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Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

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

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

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 our interpreters. You'll also notice a QR code on the card that links to a short awareness video.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and the 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 are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. 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 to the best of our abilities, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Members, the clerk distributed yesterday a draft budget for our meeting today with the Secretary of State for International Development. Do I have the members' approval for this budget?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting on the study of the mandate and priorities of the Secretary of State for International Development.

I would like to officially welcome our witnesses for the first hour. We have the Honourable Randeep Sarai, Secretary of State for International Development.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we welcome Christopher MacLennan, deputy minister of international development; Leslie Norton, assistant deputy minister, international assistance partnerships and programming branch; and Alexandre Lévesque, assistant deputy minister, Europe, Middle East and Arctic branch.

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

Please proceed.

Hon. Randeep Sarai (Secretary of State (International Development)): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, members. It's an honour to be here. I served on this committee before, so it's good to be back. I am pleased to join you to discuss my mandate and how our government's priorities for international development are evolving.

As you all know, we are operating in a challenging geopolitical landscape that is affecting every aspect of our work on the international stage. Multilateral organizations are under tremendous strain. Over the past five years, we have seen important development gains stalled or even reversed. Globally, progress in alleviating extreme poverty has been nearly stagnant. The global food crisis is worsening, and humanitarian needs remain worryingly high, particularly in Gaza, Haiti, Sudan and Ukraine.

Major aid donors are cutting their budgets and shifting their approaches to development assistance. At the same time, new donors are competing for influence, following approaches that may not be in line with Canada's values. Global south countries are calling for reforms to multilateral organizations to allow for more equitable representation systems, and Canada is supporting the ongoing reforms of the UN and the humanitarian system to make them more agile, efficient and effective.

I took on my new duties as the Secretary of State for International Development this spring. My mandate is to act on behalf of Canada to foster sustainable international development and poverty reduction in developing countries and provide humanitarian assistance during crises, but the conditions under which I must fulfill this mandate have changed dramatically over the year, and it is clear that Canada's development work and that of traditional international assistance donors need to adapt to meet this new reality.

In discussing these issues at the meeting of G7 development ministers I chaired this month, my counterparts and I agreed that this moment calls for urgent reforms. We agreed that it's imperative to rethink our approaches to tackling extreme poverty, promoting economic growth in developing countries and responding to humanitarian crises. For Canada, this will mean working to maximize the impact of our dollars, ensuring tangible results and better connecting what we do to strengthen Canada's economic security.

International development assistance can be an investment in shared prosperity and stability. Canada has a strong and proud history of doing just that. We are a leader in putting gender equality at the core of our work, because evidence shows this is not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do. Canadians expect that their taxpayer dollars advance sustainable results they can relate to, and I am making it my priority to achieve this.

As I work through what we need to change in our existing approaches to meet the new era, I will be particularly focused on the following elements.

First, I will work to better articulate how our international assistance concretely supports Canada's need to diversify its trade relationships. This will mean placing greater emphasis on supporting economic growth, trade readiness and private sector engagement to build prosperity and resilience in developing countries. It will mean continuing to build and strengthen enabling environments for growth while ensuring that the most vulnerable are not left behind.

My goal is ultimately to contribute to Canada's long-term, mutually beneficial relationships in developing countries and emerging markets. To achieve this, we will embrace new financing models, digital solutions and locally driven approaches that make good use of our development resources, increase our impact and deliver sustainable outcomes. This includes expanding our use of innovative finance tools such as blended finance to increase private sector investment to ensure that every taxpayer dollar goes even further.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

Our government will ensure that FinDev Canada, our development finance institution, works to scale up more private sector investment in developing countries.

[*English*]

In short, we will establish a more integrated approach that connects our trade diversification and international development imperatives, so that we can strengthen enabling environments for trade, reduce private sector barriers, help create jobs and enhance supply chain resilience.

Second, I am acutely aware of my role in helping address risks such as climate change, infectious diseases and food insecurity. By addressing these, we help create the conditions for global stability and resilience, which is in Canada's benefit.

[*Translation*]

We will continue to work with partners to advance gender equality, respond to humanitarian crises, and protect the environment.

[*English*]

This is a tremendous opportunity to inject a new sense of focus and purpose into what we do and how we do it. It is an opportunity to use Canada's international assistance as a valuable resource that helps tackle global challenges, build strong partnerships and drive meaningful progress, all while ensuring that Canadians stay at the core of our work.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, honourable Secretary of State Sarai, for your remarks.

I will now open the floor to questions, beginning with MP Rood.

You have six minutes.

Lianne Rood (Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much, Secretary, for being here today.

For my first question, I think everybody is paying attention to the news right now with the hurricane that is hitting Jamaica and is about to devastate that island.

What relief is Canada planning, and what humanitarian efforts is the Canadian government preparing to provide?

● (1110)

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Thank you. That is a great question.

We have been on alert regarding hurricane Melissa. In terms of the preparation work and other things, my deputy and ADM have both been apprised of that.

We have a centre in Mississauga that is ready with goods to be shipped out as we need them. There are some funds that have already been deployed. We've been working with CDEMA, and we're waiting for their requests; whatever is needed in the region, we will be supporting them with that.

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much, Secretary. I think all Canadians' thoughts and prayers are with Jamaica right now for the safety of the people there.

Changing channels, Secretary, we see 8.4 billion Canadian tax dollars being spent within the foreign aid envelope. Much of it is going to projects with names like Beans for Women for Empowerment or Gender-Just, Low-Carbon, Rice Value Chains in Vietnam, or it is being funnelled through organizations like the UN or the World Bank.

What returns on investment or outcomes can Canadians see coming from this that improves their lives?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: There are over 2,000 programs that the ministry administers, and they are great programs. Some you may have issues with their names, but their intent is great. In the context of greening our rice, it's a project through which Oxfam aims to promote low-carbon rice value chains in Vietnam. It increases women's participation. It has been developed through broad consultations with government donors and civil society. It increases the production of more sustainable rice, and it increases the livelihood of small rice producers, particularly women.

On that note, Vietnam is one of our top trading partners in the ASEAN, and it's a major supplier of our affordable rice.

These are mutually beneficial programs, and if we can improve the lives of local farmers, increase women's participation and increase their yields using less water for more climate-resilient crops, we also, as Canadians, get a more affordable base for our rice, which is an affordable starch and a much-needed supplement or food source for many Canadians.

Similarly, I think you mentioned international development banks and others. We support them, and now we're doing it more innovatively by giving them capital, using blended finance means and other things so we can attract private capital to help build some of the infrastructure needs in those countries, from ports to storage facilities for food supplies and others. These are the types of things we're doing that are mutually beneficial but also help support a resilient economy for the recipient states.

Lianne Rood: Minister, I did mention organizations like the UN and the World Bank. Again, Canadians are asking about programs where we're giving, for instance, \$22 million—or however much the amount is—to this project on Gender-Just, Low-Carbon, Rice Value Chains, and it's going through organizations like the UN or the World Bank. What kinds of returns or outcomes can Canadians expect from those that will improve Canadians' lives? Are there any?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: The example would be, in that case, that you get more affordable rice shipments to Canada. You get an increased yield in the rice in that land.

Our goal, when it's international development, is not a dollar-for-dollar return to Canadians. It's to maintain a more financially secure world where there is less poverty and that helps result in less migration from those places. It allows for more peace and security and a more stable world.

