term development projects aimed at enhancing livelihoods and promoting climate-smart agriculture through drought-resistant crops and so on. That's been critical to help ensure food supplies in other parts of the country. Even one of our largest programs, done with the World Food Programme, which is about school feeding programs, is sourcing most of that food from local producers, so there's actually an economic benefit to that as well.

• (1155)

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much.

Food is part of the overall health and well-being of the folks there in Haiti.

After the targeted attack on one of its convoys in March 2025, Doctors Without Borders, given the deteriorating security situation in downtown Port-au-Prince, withdrew from an emergency centre and a trauma hospital. Quickly, to what extent are international humanitarian organizations currently able to operate in Haiti?

The Chair: Give a quick response, please.

Mark Richardson: That's an excellent question, and that is one of our concerns. One of our primary interests and one of the needs that we recognize is to restore stability so that international organizations like Doctors Without Borders and others can safely operate in Haiti.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move to Ms. Anita Vandenbeld, please.

Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our officials.

I want to ask a bit on the development and humanitarian side of things.

I know that not only is Canada one of the largest donors, but we have also used our influence to be first in a number of areas and then leverage other countries. For instance, concerning the UNDP basket fund for security, we were one of the first to come in at scale, and I'd be interested to know the impact that's had on other donors following suit.

More particularly, I know that sexual exploitation was mentioned earlier. During the previous G7 presidency, Canada initiated the Whistler declaration, which then led to codes of conduct and accountability in the area of sexual exploitation done by international organizations.

I was wondering if you could comment on the leadership role that Canada is playing, not just in the dollar figures but as a country that has come in at scale early on in multiple different areas, including the food you mentioned and the localization of the food system. Could you talk about Canada's impact on getting other countries to also come in at scale?

Mark Richardson: I think that's an excellent question from the member in terms of the role that we can play in mobilizing. Historically, Canada has played that role in Haiti, and we have seen success in terms of bringing in other countries. We are currently the second-largest donor in Haiti and have also helped to encourage some of our G7 members, the OAS and other members of the UN to get engaged. In terms of the specific numbers, I turn it to my colleague Ian to cover those.

Ian Myles: The question of leadership is critical, particularly in Haiti, because there aren't that many players. There are not many countries that maintain embassies, let alone direct bilateral development programs.

We've often found ourselves working heavily with multilateral organizations, and that's been very helpful. In that sense, we've often been able to leverage those multilateral organizations, because they often don't have the resources to do everything from their side, but there are not too many other players there to get them on board, so that's a bit of a challenge.

From our side as well, we have regular program evaluations, and one of the frequently recurring recommendations is to focus, because there's a really high chance of dispersing our efforts.

Increasingly, we've tried to work on trying to address root causes, so when we talk about security, we're talking about the immediate crisis, but ultimately, as one of the members mentioned earlier, we need to address root causes, and that brings us to the area of governance.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much.

I also want to talk about that intersection between humanitarian aid and security and, in particular, reference the same report that my colleague Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe mentioned in the subcommittee on human rights. We heard a lot of testimony about the situation of adolescents and youth, who, because of the humanitarian situation, not enough food at home and not being able to support themselves, end up in orphanages even if they're not orphans. They get recruited as gang members. The pipeline into the gangs starts from the humanitarian side of things. Also, for a lot of the girls, there's transactional sex and recruitment into sex work.

I wonder if you could comment a little about the work that we and others are doing to make sure we aren't losing an entire generation of young people in Haiti because of this conflict.

• (1200)

Ian Myles: The member has touched on a key area that we really struggle with. It's an immediate issue in terms of the ongoing recruitment of young people—as you say, extorted sex and so on from often very young, vulnerable people. Also, there's the sense that if we succeed in our efforts to stabilize the country, we need livelihoods for those people. We need to help them to reintegrate into society. Many of them have witnessed atrocities; many of them have committed atrocities. We're conscious that this creates mental health challenges as well as very tangible economic challenges.

One of the key partners that we've been working with, or at least comparing notes with, is UNICEF. They are very conscious of this. We look at them as one of the leading thinkers in terms of how you breach that, because it is an immediate problem as well as a future problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now begin our third round of questioning, beginning with MP Kramp-Neuman.

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

I think over the next several minutes I'm going to do some follow-up, because there have been lots of really good questions here.

I will just touch base on a question that my colleague from the Bloc posed. Was the CAF operations capacity playing a role in the decision not to put boots on the ground earlier?

Mark Richardson: I cannot speculate on that question. That's not something I'm aware of.

My understanding is that in looking at our options and what was being asked of us at the time, and in talking to our various stakeholders both here in Canada and in Haiti, we came to the conclusion that our efforts were best focused on trying to galvanize support from the international community, as well as continuing to do what we were doing in terms of international assistance in Haiti.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: I'm understanding that many observers are pointing out that the Canadian Armed Forces are suffering a widening commitment capability gap. I was just curious on what the view of the department was on that capacity.

Mark Richardson: Just to clarify, you were asking me to comment on Canadian Armed Forces capacity. Okay.

Unfortunately, that's not within the purview of the ministry of Global Affairs Canada to comment on that. That would need to be someone from the Department of National Defence or the Canadian Armed Forces themselves.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: That's fair enough.

In your introduction, you spoke to the very grave situation, and the notes we were provided spoke to “a perfect storm of suffering”, which is extraordinarily tragic.

Given the worsening situation and gang control, how can Canada ensure that aid is actually accessible to Haitians on the ground?

Mark Richardson: That's another excellent question.

As Ian alluded to in some of his answers, I think that is something we struggle with on a regular basis.

From a very practical level, it comes down to the partners that we choose to work with. Increasingly, because of how complex the situation is, we are devolving to working with more multilateral organizations that have robust structures in place in order to support the efforts they have on the ground.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

Next, I'm curious as to what tools the government is using to actually track the dollars that are being spent—all \$450 million plus, since 2022.

Could you speak to any measurable outcomes that Global Affairs is able to provide on where and how Canada is actually making a difference? How is that tracked?

Mark Richardson: That is something we do actively track. We do want to see value and obviously hope to ensure that the money we're investing in Haiti does help the Haitian people, which is the point.

As I've previously stated, we can stay, and we have tracked that our emergency food assistance has helped over one million people in Haiti. We have provided, as I mentioned before, daily meals to 100,000 schoolchildren; we've enabled, for instance, more than 65,000 women to access a variety of health services; and we've trained, I think, 330 CARICOM officers for MSSM deployment.

We do track these things actively, but for more specifics I might turn to my colleague, Ian.

• (1205)

Ian Myles: Just to add a few examples, we do have rigorous results-based management systems that are part of what we do for all of our programs. Even under the trying, difficult circumstances in Haiti, we still insist on regular reporting. We track that. We ask difficult questions as well.

To give some sense, we're working on anti-corruption, for instance. On that side, we're helping to provide a legal system to over 10,000 victims, including 3,155 women. Helping women who have been victims of sexual abuse to access medical services and psychosocial treatment is also a key thing that we've been doing.

In 2023 alone, we had 1.26 million people who received emergency food assistance, and 74,630 children under five received malnutrition treatment out of 361,000 who were screened, so it gives you a bit of a sense of the numbers and the scale.

I would flag, as well, that one of the challenges is that over 1.4 million people have been displaced from their homes because of the gang violence. That poses additional challenges in terms of how to sustain and support those people as well when they're pushed out of their homes, so it is a very challenging situation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Oliphant. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you very much to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for taking the initiative to propose a study of this kind.

With everything that is happening in the world right now, including the crises in Ukraine and Palestine, our situation is complex, but this affects our hemisphere. Given Haiti's close proximity to Canada, it is absolutely necessary to have this kind of discussion.

Thank you as well for being with us today.

[*English*]

I have a couple more microquestions.

Regarding our embassy and our diplomatic presence, we obviously have concerns. You've mentioned that there are many countries that have withdrawn. We have downsized our embassy. These are our personnel on the ground.

How are we doing, and how are we ensuring the safety of our personnel?

Mark Richardson: Our embassy continues to be fully operational under the leadership of our ambassador, André François Giroux. Of course, as the member stated, one of our primordial concerns is for their safety, so we do look at that very actively. That is a key function of leadership that we look to the ambassador to comment on and ensure that we are doing what needs to be done to ensure the safety of our personnel on the ground.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: In terms of consular issues, we have dual citizens, we have Canadians living in Haiti and we have family members travelling. Are we able to keep up with requests for consular assistance?

Mark Richardson: My understanding is that yes, we are able to keep up with requests for consular assistance in Haiti.

Obviously, our travel advice, which has been in place for a number of years, is to not go to Haiti and to avoid all travel there, but

we are aware that there are quite a few Canadian citizens who continue to live in Haiti, so we continue to provide them with services.

Our advice to them is to have their documents ready and to obviously take care of themselves and, if they are able to, get out of the country.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: On Sunday, Canada signed a declaration presented by Australia and a few other countries on the protection of humanitarian aid workers. This is a UN declaration, and about 100 countries have signed it.

[*Translation*]

I think a doctor or nurse from Doctors Without Borders was killed last year.