Right now, you see that Prime Minister Carney is in the region and is making more trade agreements. This is a soft power that helps us work with nations like Vietnam, in this case, where they see the effect of Canada having been there for them and their development in bringing up the needs of women in their regions and increasing their farming yields, and that results in better trade agreements for us. As we're looking for new trading partners, this is the type of program that we'll be working on even further.

Lianne Rood: Thank you.

Minister, I hear this a lot from stakeholders, so my question is, will Canada renew its commitment to the Global Fund to Fight Malaria, Tuberculosis and AIDS during the upcoming replenishment period? How much does the department have earmarked for this?

● (1115)

Hon. Randeep Sarai: The Global Fund does a lot of great work in saving thousands, if not millions, of lives. It's bringing people out of poverty. It's worked immensely well at reducing HIV, as well as tuberculosis, malaria and other diseases. It's a great fund.

As the budget is coming out very shortly, we'll see...and the Prime Minister will make that commitment shortly, so I don't want to foreshadow anything. We have a lot of great appreciation for the work that the Global Fund has been doing in the past, and we'll continue to work with them in the future.

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much.

My time is just about up, so I'll cede the rest.

The Chair: Next, we will go to MP Anita Vandenberg, who is joining us virtually.

Go ahead. You have six minutes.

Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to welcome you back to this committee. Thank you so much for the leadership you've shown in the past months, especially for Canada to lead in working toward a more peaceful, more secure and more equitable world.

On that, I'll pick up on something you said in your opening remarks about Canadian values and how there is now more competition in terms of the narrative. There are illiberal values being backed by certain nation states. The battle between authoritarianism and democracy is really what underpins our geopolitical reality right now. Canada has a very strong history of supporting democracy, supporting human rights defenders and making sure that rule of law and stability are all over the world.

I would just like to ask you at this very crucial moment what Canada is doing in terms of promoting democracy. We've seen cuts from a number of countries, in particular to the National Endowment for Democracy in the United States, which has caused the end of the World Movement for Democracy.

We've also seen other areas where they're stepping up. At a recent all-party democracy caucus meeting last week, where we had the European commissioner for democracy, they said that Europe is creating a centre for democratic resilience and would love to have Canada be a partner in those kinds of things.

Could you give us an overview about inclusive democratic governance and how we're promoting the values of democracy and freedom globally?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Thank you. I really commend you on your passion in this regard.

You are very right. There is a rising authoritarianism and a misuse of technology to undermine democratic systems. This is something we have spoken about many times in ministerial meetings around the globe. We have to do more on that.

We are working with partners to advance media freedom, civil society and human rights, and to address the threats against democratic governance. In the budgets of 2023-24, I think \$376 million was funded for inclusive governance programs. That's about 7% of our international assistance budget.

Overall, I think there are about 650 projects yearly, supporting civil society groups to advance inclusive governance, human rights, equality and peace. These include Journalists for Human Rights, Equitas and many others. We'll continue doing that.

I can say that when we met with the G7 developmental ministers, the commitment from most of our counterparts was very strong in this regard. We'll continue to do that work. It's very imperative.

Some governments, in my tours, have actually asked for assistance in strengthening their governance systems, particularly in terms of oversight and how to build those structures. We continue to do much of that work bilaterally as well as multilaterally, and we'll continue to do so.

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much, Minister. We know this is a significant priority.

The other question I wanted to ask you is about the FIAP, or the feminist international assistance policy. We know that when women are included—not just as beneficiaries of aid but in the design and implementation from the very beginning of development programs—we see better outcomes.

I know that Canada has been a leader in the world. In fact, other countries are following us on feminist foreign policies and feminist assistance policies. I just wonder what the current commitment is and what the state is of the feminist international assistance policy.

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Great. Thank you.

We all know, and I said it in my speech as well, that when women and girls do better, then we all do better. It's not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do. We discussed this as well at our G7 development ministerial, that we need to strengthen those. It makes economic sense. It makes sense for a lot of other programs, and to have that participation of women in the agenda itself, in the way we fund our programming and the way we implement that programming, makes it even better. I think we've done that as a government here in Canada, and we're doing that in the programs that we're funding globally.

The world is changing. We have to push hard to maintain that. We're seeing a lot of drawing back. We're seeing a lot of push-back from many. Some are okay with some words and not others. We're being creative and doing whatever we can to make sure we fund to help young women and girls, whether it's for sexual reproductive health, participation in the workforce or sustained development in the regions. We're doing whatever we can, and we'll continue to do that going forward.

• (1120)

Anita Vandenbeld: I'm very pleased to hear you talk about the sexual and reproductive health rights. We know that around the world this is something we're losing. Women are losing those rights.

With your 10 seconds, I want to reaffirm that commitment to SRHR.

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Yes, there's a very firm commitment and a very strong commitment. I've seen first-hand the benefits for a lot of these marginalized women and very young girls, and how a little bit can make a big difference in their lives. We'll continue to do that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll next go to MP Duceppe.

[Translation]

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

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

Thank you to the Secretary of State and the other witnesses for joining us today.

Mr. Sarai, since Mr. Carney took office, we've witnessed a clear intention to link international aid and economic issues. You touched on this in your opening statement. We agree that an international aid project that has mutual economic benefits is a good thing. It helps justify international aid to our fellow citizens. However, many people—including myself—fear that international aid will be exploited for economic gain.

How can your department ensure that this doesn't happen?

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Thank you. It's a great question.

The goal is to make sure it's never weaponized. The point is that the landscape of the development world is changing. There's almost a 24% to 30% reduction in aid development in Germany and France, and massive amounts in the U.S. This is a large void that Canada and other countries cannot fill on their own.

Two things are probably happening. One is that we're trying to get more private capital. There are trillions of dollars around the world that might be hesitant, but we need to get them and get the right vehicles and tools through our international financial institutions—the development banks, FinDev and others—to help contribute.

The other thing is how we focus as Canada. Traditionally, we were able to sprinkle a little in a lot of buckets to help a lot of programs, because we had the support of a lot of these large countries that were contributing to the international development world. When we don't have them, then I think we have to focus more on how we can concentrate.... One of the ways we concentrate on areas where we are doing trade and have synergies is that we can get private capital to contribute more. We can concentrate and create a great brand and reputation for that region.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Indeed, all over the world, we are seeing a sharp decline in international aid investments by developed countries.

Nevertheless, in 1970, the UN asked developed countries, including Canada, to devote 0.7% of their GDP to international aid, a goal they had committed to achieving. We are still a long way from that goal, given the reduction in investment by developed countries in this area. The U.S. in particular comes to mind, having abolished USAID.

Does Canada have a plan to meet that 0.7% target?

If so, how will it do so? If not, why is there no such plan?

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: We are actually one of the largest donors per capita in the world. In fact, even without a per capita basis I believe Canada is seventh in the world in terms of ODA and development. We punch above our weight in almost every single category.

We are also one of the ones now praised by our counterparts, whether it's G7, G20 or OECD countries, which commend us for maintaining our strong commitment to development and humanitarian assistance. I would proudly say that we actually get commended for keeping that.

Yes, the climate has changed quite a bit. Others have pulled back. We have been strong in our commitment to maintaining ODA and—

• (1125)

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Secretary of State, excuse me for interrupting, but my question was not a pretext for you to brag. It was a specific question: Does Canada have a plan to reach the target of 0.7% of its GDP in international aid? If so, how, and if not, why not? It's a simple question.