• (1210)

[*English*]

Do we know of other aid workers who have been killed? Does Canada have a role in protecting humanitarian aid workers in Haiti because we have a larger presence than some countries?

Mark Richardson: I'll defer to Ian on that question.

Ian Myles: To my knowledge, the challenges that Médecins Sans Frontières had were particularly directed toward the people they were carrying, because they have to go in and out of gang-controlled areas, which means there's always suspicion as to whether they're helping the gangs. That was one of the real challenges.

From Canada's side, we tried to provide as much support as we could, particularly in terms of engaging with the Haitian National Police at the highest levels on a regular basis to raise our concerns, to look at how to create dialogue directly with humanitarian workers, to discuss the protocols and to avoid incidents happening. It's not straightforward.

I'm not aware of any other situations or casualties. It does mean that the enhanced security processes and protocols are cumbersome and very expensive, often involving movement in armoured vehicles and so on. It's extremely expensive.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: War is always more expensive than development assistance and governance assistance, so I hope we continue in those.

The last question is with respect to its neighbour, Dominican Republic, the border between Haiti and Dominican Republic, and the security threats on the DR.

Is Canada engaging with Dominican Republic? Do we help them with intelligence or security, or do we get intelligence and security information from Dominican Republic?

What is that relationship like for Canada?

Mark Richardson: I can't comment on whether we're sharing intelligence back and forth with DR. I can say that we do have a very active bilateral relationship with them. Obviously, the situation in Haiti and its spillover effects on them are a key part of that.

We are very grateful to them for their assistance.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

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

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

Do you know whether the gangs currently plaguing Haiti have ties to people on Canadian soil?

[English]

Mark Richardson: We are under the impression that yes, they do, as I mentioned in my opening statements. That is a matter for the RCMP, Canadian security services or Public Safety to comment on.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand, but wouldn't blocking their communication channels already be a step forward? Perhaps we're talking about money laundering or financial support that comes from here and goes to Haiti. I understand that this is the responsibility of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but it is also part of a foreign affairs strategy to realize that there is a problem there and that it is making the situation in Haiti worse.

Mark Richardson: I take your point. What I can say is that, so far, we have implemented sanctions against 34 Haitians, and that has had a significant impact.

In terms of measures to combat money laundering here, that's really a question for other departments.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I appreciate that.

There's also the fact that Mr. Trump signed an executive order depriving many Haitians in the United States of the visas that allow them to stay there.

Is that part of the discussions between Canada and the United States? The United States wants to improve the situation in Haiti, but if the Americans start deporting Haitians from their country, I imagine that Canada is having discussions with them about the consequences of the decree Mr. Trump signed against Haitians living on American soil.

Mark Richardson: We are aware of President Trump's comments about Haitians in the United States, but so far, it hasn't been a measure that Mr. Trump has discussed with us.

If we got to that point, it would be a matter that would fall under the policies of the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much. Unfortunately, your time is up.

[English]

We'll now go to Mr. Aboultaif.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Canadians are watching—this is a public session, basically.

As Canadians, how well do we understand the network of gangs in Haiti?

Mark Richardson: As Global Affairs Canada, that's not something we track directly and actively—at least that I am aware of in my position. That would be a matter for another witness or, perhaps, someone from Public Safety or the RCMP to comment on.

Ziad Aboultaif: I'm not throwing this out to foreign affairs by intention but, as they represent Canada at the table, in order to figure out what we are going to do with financial aid, or whether we are going to participate with troops on the ground or even on a diplomatic mission.

How can the department have a lack of feedback on such an important thing, knowing that we are walking into fields full of mines? This is something that can be very disastrous for any mission to figure out, again, financially or otherwise.

Mark Richardson: Global Affairs Canada has been involved in an interdepartmental strategy to disrupt gangs with the RCMP, the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence in order to carry out that strategy. It drew analysis from a Haiti-integrated intelligence cell with the intention of supporting the Haitian National Police to disrupt gangs in Haiti.

Of course, our international programming has also focused, in terms of international assistance, on interrupting sources of arms funding in Haiti as well. This is done predominantly through UN-ODC funding that we provided—UNODC being the UN Office of Drugs and Crime—as well as through training that we provided, which was funded through the International Organization on Migration for both training and equipment to help surveil criminal activities.

Ziad Aboultaif: We know that on the expansion of the MSS to more of a permanent peacekeeping mission, Russia and China, as Security Council members, are not in agreement with this initiative.

Can you advise us on what Canada's position is?

Mark Richardson: My understanding is that within the UN Security Council, these discussions are ongoing in terms of the resolution, and that a vote will take place before the end of the month.