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: I'll be very honest. I think that with the financial situation and our global stresses in terms of our trade, to maintain what we have is a strength, and we should pride ourselves as Canadians on punching above our weight. Based on that, I'll leave it there.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Secretary of State, there are many small international aid organizations in Canada. For example, in my riding, there is the Centre de solidarité internationale du Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. The organization has been around since 1979 and has carried out numerous projects across the country. Its projects have had a real impact—both for communities in which they take place and in Lac-Saint-Jean. People from Lac-Saint-Jean take part in these projects with partners from Benin, Burkina Faso, Ecuador and Senegal. They conduct solidarity projects and implement global citizenship education programs, for example.

In short, the organization has carried out a huge number of projects, yet it has seen its funding decrease. Here are the figures, Mr. Secretary of State. In 2019–2020, it received \$603,000 from the federal government. In 2022–2023, it received \$584,797. Currently, in 2024–2025, funding was reduced to \$5,000—which is slightly less than the salary of an employee hired for the summer. Hiring someone for the summer actually costs the organization, since it has to add a little money.

Small organizations like this one have been sounding the alarm for a very long time because they do not have access to federal funding, even though they're probably better at accountability and on-the-ground impact, and probably spend their money more wisely.

First, how do you explain the fact that funding for these organizations has dwindled to a trickle?

Second, do you intend to do anything to enable them to return to meaningful federal funding, as was the case in the not-so-distant past?

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: I'll be very brief.

As to that particular organization's funding, I think GAC has a rigorous process to vet those, and, maybe off-line, we'll try to get you that answer. Twenty-five per cent of our aid goes to Canadian NGOs that are doing work across the globe, and we're trying to make the application process simpler so that they can have a simplified way while maintaining the proper governance and accountability of our funding.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now start the second round of questions, beginning with MP Rood.

You have five minutes.

Lianne Rood: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, since 2015, Canada has sent \$108.9 million in aid to China. What precise objectives justified this spend, and what measurable outcomes were achieved for Canadians and for human rights on the ground?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Canada doesn't give any bilateral funding directly to the Chinese state or to its government. The work we do is for civil society work, for human rights, for gender, and for climate initiatives to make the area more climate-resilient. Most of that funding is done through multilaterals. We contribute to the Red Cross, Oxfam and other UN organizations that have smaller percentages that go into China. The only bilateral ones are the ones that I particularly mentioned, and they are mostly for increasing human rights or strengthening the organizations that are working in that regard.

Lianne Rood: Minister, your May 6 briefing note said specifically that 39% of China aid went directly to Chinese recipients.

Who exactly received these funds and for what projects? How were they vetted for links to the Chinese state, the People's Liberation Army or United Front entities?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: I can certainly say that none of them were given to the Chinese government or any of their organizations. These are only for civil society funds. I can give you that number in one second. I think it was \$14.6 million that was in multilateral funding for organizations that Canada contributes to that have an active role in China. That is pretty much the only multilateral funding.

I can say that both the previous government before us and the Conservatives gave \$360 million to China over their tenure, including some funds directly to the state. I think ours has been a very small level, and it's only for civil society, human rights groups, and NGOs that are working on climate. They have only been bilateral with those civil society groups, and there has been nothing with the state itself.

• (1130)

Lianne Rood: Minister, the briefing note is contrary to that. It says it was given directly to Chinese recipients. Perhaps, then, could I please ask that you table to this committee a full list of projects since 2015, including their budgets, implementers, deliverables, audits and independent evaluations?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: I would be happy to do so.

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much.

The briefing note also cites OECD eligibility as a justification for funding China. Does the OECD eligibility override Canadian foreign policy priorities, national security risk and values considerations, and where are those trade-off decisions documented? Who signs off?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: As I said, we do not give any funding to China itself or to the Chinese government. The funding goes to—I actually have this in front of me—the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, which gets about \$880,000. That helps provide small contributions to local graduate student initiatives that work on inclusive government, human rights, gender equality, peace and security. We have a very small program, the Canada-China scholars' exchange program. It's about \$200,000, and it helps build cultural understanding. Between those two, it's been operated for over 50 years under consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments. The last one will be the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development. It's an international advisory body that provides support to China and environmental and sustainable development policies.

That's how we do our work. We don't give any contributions.

Lianne Rood: Where are they documented, and are you the one who signs off on these, then?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: They're probably all well below my signing-off threshold, but Global Affairs officials would sign off on these.

Lianne Rood: Minister, the department says there has been no “direct bilateral assistance to Chinese state authorities since 2013” but that aid flowed via multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and “non-state partners”. What safeguards prevent pass-through funding from indirectly supporting state organs or entities under Canadian sanctions?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: I don't think there are any sanctions in that regard, but they're mostly multilateral development banks. They are also contributions that are...the Green Climate Fund. The sectors that they are working on are in energy, transport, storage of energy, and environmental protection. Those are the two areas that some of these multilateral development banks have been funding, including in places like China.

I think Canada's share of the multilateral...is about \$12.1 million.

Lianne Rood: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll next go to MP Mona Fortier.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Thank you, Secretary of State, for joining us today.

As part of the exercise you're planning to conduct, rather than giving us an overview of the government's contribution since 2015, I would prefer you used 2005 as a starting point—if it's not too much to ask—since the Harper government also made investments in that area. That would allow us to conduct an interesting comparative analysis.

We are well aware that the government invests billions of dollars in international aid and that we have a concrete role in working with NGOs, which are doing important work on the ground.

I'm coming back to some questions from my colleague Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, but in my riding, Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, there are several NGO headquarters—including Cooperation Canada, Oxfam Canada and Cuso International. If I listed them all, we'd be here all day.

How will we continue to work with these NGOs in modernizing Canada's role, as you mentioned?

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Sure. I would always call it a non-partisan file. This is a file of development, humanitarian assistance. I think I've spoken to all my counterparts and critics, and everyone agrees that we should all focus on making the lives of those who are most in need better. It's not partisan in nature, but we do have accountability and other issues that we always have to maintain. That's where Parliament plays an important role.

When it comes to small NGOs or Canadian NGOs, we do a lot of work with them, a lot of funding for them. I have been told that it's a little onerous sometimes for smaller organizations to apply the accountability, but I will probably say that 25% of the funding goes to them. We would love to give funding to more Canadian NGOs. Sometimes the narrative in terms of why multilaterals get more funding or greater funding is that they just have the infrastructure on the ground. They are able to rapidly respond much more easily. If I may speak candidly, we get more bang for our buck for Canada, because they have the ability to be there; they have the infrastructure. Setting up shop in a new place all at once is harder.

Canada has a good number of programs. In Quebec, Desjardins is one of the amazing global organizations doing a lot of NGO work. I've seen their work in West Africa and in Latin America, and they have been doing a great job and will continue to find more ways to get more Canadian participation.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Indeed, the Fédération des caisses Desjardins du Québec celebrated 125 years of work in Canada and around the world. I'm glad you mentioned Desjardins.

We were talking about NGOs, but let's talk a bit about the private sector. You mentioned that the private sector could and should play a greater role in Canada's approach.

Can you give us some concrete examples of what is currently happening that is important in achieving our objectives and priorities?

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: This has been a priority in the G7, among the leaders themselves. Prime Minister Carney committed \$391 million for innovative finance to catalyze private capital towards economic growth. There was another \$50 million given to a program called SCALED, to address the barriers that the private sector was facing in terms of investment in developing countries. It's to simplify and standardize the blended finance structures so that our sustainable development goals are achieved, and the international development banks have the tools and means.

When I hosted the G7 development ministerial, we hosted a reception. Expectations were for, maybe, 50 of these funds and their participants to come. Over 100 came—115. These included from philanthropic groups like the Rockefeller and Ford foundations to large asset managers like BlackRock, Brookfield and Macquarie, and to state banks and state development funds like the Austrian Development Bank, the Qatar Development Bank and many others. They showed a huge appetite to give and put money in. They're usually looking for stability in terms of currency, governance, how they get their money and whether it is secured.

They're willing to do concessional financing as well, at a lot of these foundations particularly, but we have to give them the foundations for that, and that's how a small contribution goes a long way. If we capitalize a bank in terms of their reserves, or we give them the structures for how they can register or do blended finance—when the private corporations keep their money a bit more safe and we take the risk—they're more than willing to participate. It's been a game-changer in that regard.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[Translation]

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

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Over the past two years, I've had the opportunity to join missions in Cameroon, Kenya and Rwanda. NGOs and a number of advocacy groups that are present in Africa say they sense a disengagement on Canada's part. These are the people on the ground talking.

Because nature abhors a vacuum, we see the increasing presence of China and Russia on the African continent. These countries are filling a void left by others.

The government's response was Canada's Africa Strategy, which was tabled a few days before the election. According to many, it is a bungled strategy that is barely 18 pages long and is not a serious approach, given the scope of the existing problem.

Do you have a more effective strategy in the works to get Canada back on the ground in Africa and help these organizations feel that Canada is no longer disengaging? This is a Quebec sovereigntist speaking to you.

• (1140)

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Look, when it comes to Africa, I think it's one of the largest, if not the largest recipient of our development aid. Over \$3.2 billion, which is 44% of our ODA, goes to Africa, so it's a large recipient.

When you talk about a vacuum, I think, if there's a vacuum, it's probably USAID's. The fact that the U.S. is going out and leaving that development world, where countries like China and others are—

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Excuse me, Mr. Secretary of State, but people have told me this. I'm not making it up. I'm not pulling it out of thin air. I met with several organizations on the ground who said that there used to be a greater Canadian presence in the countries I visited. When I speak to ambassadors on the continent, they tell me the same thing. So I'm not making this up.

To solve a problem, you first have to recognize that it exists. I want to work with the government if it truly intends to regain its place on the ground.

What I understand from your statement is that you don't think it's a problem. So you haven't planned anything to address this problem since you say there isn't one.

Did I understand correctly?

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Tackling the vacuum created by the U.S. or others that have exited is not something that Canada on its own can do. It's a massive pool. It's between \$60 billion and \$80 billion. It's 25-30% of the aid. It's not something that Canada on its own can do, but that's where private financing and blended financing come in. Others we will be able to do.

I met with the African Union commissioner at the African Union as well. They've now recognized that they have to build some of their structures themselves, especially when it comes to health, so they're not reliant on it. I was able, in my first and second trips, which were both to Africa—Ghana, Tanzania, Ethiopia and South Africa—to see our programs first-hand, and I think our programs are very strong.

Again, I think the proof is in the pudding in that 44% of our ODA, our official development assistance, is to Africa. Now, if anything, we're trying to do more to work with them, as they have 30% of the world's critical minerals, 60% of the solar energy and 25% of the biodiversity, so we will continue to engage with them.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We will next go to MP Rood.

You have five minutes.

Lianne Rood: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you say that no money goes to the Chinese state, but Global Affairs paid \$1.1 million in educational grants to Chinese universities and colleges. Of course, colleges and universities are linked to the state, and I can't for the life of me think why we're giving them money when money is supposed to be for impoverished people, people living in poverty. The only people in China who can afford to go to school are those from the wealthier families.

Minister, I was wondering if you could table with the committee which institutions, what programs, receive the funds, what steps were taken to prevent the misuse of Canadian funding, and whether assurances were in place to ensure that this funding was not used for furthering educational oppression by the Chinese state.

Hon. Randeep Sarai: I can defer to my deputy. He can answer any particular questions in that regard.

Christopher MacLennan (Deputy Minister of International Development, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I don't have the exact details on that, but we can absolutely bring them forward to the committee. As I think was suggested, over the past 20 years, the support that has gone to.... My guess is probably educational exchanges, and it's potentially through IDRC as well, but we can bring that forward to the committee.

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much. We'd appreciate it if you could bring that to the committee.

Minister, going forward, will you suspend new disbursements to Chinese recipients and other hostile state actors pending a full risk review and public audit? Will you be implementing additional partner vetting, transparency and disclosure of human rights, unconditionality and intellectual property safeguards as conditions on aid disbursements?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Global Affairs Canada, when they fund and review any of these grants, have a very rigorous process in terms of vetting those programs. They have strict criteria to adhere to, so I'm pretty confident that those measures are already in place.

I'll continue to ensure that no funding is going to anyone who is suppressing anyone's rights, infringing on Canadian copyright laws or anything that's detrimental to Canada or its existence.

• (1145)

Lianne Rood: Thank you.

Minister, the \$645 million for Canada's international climate finance and biodiversity programs will end on March 31, 2026. Would you commit to asking your government for fiscal responsibility that prioritizes Canadians and not seek the continuation of this program?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: We are going through a budget that's going to come out on November 4. There's a comprehensive expenditure review happening.

Canada has a very strong commitment to climate and biodiversity. I don't see our exiting that in any which way, but there will be always reviews and tweaks to programs as we see how efficient or effective they are, where they're needed, how they're needed and what the priorities are. We always consult Canadians to make sure that the voices of Canadians are heard, and we do a program that is appropriate for Canadian values and Canadian interests.

Lianne Rood: Thank you.

The \$15.5 million for climate change action for gender-sensitive resilience will end on November 30, 2025. Can you commit to asking your government for fiscal responsibility that prioritizes Canadians and not seek the continuation of this program?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: As I said, I will review all programs as they come up for review. As other program funding requests come in, we always continue to look at their merits and success, as well as how well they've done in terms of results. Based on that, we'll make our decisions.

Lianne Rood: On what criteria does the department deem a nation hostile or at high risk for Canadian aid? Beyond China, what other states fall into this category? How is due diligence applied in determining whether aid funding will be misappropriated or not?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: The best example would probably be Afghanistan. I think that Canada does not share values with the government in Afghanistan, but remember that when we're doing aid in developing nations, we don't agree with all the values of many of those countries. Our goal is to help build some values, whether it's through democratic institutions, through gender rights and women's rights or through creating a better education system.

We help more than 100 million students around the world through many of our funding initiatives.

Lianne Rood: Thank you, Minister. I have one final question.

If projects fail to meet governance transparency or human rights benchmarks, what clawback mechanisms exist? Has funding been recovered, suspended or reprogrammed since 2015, from which nations, and why?

The Chair: Please give a very brief response.

Hon. Randeep Sarai: The process is very rigorous. I will let our department answer those questions, and maybe we can table those afterwards.

Lianne Rood: I'd appreciate that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to MP Rob Oliphant. You have five minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Secretary, and thank you, officials, for being here and for the work you do on behalf of Canadians all the time.

I am tracking hurricane Melissa, which will land momentarily, probably as a level 5 hurricane that will affect Jamaica and probably Haiti and Cuba as well. This is something I'm glad you are tracking, and I hope the Canadian response is strong in the aftermath.

However, I want to focus less on a natural disaster and more on human-made disasters.

I had a meeting last week with the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We talked about the blatant disregard for the rules of war and international humanitarian law, the engagement of states in breaking those laws and then the aftermath.

Whether it's Russia in Ukraine or, allegedly, Israel in Palestine and Gaza, we have a disaster. The rules of law under the Geneva Conventions and other international humanitarian law are not being followed, and we will have to pay a bill.