I'm not aware of all the various members' positions, but we understand that a variety of members have had questions and are in direct discussions with the United States on them. Not being a member of the UN Security Council, obviously, we do not have a vote, so we're not consulted directly in terms of how we would vote.

Certainly, we are engaged in full-on diplomatic efforts to try to encourage members to vote for the resolution, as we do feel that at this point in time it represents the best strategy going forward.

Ziad Aboultaif: When my colleague, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, asked a question on whether the gang network in Haiti had any roots or branches in Canada, the answer was that it wasn't your department's...and that you refer to Public Safety in this regard.

Are we aware of any branches of these gangs outside Canada, in other countries that we know of or work with?

Mark Richardson: In a general sense, yes, we are aware that there are links among criminal networks across the region and across the world. Transnational crime is increasingly integrated, and we are aware of this in a general sense. In terms of specifics for Haitian gangs, I'll turn to my colleague Ian.

Ian Myles: I can't add too much to that.

Essentially, the links are growing among the Haitian gangs and pre-existing cartels in places like Colombia and Mexico. We know there is weapon trafficking going through the Dominican Republic. We've also been hearing reports of growing linkages with gangs in Jamaica. I don't see those as branches of Haitian gangs, but I believe there are linkages among separate gangs. Again, it speaks to this issue of the regional nature of the conflict and the spillover that's there. The chaos that exists in Haiti right now makes a very attractive base for international or transnational crime.

• (1220)

Ziad Aboultaif: In our diplomatic mission, how well prepared are we to put on sanctions and go after countries that do support these gangs out there?

Mark Richardson: Up until this point, the sanctions that we have been putting in place with regard to Haiti have been targeted at Haitian individuals. As a country, we seek to align our sanctions policy with the United Nations. In terms of putting sanctions on other countries with regard to Haiti and the transnational crime organizations that are working there, I believe this is not something that has been discussed until this point.

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

If all the members agree, I would like to have a five-minute question period. Is that fine with everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your indulgence, colleagues.

I would like to begin by asking about the use of social media by some of the warlords, essentially broadcasting live the horrendous activities of extortion, violence and beheading people. To what extent do you believe that social media platforms can take more steps to prevent the warlords from profiting from those platforms?

Mark Richardson: It's an interesting question and not one that I've personally come across before. Obviously we are aware of how these warlords are using social media in order to get out their message for recruitment as well as to promote what they're doing. They also spread terror in order to increase their profile.

In terms of speaking with the actual social media organizations in order to control that, that is not something that I, as a witness, am best placed to speak to, unfortunately.

The Chair: What I am specifically referring to, just as a clear example, is the use of Facebook Live having the main warlord performing violence and committing violence against civilians and using that platform repeatedly. I am concerned. There is a video of a beheading of a civilian by the warlord on Facebook Live. It's not once; it's not twice; it's a number of times. These social media platforms are being used to amplify fear and terrorize people. Again, you may not be tracking this, but is that something that the department is tracking?

Mark Richardson: Unfortunately, that is not something that I am able to comment on. If you would like us to take that back and consult within the department as to whether it is something that we as a department are tracking more broadly, we would be happy to do that.

The Chair: My second question is on the Dominican Republic. How porous is that border with respect to guns being sent to Haiti through the Dominican Republic?

Mark Richardson: I'll pass the floor to my colleague Ian Myles.

Ian Myles: The border with the Dominican Republic is a long one and a difficult one to control. There's irregular movement of people but also of materials and illicit materials between them. This is a source of concern for both governments. We've been providing support through programs. One of our programs is the anti-crime capacity-building program that's been providing support to the border control agencies on the Haitian side to try to look at how to reduce that flow. It's very difficult because, as you know, traffic of weapons is linked to corruption and to lower-level law enforcement officers who are bought off by large sums. It's not an easy one to control. It is a challenging area, both in terms of migration as well as in arms trafficking.

• (1225)

The Chair: I have a follow-up question.

Where are the guns or weapons coming from that transit through the Dominican to Haiti?

Ian Myles: I don't have detailed information. The understanding of most people working on the file is that the weapons are originally from the U.S. They're manufactured in the U.S. How they reach the Dominican Republic is something I'm less clear on, because the routes are not necessarily straightforward.

The Chair: Is it your opinion, or the opinion of Mr. Richardson—this is a question for both of you—that the Dominican Republic can do more to interdict those weapons?

Ian Myles: I know that it has been a topic of discussion between our government and the Dominican Republic. They've definitely shared with us the efforts that they're making to strengthen their ability, particularly at their ports of entry, with additional scanners and things like that, to try to intercept it as it enters their borders. I'm afraid I don't have much more information to share at this point.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to our fourth round of questions, starting with Mr. Majumdar.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you for this.