How can you and the department work towards engagement on international law to ensure that Canadians won't be footing a bill later for human-made disasters because people have not followed international humanitarian law?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: That's a very good question, Parliamentary Secretary.

We all know the effects of war and of the breaching of many international laws in Ukraine by Russia and in Gaza by Israel. Obviously, the enforcement of international law is the purview of Minister Anand in terms of or in addressing those matters that come to me in terms of international development and humanitarian assistance.

I can't agree with you more, particularly with regard to Gaza. The situation has been very dire. The way in which aid was given was horrific. Daily updates on the loss of lives, as you have probably seen, show almost 20 to 30 deaths every morning. It's numbing to see those deaths. People are dying. They're just seeking aid, and they're being shot at.

Accessibility was diminished significantly. There used to be 400 places where you could get aid; now it's down to four. You can imagine a population of more than two million people getting aid from only four distribution points. That's 500,000 for each one. It's not effective, not correct. In no way is it based on international standards.

We must do more to avoid this. That is a great example of a really preventable famine, a very preventable humanitarian crisis, and I think Minister Anand, along with her counterparts globally, has been working very hard and very strongly to prevent that, to sanction many individuals and create sanctions against those who are responsible, and to demand from them that they respect and adhere to international law.

The Prime Minister has also been very clear on the role of the ICJ and the international community.

• (1150)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I'm trying to push us all upstream so that we don't have crises later, so I want us all to work together on that.

The second issue I'd like to raise is about pushing upstream. I want to talk about the International Development Research Centre, the IDRC, which I think is a pre-eminent, world-class institution that is providing research so that we put our aid in the best places possible. It is building research capacity around the world.

I want to be assured that the IDRC will be on your radar as we go through budget discussions, because I think it is providing the tools to go upstream to stop some of the issues later.

Do you have any comments on that?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: I call it our secret weapon. I think the IDRC is one of Canada's best investments. It does amazing work, like creating climate-resilient potatoes in the Philippines, which is not only increasing the yields but also putting people through school. Families that otherwise couldn't even afford to feed themselves are now getting larger yields because of the work that IDRC has done in agriculture.

It will continue to maintain the support that is necessary. It is one of Canada's paramount institutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: My time is done.

The Chair: Yes, it just about is.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: It flies when you're having fun.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll start the last round. It's a lightning round. We will have three members with three minutes each, beginning with MP Kronis.

You have three minutes.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you so much for being here today.

You spoke about a realignment towards mutually beneficial programs so there's a return on investment—in your words, a “bang for our buck”—and about things like investing in programs for rice in Vietnam leading to lower prices for rice here in Canada.

How do you measure that?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: When it comes to international development, those measurables are long term, so these are ways we support a nation we have good ties with or we want to potentially have better a relationship with. Vietnam is one of the areas in the Indo-Pacific that we want to improve ties with. It's a large trading partner for Canada, and it's an emerging market that is going to be increasing as a trading partner.

This is the soft diplomacy we use. If we're able to help develop their agriculture processes, their education and their women's and girls' programs, the relationship to support a strong supply of agriculture products going both ways improves.

We've seen the increase in our trade with Vietnam in the particular program you asked about—

Tamara Kronis: Thanks for that, but you did speak about ROI. You spoke about a “bang for our buck”, and I'm wondering what that looks like structurally.

Do you have people doing regression analysis? Is there a place Canadians can go to see how these things impact our prices, or is it really just something where we are hoping and we have good feelings about it? Is this a vibes program, or is there actual data that Canadians can look to and see the return that you're talking about?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Absolutely. I think the data will be that you'll see trade relationships and the trading back and forth increase. You'll see an increase in Canadian development—

Tamara Kronis: How and where will we see that increase?

• (1155)

Hon. Randeep Sarai: You're more than welcome to see it. I think Canada has trade relationships with those countries. You're more than welcome to see those. I think you'll see a steady increase in terms of where we've given development dollars. Where it hasn't been effective, we're able to—

Tamara Kronis: We have a limited amount of time in this lightning round. I want to ask you one more question.

You talked about getting private capital to contribute more, and you talked about a \$391-million fund. You talked about The Rockefeller Foundation, and I also noticed you included BlackRock in that list.

Can you say how much of that \$391-million Canadian government fund will go to for-profit corporations to increase this vibey, feelings way of international development?

The Chair: Give a brief response.

Hon. Randeep Sarai: It's not a vibey, feelings way; it's to support the banks. None of that money goes to private companies. It goes to our international development banks, like the African Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Tamara Kronis: And BlackRock.

Hon. Randeep Sarai: No, BlackRock would contribute to a program. They haven't yet. They're keen to see how they can participate.

Say there's a port being done that's being funded by the Caribbean Development Bank. Canada will contribute the structure of that financing, and private capital is able to contribute to the loan program that the African Development Bank or the Caribbean Development Bank would make to that port.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have MP Bill Blair.

You have three minutes.

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

Welcome, Secretary. It's very good to see you here. I'm very familiar with all of the work that you have been doing as a member of Parliament and in your community for many years. I think it uniquely positions you to be successful in your current role.

I would like to talk about this new priority that you're advancing about mutual economic prosperity and trade facilitation. For many years, our approach has not been as transactional as, perhaps, that of China or the United States or other countries.

Looking at how our significant contributions to international development can facilitate trade is something worthwhile. For example, last year there was nearly \$2 billion in loans to Ukraine to stabilize their economy. We see right now that the Prime Minister is in Southeast Asia for conversations with ASEAN and others.

Can you share your thoughts on how we might facilitate our significant contributions to humanitarian aid and how we could also facilitate improved trade relationships with those developing countries?

Hon. Randeep Sarai: Sure. I think there are many ways. I'll give you simple examples that I saw first-hand. Take a coffee-growing region in Ethiopia or another country from which Canadians buy coffee. If we are able to assist farmers to increase their yields by stumping or pruning—they call it stumping there—we give assistance by helping them with water wells, solar-powered wells, etc., and we help the women and girls in that region, then we maintain, for our coffee companies, a safe, sustainable and resilient supply chain going forward, so they don't have to worry about instability in those regions. When they choose which countries to supply their coffee to, they're going to be more keen on supplying to those that are like Canada, because Canada has assisted them in that regard.

Another example would be my going to Tanzania. Barrick Mining is the largest taxpayer in the country of Tanzania. If we are to put development in a region where that extraction and mining work is being done, Barrick or other resource sectors also contribute to that development, because they will want the best. If we're going to do vocational training for women and girls in, say, heavy equipment operating, they get a steady supply of great workers who will work on their plants, instead of having to import them or bring them from somewhere else. This is the type of stuff where we can coordinate development.

Similarly, last I would say infrastructure. Many Canadian companies are great infrastructure development arms around the globe. If we can do some of the pre-work in terms of the research on say, a train, a subway line or a highway corridor to help facilitate supply chains or the movement of people, when our bids go in for that infrastructure to build a subway, highway or rail car, we have the upper hand. We have a better ability to navigate that market.

These are the types of ways that I'm trying to help facilitate our trade through the development work that we do.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

You have three minutes.

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

Mr. Secretary of State, we are all in favour of inclusion and diversity, and we agree that the money used to fund international aid when you participate in programs comes from Quebeckers and Canadians.

Recently, a program called “Gender-Sensitive Mine Action for a Sustainable Future in Ukraine” was created, which also included “the creation of a working group on gender equality and diversity to promote gender-transformative mine action in Ukraine.” That is probably the most Justin Trudeau program ever created.

I would like someone to explain what a gender-sensitive demining activity is.

[*English*]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: I know the Bloc has a very passionate commitment to gender equality, and I'm glad you asked me that question.

Without the particulars of that program, I've met with some of these anti-mining, demining corporations, NGOs, that have been working. They've found that women who engage in this get more empowered and are much more effective at demining in that respect. If we're able to train and empower women into fields they otherwise are not, that is better.

I don't know if you're talking about anti-mine or demining in terms of bomb demining, or if you're talking about mining in terms of the mineral extraction world. In that regard as well, it becomes a singular, male employment sector only if we cannot empower women—

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Secretary of State, shouldn't the goal of demining a field be limited to just that? What we want is for people not to die. I don't see how a gender-specific criterion can improve a program funded by our taxes. I think Ukrainian men and women simply want to prevent people from being blown up when they step on a mine.

I just want to draw your attention to this type of program. Will you continue to implement such programs in your new role, or will the department's vision change somewhat?

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai: We have to remember that, in Ukraine in particular, the men are at war. There's a big lack of men to do a lot of these jobs. If we can get the women who are there to have those skills.... In this regard, I have met the organizations doing that work. They have said that women have done a better job at demining; their natural, intrinsic nature to demine is much more effective. They also are much better when they come home. They are respected by their peers, so it's doing two things at one time. I think it's demining; it's getting more people in the field of demining, which, otherwise, they would not have. If it also helps improve their gender equality and employment equality in their area, I think it's a win-win situation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you for your appearance today before the committee, Minister, and thank you to the officials as well. This concludes the first half of our meeting. Therefore, the meeting is suspended.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: Colleagues, I call this meeting to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 23, the committee resumes its study of the situation in Haiti and Canada's response.

[Translation]

I would now like to welcome the witness who will be with us for the second hour of the meeting. His Excellency Anthony Dessources is the ambassador of the Republic of Haiti to Canada.

Mr. Dessources, welcome.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks. We will then move on to questions from committee members.

• (1210)

H.E. Anthony Dessources (Ambassador of the Republic of Haiti to Canada, Embassy of the Republic of Haiti): Good morning, everyone, dear members of the committee.

Thank you very much for welcoming me to this great assembly and for inviting me to testify before this committee as part of the study on the situation in Haiti and Canada's response.

My name is Anthony Dessources, the new ambassador of the Republic of Haiti to Canada. I presented my credentials to the Governor General, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon, on September 24.

After consulting with the authorities in my country, I am able to respond to the invitation you extended last week, on Tuesday, October 21, 2025, which we had to postpone until today. I also feel it is important to express, on behalf of the Haitian government, my gratitude for your country's unwavering support for Haiti in various areas of co-operation and for the warm hospitality shown to the Haitian community in Canada.

I would particularly like to highlight Canada's involvement in recent years in Haiti's recurring socio-political crisis, with a view to

finding a democratic and lasting solution. At the same time, I must take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of the international community to come to Haiti's aid.

Haiti, once known as the pearl of the Caribbean, is currently in an untenable situation that makes life extremely difficult for the majority of Haitians. It is a multidimensional crisis that remains quite challenging for the Haitian authorities to manage.

Firstly, the security situation remains quite difficult to resolve. Indeed, despite the Haitian government's efforts with the presence of the Multinational Security Support Mission, or MSSM, led by Kenya, bandits and criminal gangs have continued to expand their presence in the Haitian capital and even in other parts of the country, such as the Artibonite department, as well as the city of Mirebalais and the commune of Lascahobas—both located in the Central Plateau department—which are important areas for the survival of a large proportion of the population.

Naturally, this situation has caused catastrophic humanitarian consequences that the Haitian government has struggled to manage so far. These include the mass displacement of a large part of the population. Indeed, 1.4 million internally displaced persons have been forced to abandon their homes and settle in temporary shelters that do not have enough space to accommodate them.

That said, the most grievous aspect of this untenable situation is the suffering inflicted on young girls as a result of sexual violence perpetrated by gang members.

It should be noted, however, that this situation is not new and has been escalating since 2021, following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. That event is largely responsible for the violence that prevails in several areas of the country.

Ladies and gentlemen, try to imagine for a moment a Canada without a governor general, prime minister, or members of Parliament for five years. The country would then have to try to function with a provisional government without the appointment of these individuals, whom only the people have the power to choose and elect. Then you will better understand the situation in Haiti, despite the efforts of the presidential transition council, or PTC, to get Haiti back on track.

We also believe that, in addition to the assistance that our compatriots here are providing to their brothers and sisters in Haiti, it is undeniable that without the support of certain friendly countries, Canada in particular, the current situation would only worsen.

• (1215)

As the new ambassador, I would like to take this opportunity to make a solemn appeal to the Canadian government and non-governmental organizations to increase their assistance to the people of Haiti, whose ancestors were the saviours of certain nations throughout the 19th century. Such assistance should focus on security, namely strengthening the national police force, humanitarian aid, of course, economic development and support for the transitional government.

It should also be noted that the United Nations has decided to approve the creation of a new security force to assist the national police in combatting gangs, namely the Gang Suppression Force, or GSF, which has just officially replaced the MSSM in Haiti for a period of 12 months. Furthermore, all former members of the MSSM have been hired by the GSF. It is also within the framework of this reorganization that the United Nations has created the United Nations Support Office in Haiti, or UNSOH, to support the transition, which will only be operational in six months.

For its part, the presidential transition council has entered into talks with various political stakeholders and other entities in order to find the right formula for dealing with the February 7 deadline in the event that there are no elections. The choices are as follows: first, to keep the PTC in place; second, maintain the PTC with four members; third, cancel the PTC; fourth, choose a well-known Haitian citizen who is loved by the population.

Ultimately, it would be a real shame if the current political leadership failed to deliver on its major commitments. In all honesty, it would be regrettable if this transitional political opportunity did not lead to the return to constitutional order that is so desired and vital for Haiti's political stability and future. If, in the coming weeks, the credibility of the elections proves untenable, a credible democratic solution will have to be found as soon as possible by the members of the PTC, national stakeholders, and Haiti's partners. Every effort must be made to prevent the country from sinking into a deeper socio-political crisis. Haitian stakeholders must set aside their ideological differences and personal interests to prioritize the lasting stability and prosperity of our beloved homeland, Haiti.

Thank you for your attention. I apologize if I have taken up too much of your time.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

We will now begin the question and answer portion of the meeting.

[English]

We're going to begin with MP Ziad Aboultaif for six minutes.

[Translation]

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Welcome to the committee, Your Excellency.

I am sorry for the devastation caused by hurricane Melissa in your country.

[English]

Speaking of which, Canada has committed to help assist. What other countries have stepped up to the plate to support Haiti for the hurricane situation?

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Sorry, but I didn't quite hear your question, because I took out my earpiece.

Would you mind repeating your question, please?

[English]

Ziad Aboultaif: Yes.

Canada is ready to help during the hurricane situation that appeared today. Can you tell us, what other international commitment is Haiti getting in addition to Canada?

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Again, forgive me, but I didn't hear the question clearly. I may not have had the volume up high enough.

I am interested in your question, so please repeat it once more.

• (1220)

[English]

Ziad Aboultaif: Initially, I had a better set of questions for you, so I'm going to move, with your permission, to other questions.