I want to pick up on this thread that has been raised by my colleagues, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Mr. Aboultaif. You mentioned earlier, Mr. Richardson, that you don't have a good sense of the criminal activities in Haiti. I want to give you a chance to respond to that. Can you give me a portrait of the criminal activities that happen in Haiti as they relate to the politics and power structures of that country?

Mark Richardson: I didn't intend to give the impression that we, as a ministry, don't have a good understanding of that. I myself started in this job three weeks ago, so I'm learning as I go—on trial by fire, so to speak—but I'll turn to my colleague, Ian Myles, to cover that question.

Ian Myles: It's a difficult situation to summarize briefly, but, as I mentioned earlier, the origins of the gangs are that they are essentially private armies that were developed, working at the behest of and paid for by different members of the political and economic elite. When the government fell and there was this gap, what changed was that those different gangs, who normally had been fighting each other, formed an alliance to have a common enemy, both in the Haitian National Police and the multinational security support mission, and in the transitional authorities that are in place.

In April 2024, a negotiation was had, in this vacuum, to establish a transitional government with a mandate to restore security and prepare the ground for national elections by the end of their mandate in February. They have become the main focus of attention from these gangs, but, ultimately, our understanding is there's no political motivation whatsoever. It's essentially a criminal one, so the status quo is actually working quite well for the gangs, because they have almost full range to carry out extortion—

Shuvaloy Majumdar: I appreciate what you're saying. I'm sorry for interrupting, but in the interest of time, when gangs subvert the legitimacy of a government and end up diverting billions in aid, at some point, new tools need to be used to confront them. We watch, in Washington, a lot of movement toward using the same instruments and tools to confront terrorism being applied to international crime. We know there is a human trafficking operation, from Haiti to Canada, of people who are abused horribly. Do you think it is time for us to bring new tools and focus to dismantling the gangs that have been denying the Haitian people their representation and legitimacy for well over a decade now?

• (1230)

Mark Richardson: As I alluded to in my opening remarks, we are at an inflection point. Just by the fact that the mandate of the MSSM comes to an end on October 2, we are at a point when we have to think about what the next step and successor to that mission will be.

In terms of the U.S. approach, they have announced both the gang suppression force—so a real focus on that element, as the member has noted—as well as putting in place logistical support to help support that.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you.

The economic elite, whom Mr. Myles described, was created by the aid diversion of the last decade. In many ways, people who have been profiting and maintaining their positions of power have done so at the behest of the gangs that supply them. I don't think that's an intelligence report issue. However, in my mind, has the international system, which has been focusing on Haiti for 10 years, failed? Is it not now time to start rethinking exactly how these violent groups can be confronted, using the same tools that we use to confront terrorism and international crime?

Mark Richardson: I think we all agree that we are at a point where the situation is horrible for Haitians on the ground. We need to be focused on solutions that seek to address the very real security and humanitarian crises they face, as well as on ensuring that we are advancing our national interests.

In terms of using the same tools that we use, or that the Americans use, to address terrorism, in this particular instance that's not something I'm able to comment on, as that has not been part of our discussions thus far. The focus really has been on trying to support this resolution and to put in place the gang suppression force and the UN support office.

I would note that the gang suppression force is meant to be quite a step up in terms of size and scale compared to the MSSM.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to Mr. Blair.

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

Mr. Richardson, we're aware that since 2022 the United Nations and then Canada, through its own autonomous sanctions regime, established certain regulations to create an arms embargo, a travel ban and asset forfeiture and seizure regimes, naming now, as you said, 34 individuals. I'm aware as well that in March of this year, by a Governor in Council order, the Government of Canada brought forward additional regulations naming additional individuals. At the time, it was stated that these "Additional sanctions...are necessary to exert immediate pressure on persons who, either directly or indirectly, engage in activities that undermine the peace, security and stability of Haiti, have participated in gross and systematic human rights violations...or are associated with someone who has committed such acts."

I wonder if you're able to provide us with any update as to how these new regulations have perhaps created greater authority for the Government of Canada to deal with these criminal individuals.

Mark Richardson: On that specific question, I'll turn to my colleague, Ian Myles.

Ian Myles: Again, the use of sanctions by Canada is not done in a vacuum in the sense that an important part of it is trying to build critical momentum with others. The UN sanctions tend to be the most powerful ones, because, by law, they have to be implemented by all member states. Certainly, that's important to us. Some countries have their own autonomous sanctions regimes, so we work closely with them, notably the U.S. The European Union tends to be the mechanism for members of the European Union. We share information; we share our plans; and we speak in advance, to try to determine what will be the most effective way to implement the sanctions.

Enforcing them takes different shapes in different places, and it's not straightforward. One of the most powerful dimensions is making it harder for the people who have been sanctioned to move around or to move their resources around. In terms of the immediate impacts of those, we are aware, from the responses of those who have been sanctioned by Canada, that the complaints are about the impacts on their political careers as well as on their businesses. That, to me, tells us that the sanctions are having the desired impact.

The intention is at least to make initial steps at combatting impunity and making sure that, not just for gang leaders but also those who finance and support them and cause disruption in the country, there are going to be consequences for them and their families for carrying out those types of acts, holding their country's interests in contempt, essentially, in favour of their own personal interests.

• (1235)

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

We are aware of the transitional presidential council and the work that it's undertaking. I think, ultimately, the goal would be to create a politically stable Haiti, with functional military police and with other social services in that country. I think it's a long way off. It's a multi-dimensional crisis, and we speak primarily about the humanitarian crisis and the security concerns. Ultimately, if we are going to be able to support democratic governance and institution building in Haiti beyond the immediate crisis, could you perhaps share with us a bit of what you see as Canada's role in helping to

support the development of those supporting democratic governance and institution-building initiatives?

Mark Richardson: I would simply recognize that this is getting at the heart of the matter in terms of long-term efforts to try to improve the situation in Haiti.

In terms of the transitional presidential council itself, it is mandated to restore security and organized elections by February 2026.

Our view of its legitimacy will be based on the concrete actions that it takes in terms of restoring security, organizing credible elections, fighting corruption and delivering basic services. In terms of how we see that and how that fits into our specific programming, which is all wrapped up around that, I would defer to my colleague, Ian.

Ian Myles: Addressing the root issues is critical. We can't focus just on the short term. I think we have to have clear eyes to know that we won't overcome an entrenched culture of corruption overnight. The corruption happens at many different levels.

Part of the work we're doing now to increase the ability of relevant organizations to conduct investigations and then prosecute them is a key part of that, as is reinforcing the institutions that have those mandates. It's not easy to do. It's not an easy country in which to stick your head up in favour of transparency or justice.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have 2.5 minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

We know many things, including that the main problem in Haiti is the safety of Haitians who are living under the yoke of gangs. We also know that Canada wants to play a leading role in Haiti through its foreign affairs strategy.

As you said earlier, there are proven ties between the gangs in Haiti and people present in Canada.

Knowing all that, shouldn't the Department of Foreign Affairs logically put in place a foreign affairs strategy to intervene in the situation in Haiti, more specifically as regards the ties between Haitian gangs and the people helping them from Canada?

Earlier, you told us that we had to turn to the RCMP, but if gangs are the problem, and if we want to play a role.... You understood my question.

Ian Myles: I can answer that question, Mr. Chair.

Since the beginning of the crisis, we've taken a "departmental" approach, shall we say. We work closely with the RCMP, the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence.

There are always RCMP members who work on the ground at our embassy as liaison officers. They work closely with us, but also with local police and security forces. They can't tell us about all the possible solutions they are following, but we are very aware that they are actively working on this.

Obviously, these officers aren't just interested in the problems in Haiti; they work on the ground precisely to find out and understand potential ties with Canada.

• (1240)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do I have time for a quick question?

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Witnesses, I want to thank you for the clarifications you've provided us today.

I'll give you the opportunity to tell us first about what Ms. Anand is going to tell us this afternoon. Go ahead.

Mark Richardson: Mr. Chair, I would like to talk to you about it, but the truth is that I can't tell you exactly what the minister will say this afternoon during the meeting she will co-chair with her Haitian counterpart.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Next we have MP Kramp-Neuman.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

I'm following up on your comments suggesting that the efforts are focused on the resolution right now.

As we're aware, Canada is the second-largest contributor of cash to Haiti, after the U.S., of course. Is there coordination of efforts with the Americans?

Mark Richardson: We do coordinate our efforts closely with the Americans in terms of the international assistance we have been providing traditionally. As this resolution itself has been presented by them, we are coordinating our efforts with them in terms of trying to support its passage.

I would like to go back to something the member said. Our efforts are not focused solely on passing the resolution at this time. Obviously, our programming on the international assistance realm continues alongside.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Are we aware of why the U.S. excluded Canada in favour of Panama when they were developing and submitting their plan to the Security Council?

Mark Richardson: That's simply because we're not a member of the UN Security Council at this time.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Okay. That's fair.