You've been ambassador for 20 years—

[Translation]

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

There was an issue with the interpretation, so I think Mr. Aboultaif should get his time back to ask his question again, since Mr. Dessources wanted to answer it.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you kindly, my friend.

[English]

You've been an ambassador to Canada for almost 20 years and during changes of government. How have you seen the relationship between Canada and Haiti change during those 20 years?

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Thank you for your question, which I welcome.

Your fellow members may not know that I've been to Canada as an ambassador before. It was in 2003, but I wasn't here long, because things weren't good in Haiti. President Aristide had been overthrown, and I was called back, so I had to return to Haiti. I am very happy to be here representing Haiti, but to be honest with you, I feel best when I am in Haiti.

I have spent 20 years serving my country. I kept working, even when I didn't have key responsibilities like I did when I was the Minister of Planning and External Co-operation, for instance. I've done a lot more work in the rural sector, given my background as an agronomist. I continued to meet with people who wanted to see Haiti emerge from this impasse, the situation it's in. I've also done a bit of teaching, showing young Haitians all that needs doing to help the country come out the other side. That pretty well sums up what I've been doing for those 20 years in Haiti, before I was once again appointed as Haiti's ambassador to Canada.

I hope to stay longer this time, not for myself, but for Haiti and my fellow Haitians. I want to make the most of my time, so I can help them overcome this impasse.

[English]

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

We know that the situation in Haiti has been very painful, not just for your people but also for all of us as we watch from afar. The big question will always be whether there is a path or a way forward for Haiti to basically restore and rebuild the country.

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: That's really the big question, isn't it?

I think so. I think we can get there, but the authorities in Haiti, the ones holding the power, need to be able to take the steps that can lead us out of the situation we are in. To be honest with you, though, I don't think we can get there on our own. Haiti needs help from its international friends.

I don't want to put my foot in my mouth, but I consider Canada to be a friend of Haiti's. The way you approach your dealings with us is very different from how another of Haiti's friends, the United States, interacts with us. It's very different, and I can assure you that, if the United States took the same approach as Canada and France, we would have made progress and solved some of our problems; we could have the workings of a normal state. We love our land, we love our country, but we aren't able to get everything we need to function normally. That's a fact.

What I can say, and this has been increasingly shown.... It is true that the Americans send us money here and there, but it's not the same as what Canada does. Canada's ambassador to the UN, Bob Rae, just went to Haiti, on October 21, I believe. I followed his visit, and I can tell you it was completely different from how the Americans do it. While they may be able to provide a lot more financial support, the experience is totally different.

We will definitely benefit from the additional support Mr. Rae announced, even though it's not a huge amount. It's a \$60-million contribution, on top of what had already been provided. I can assure you that the money will help us do good things.

We would like to see our international friends, the United States, France and Canada, working together. I'm not trying to flatter Canada, but the situation with Canada is a bit different. If those in charge of leading Haiti follow the rules and laws they should, I have no doubt that we can return to our former glory as the jewel of the West Indies. I am confident of that.

• (1225)

[English]

Ziad Aboultaif: I have all of 30 seconds left. I just have a quick question that's on my mind.

Do you see any role for the church in helping to solve the issue in Haiti?

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: You mentioned the church. Could you please repeat the question?

[English]

Ziad Aboultaif: Is there a role for the church in helping to solve the issue or the situation in Haiti?

The Chair: Give a very brief response, please.

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Sorry, that made me smile. The reason for my reaction is that I don't know how the other members of the committee will take my remarks.

I'm a practising Catholic. I believe in God. I don't say that because I'm Catholic. Protestants believe in God too, of course. I think the church can help us, but it can't be simply to give.... It would have to be people who take into account the situation of all Haitians in the country.

H.E. Anthony Dessources: There are good Catholics and bad Catholics. There are good Protestants and bad—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Your Excellency, but the member's time is up.

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Too bad; it was an interesting question.

[English]

The Chair: We'll have to come back to that off-line. Thank you so much.

Next is MP Mona Fortier. You have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

Thank you, Ambassador, for being here. I'm delighted to meet you and participate in this discussion with you today.

We are well aware that much needs to be done in Haiti. This discussion will help us focus on the study we are doing right now.

We talked about the new security force. Minister Anand was very clear on that front during her address at the UN, in New York. As you mentioned earlier, Canada is going to continue its commitment.

What do you think of Canada's leadership role and its support for the multinational security support mission in Haiti? You shared a few thoughts, but is there anything you'd like to add regarding the new mission, which Canada will play a tangible role in?

H.E. Anthony Dessources: This may be my own impression, but given all the support Canada provides to Haiti, I think it should take a more practical form. Money is great, but it's important to see how the money is being spent on the ground. I am not suggesting that the money is being misused or underused most of the time, but if those providing the money also took the time to look at how it was being used or participated in the construction effort their money was funding, I think it would be much more—

• (1230)

Hon. Mona Fortier: What exactly do you mean by “participated in the construction effort”?

In concrete terms, what should Canada be doing, in your view?

How can we encourage other countries to participate in this very necessary process?

Can you tell us what your vision is?

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Actually, I think I benefited from Canada's support.

I did my high school studies at a Canadian-run Brothers of the Sacred Heart school. There's actually a school in Haiti named the Canado-Haitian high school. When I was a student, even though the high school was run by the brothers, other people were involved, providing support and assistance. That isn't the case anymore. You give us money, and that's definitely something. However, the lack of practical support is real, and having that guidance would help us progress a lot more quickly. That may be the missing piece. It's a point of view. It's not that we absolutely want to see you working on the ground, but I think it would go a long way if there was a feeling that you had a real presence, not that you were just giving money. We need to feel that you are also there to advance efforts that will help Haiti emerge from the situation it's in.

Take children in Haiti, as an example. Work has been done to ensure that most kids are able to go to school, but we don't have enough people to train the teachers. As a result, young children aren't learning everything I did when I was small. I'm from humble beginnings, but despite that, I was able to benefit from the support provided by the brothers, these friends from another country.

I apologize for what I'm going to say, but it sometimes feels as though Haiti does a lot more for Canada than Canada does for Haiti. I'm not sure whether you know what I mean. Consider how many Haitians leave Haiti, people who are highly educated, and move to Canada. It could work the other way as well. It would be very good to have—

Hon. Mona Fortier: I'm sorry to interrupt you again. You know, there's a very strong Haitian community in the national capital region and in Montreal. I understand what you're saying; people have made Canada their home, but still want to support their homeland. I think that's what you're getting at.

H.E. Anthony Dessources: You are absolutely right, madam.

Hon. Mona Fortier: How can Canada ensure that this strength continues as part of its contribution?

I'm trying to figure out what concrete steps we could take.

H.E. Anthony Dessources: I thought I'd already expressed my opinion on that. It's difficult.

Since we would like the crisis in Haiti to be resolved soon, we would also like for our fellow countrymen in Canada to have the opportunity to go to Haiti. Contrary to Haitians who moved to Canada, Canadian-born citizens of Haitian descent don't have that sense of belonging. It would be a good idea for our fellow countrymen to go to Haiti, not necessarily to stay there, but because they could use their ability and skills, and their love for the country to help Haiti. Unfortunately, the current situation in Haiti makes that difficult.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Next, we'll go to MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes.

• (1235)

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. Your remarks are enlightening, and it's nice to have you here with us.

Many witnesses have appeared before the committee, yet there isn't a consensus on how to reach a lasting peace in Haiti, even within the diaspora itself.

Some believe the UN Security Council resolution to create the Gang Suppression Force, or GSF, raises questions about Haiti's sovereignty. Some support the resolution, others don't.