I'll change lanes. Has the dynamic shifted between the gangs themselves? Is there still infighting, or has there been a cohesion of certain gangs? Is it all one or the other? Has there been coordination with any of the politicals or elites?

Mark Richardson: To the best of my knowledge, the situation continues to be extremely fluid in terms of how the gangs are operating. As we've commented previously, there are ties to the elites. There are different alliances at different times, depending on the interests of the gangs themselves.

At this point, I will turn to Ian to see if he has anything else to add on that point.

Ian Myles: I can say only that this is certainly something that's followed very closely by the different law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: This may be a pipe dream, but I'll follow up on a question from my colleague. Beyond immediate humanitarian assistance, too often we look at the short term. I'm just curious whether you're familiar with or comfortable with sharing what Canada's long-term plan would be for supporting governance, rebuilding institutions and ultimately reducing Haiti's dependency on external aid?

Mark Richardson: That's an excellent question. Oftentimes we get accused of being too forward-looking, in fact, and not focused enough on what's happening immediately.

In terms of the international assistance and our engagement strategy with Haiti, it has been developed in such a way that it does try to look long term to try and address the security stabilization piece, but also to build up robust democratic institutions and a judicial system that works and to support social services to Haitians that actually give them the services that they need.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Perfect.

I think, with time running close, I'll ask you an open-ended question.

Are there any particular lessons we have learned as Canadians that can be applied moving forward?

Ian Myles: The key lesson is to not underestimate the scale of the problem and the need to stay engaged over the long term. The previous international UN-led mission was there for, I think, 13 years. When they left, many were saying it was too early, and we're here a few years later, wondering if we should put another one in.

Part of that is not just because it takes a long time but because there is also this tendency to look at the security as if it's an independent thing, rather than looking at this ecosystem of the power structures and the economic dynamics.

To give one example, the existence of so many economic monopolies is a source of great concentration of wealth. That holds the country back, but it also leads to corruption and fighting among those who want to control those monopolies. Economic reforms are part of that picture; legal reforms are part of that picture, and transparency is as well.

• (1245)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Madame Fortier.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That's interesting. My colleagues have touched on several themes that I wanted to discuss, but I'd like to drill down on one, namely, the fact that Canada is coordinating its efforts with international partners. Is there anything we haven't talked about yet in terms of that coordination with international partners?

A little earlier, you briefly mentioned the role of the Organization of American States. What role could this organization play in this situation? It could also be other multilateral partners or allies.

Could you tell us more about that?

Mark Richardson: We think a body like the Organization of American States could play a very important role.

A resolution by the Americans and the Panamanians was just passed at the United Nations Security Council. This resolution supports the effort of the United Nations and the United Nations Security Council. The Americans and the Panamanians are our partners and can provide international aid.

For more details, I will turn to my colleague Ian Myles.

Ian Myles: I would like to answer the part of the question about the Organization of American States.

It's been around for a long time. They passed a resolution just a month or two ago. It emphasized that international aid had to become a priority for the organization itself, but also for its member countries. It recognizes that Haiti is its neighbour, and helping that country is part of its mandate. Historically, its strength has been precisely the promotion of elections, democracy and these reforms.

At one point, the question was raised about the role it must play in terms of security. I think the answer was that it's not really in their mandate and they don't have the capacity. However, it recently published a very ambitious road map in which it announced what it wanted to do. Marine safety is on this road map, which is encouraging. However, it is still too early to know what its added value will be.

It's possible that a convening role can help people coordinate their affairs and then build the capacity of countries in the region. You have to understand that you can't do everything. It's countries like Jamaica that need to be able to monitor their own borders and the waters in their region.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

We know that the minister will be making a statement this afternoon. Obviously, you can't comment on that at this point. However, if you have any ideas to submit to us as part of our study, following her intervention, we invite you to do so. We're trying to see if there's a way for this committee to come up with recommendations or ideas. I therefore invite you to do so, after the minister's remarks, of course. If you can send us any information, the committee would be happy to receive it in writing or by any other means.

Thank you.

• (1250)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we don't have time for another full round, but if there are one or two questions that someone needs to ask, here's your opportunity.

Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's kind of you.

We know that, in 2022, Canada offered more than \$80 million as part of the Multinational Security Support Mission, or MSSM. Kenyan President Ruto recently welcomed these discussions about mission succession. He also added that he regretted that we did not have the necessary means to carry out this mission to the end. He said that results were too often underestimated. I guess we've invested \$80 million. I assume you've had to do occasional updates on the program.

How does your department evaluate, for example, the results of this \$80-million investment from Canada as part of the mission itself?

Basically, do you have any kind of accountability from the department, based on the money that was invested by Canadian taxpayers in this mission?

Mark Richardson: Mr. Chair, I'll turn it over to my colleague Ian Myles.

Ian Myles: Mr. Chair, it's clear that we can't say that the results are what we expected or what we wanted. We can see that the crisis is still very acute today, as it was a year ago. However, we can also see that the government and transitional authorities are still in place. This would not have been evident without the presence of the Multinational Security Support Mission.

Earlier, we talked about ports, maintaining access to ports to bring in food and basic necessities. We can say that we were able to do so, when that probably wouldn't have been the case. People have died. However, it is not clear how many deaths there will be afterwards.

I think it's clear that the new mission proposed in the resolution is not the magic solution either. There will be challenges precisely because reliance on part of the costs on voluntary contributions is real, especially if the force is increased from 1,000 to 5,500 people. It remains a challenge. That is why the purpose of the event that will be held this afternoon is, among other things, to mobilize resources. It's about leveraging other contributors who are coming in with money, not just the United States or Canada. There are other contributors, but they're not on the same scale as we are.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If I may, I would like to ask one last follow-up question.

I imagine there are documents or reports within the department that show lessons learned from what was invested, which was \$80 million, and the results achieved. Do those documents or reports exist, first of all? If so, will these reports help us improve the impact of Canadian investments in foreign affairs in the future?

Ian Myles: The mission itself has evolved a great deal, even since I was involved in the file. We're talking about 1,000 people, whereas we had only 400 from June to January. We only reached 1,000 people around February, so it wasn't that long ago. The lack of staff and equipment, among other things, was limiting. However, the challenge is still there, even though we've seen things improve. Lessons are emerging over time, and we don't yet know the future of the mission, where it will go. Even if we consider that our role is a matter of big money, like the \$86 million, and that it is something substantial for Canada, I estimate that it represents probably less than 10% of the cost of the mission. It's really the United States that has done the most, especially in cash. They funded the base, a lot of equipment, food aid, and so on, which is not always visible. So separating the results produced by our contribution from what was produced by the mission as a whole is still a challenge.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

• (1255)

[English]

The last question goes to MP Aboultaif.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you again to the witnesses, who have been at this for two hours.

The U.S. is basically leading the charge on Haiti. It also seems that problem is of the Americas, more or less. Now the U.S. is suspending any new aid for international development, which means that's obviously going to affect every front going, and there's more demand, of course, and more money, especially if it's going to be the bigger mission for Haiti.

Do you know or are you aware of whether Canada was asked to put more money into this mission?

Mark Richardson: We are obviously concerned about the vacuum that the lack of U.S. aid will leave. We are, as we've stated, the second-largest foreign supporter of Haiti at this time.

In terms of looking at what they're proposing and in terms of what is necessary to try to provide security and stability for the

Haitian people, it does really address one of the key issues, which is trying to provide a stabilized security situation through both this hybrid gang suppression force, which would be much larger than the current MSSM, as well as a key piece of that that has really impeded the success of the MSSM in the UN support office.

As the member stated, USAID is withdrawing its assistance. The U.S. leadership here is drawing from experience in terms of some of the challenges that the MSSM itself has faced in terms of trying to put forward a solution or a response that will be more stable and sustainable in the long term.

Ziad Aboultaif: Your response is asking me to read between the lines. The question is very clear. Are you aware of any request to Canada to increase financial participation in this mission, yes or no?

Mark Richardson: At this time, the discussions and our efforts are really focused on—and I can speak to our efforts and what we're doing—trying to pass the resolution and encouraging the passing of the resolution within the UN Security Council. In terms of what Canada's contribution would be after the fact, that is something I can't speak about at this time, as it remains a matter of ongoing discussions.

Ziad Aboultaif: I got three-quarters of an answer. That means there's something going on, but you're not willing to speak, you don't want to speak about it, or you can't speak about it at the moment. Is my understanding correct?

Mark Richardson: I can't speculate about what Canada's response and engagement will be with the gang suppression force or what that will look like. At this point in time, we don't know whether the resolution will pass. Obviously, we will be a key contributor to the UN support office through our assessed contributions. That's something that is a given should it be passed.

In terms of the gang suppression force itself, we have been asked, as one of the key contributors to Haiti, along with the other members who have been supporting the MSSM thus far and the United States, to be part of what has been called the standing group of partners to oversee the gang suppression force that has been proposed to be put in place. We have come out and said that we will form part of that. It's essentially a governance body, a bit of a coordination body for the force.

In terms of what Canadian support could be going forward after that, that's something that hasn't been contemplated yet at this time.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Richardson and Mr. Myles, for your testimony today and for appearing on this study.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

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