There are no wrong answers here, so I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Haitians often complain that the current crisis in Haiti is the result of outside intervention.

Let's take the gangs, for example. There are skilled workers in Haiti, but I don't believe any of them has the opportunity or the skills to make weapons. Those weapons come from somewhere else. I can assure you that if we could solve this issue, we'd see changes in Haiti. I'm not saying all Haitians are saints—there are plenty of people in Haiti who aren't very nice—but some people, even friendly countries, have interests in Haiti. It's unfortunate, but those friendly countries allow weapons to cross our borders. I can tell you that is what makes our life difficult.

Despite the presence of troops in Haiti, namely the Multinational Security Support mission, the MSSM, for the last two years, gangs have been getting stronger. It is clearly not the way to go. If friendly countries really want to help Haiti get out of this crisis, they should arrest those who send weapons to Haiti to make money, allowing Haitians who don't want the situation to change to arm themselves. They could help us by stopping the flow of weapons from their countries to ours.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We totally agree. For two years now, I've been saying that things would be a lot easier if we could stop weapons and ammunition from reaching Haiti. That is the key to ensuring the safety and security of the people of Haiti, in order to start talking about a country committed to a democratic and sustainable future.

Thank you for saying that. It's good to hear.

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Thank you. That warms my heart.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: A lot of people are critical of the MSSM, namely because of insufficient personnel and resources. Some are worried about the establishment of the GSF. They worry that because the GSF relies on voluntary funding, stakeholders will withdraw.

Should we worry about stakeholders getting used to the Haitian crisis, losing interest and finally pulling out?

H.E. Anthony Dessources: I apologize for my reaction, but you seem to be well informed of what's going on in Haiti. You also seem to want our country to get back to normal. I could certainly consider you a good friend to Haiti.

If friendly countries such as Canada really want a resolution to the crisis in Haiti, they need to help us create an environment that would allow decision-makers and the people of Haiti to transform their reality. We shouldn't have to worry about friendly countries sending us money for their own benefit.

I don't want to go too far and put my foot in my mouth, but if you want to know what friendly countries could do to help us get out of this crisis, that should be the focus.

As I was saying earlier, it's been five years since we've had anyone who was chosen or elected to lead the country. That is serious. It's hard to believe.

● (1240)

The Chair: Thank you, Your Excellency.

[English]

Next, we go to MP Kramp-Neuman. You have five minutes.

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

I'd like to start by thanking you for joining us at committee today and, also, on behalf of the entire committee, to reiterate our concern and prayers that your country endures the storm, hurricane Melissa.

I was reading a headline, "UN Security Council pressures Haiti's leaders to hold general election as deadline nears" for the election, suggesting, "The transition clock is ticking." They're concerned about a steady path forward in that regard. You noted in your testi-

mony that Haiti wants to get back on track. Could you characterize the public perception of the transitional presidential council in Haiti?

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: I heard you talking about the transitional presidential council, but I didn't catch the end of your question. Could you repeat it?

[English]

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Yes, so I can repeat it. More specifically, I'm curious about the public perceptions of the transitional presidential council in Haiti. Also, let's, together, fast-track to February 8: What happens if elections are not held?

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: That's the real question. We are very concerned.

Many organizations and political parties had agreed to create the transitional presidential council. We thought the council would be able to resolve the situation and organize elections within its two-year mandate. We're now at the end of October. In about three months, we'll be close to the February 7 deadline. It's unclear whether we'll be able to organize elections by then. That's the real question. Organizations are looking into that, but it's hard to say.

Will the transitional presidential council's mandate be renewed? I don't know, but it will be a very tense period in the sense that—

● (1245)

[English]

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: That brings me to my next question. If the TPC's mandate expired, how would it affect Haiti, and how would it affect a position like yours, Your Excellency?

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: That's an excellent question. What are we going to do?

Certain people and political organizations in Haiti understand the situation the country finds itself in. They will avoid decisions that would make things difficult for us. Some are looking at possibly organizing elections by April 2026, even before the GSF is operational. Honestly, though, we don't know whether the gang issue will be resolved. If elections are to be held, the gang issue needs to be resolved now. We were told that the 5,500-person force will not be deployed until April.

That said, I have faith in the people of Haiti. I know they can take control of the situation and decide how to bring about change. One thing's for sure, we can't go on like this.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we will go to MP Bill Blair.

You have five minutes, please.

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

Mr. Ambassador, again, welcome. We're very grateful for your appearance here before us this morning.

Similar to some of the questions that have already been asked by my colleagues, I'm interested in what lessons we may have learned from some of our past interventions and how they might inform making sure the investments that we make now—not only ourselves but certainly for Canada—are effective and actually achieve the results that we seek.

For over 30 years, Canada has contributed to every UN mission in Haiti, and certainly for the last two years, beginning in April 2022, the federal government has already dispersed close to \$450 million in humanitarian assistance and to fund arrangements within that country. When the MSSM was first established, Canada was in fact the largest cash donor, representing 52% of the funds to that initiative.

However, as you've already indicated, and as we are aware, that mission, which was supposed to be 2,500 people, amounted to only about 990 personnel, and it's been widely viewed as a failure.

Canada has also made fairly significant contributions, for example, in Operation Helios. We were established in Jamaica and training some of the police and military officers who were working as part of the multi-mission task force. We've trained hundreds and hundreds of officials from other Caribbean countries, and that mission is now over.

You've already made some reference to it, but I'm thinking about the Transitional Presidential Council. It was established in 2024, but its mandate is coming to an end in February, so we're very interested in what's next.

Canada has made a commitment to make a voluntary donation to the Gang Suppression Force. We do understand the need to continue to support and reinforce judicial reform, particularly in investments in the PNH and in your armed forces in Haiti.

I'm wondering, from your very unique perspective of having served in a diplomatic role, but also having spent the last 20 years in your country and having seen first-hand the impact of the various interventions that the international community has undertaken, can you perhaps share with us any perspectives on lessons that we have might learned and how our approach going forward could possibly be more effective?

• (1250)

[Translation]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: You're making me dig deep into the past.

What you're saying is true. That's our reality. There have been multiple missions in Haiti over the years. I would say two things on that.

First, maybe Haitians didn't assume their responsibilities. We were the ones in those difficult situations, and it was up to us to figure out how to get out of them. We received a lot of help from other countries, but we weren't the ones managing that help. Let's be honest, with all the money that's been provided to Haiti over the last 10 years, our issues should've been resolved and our country should be back on track. Something's not right.

I don't want to downplay the help friendly countries have sent to Haiti, because they've given us a lot of money. However, Haiti has never been the one managing this money. That's our fault; we should've assumed our responsibilities. We also need to acknowledge that we didn't specify what ways and means were needed to get results and to allow Haiti to resolve its issues.

I understand what you're saying, Mr. Blair, and that's exactly what we need to do: take control of the situation. We receive help from our friends, but sometimes, for whatever reason, we don't use it correctly, which means we don't get the results we want. You're right. Haiti's been going through crisis after crisis for at least 30 or so years. I assume you've heard of the Duvalier—

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We'll go next to MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

You have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: My turns are shorter than my colleagues', because I represent a smaller party.

My next question may be a little sensitive. You may not be able to answer or you may not want to. Either way, it's fine.

Do you think the gangs in Haiti are supported by individuals outside the country, including in Quebec and Canada?

H.E. Anthony Dessources: There is no question that the gangs are not organized by poor Haitians like the ones I know. Yes, gangs and criminal organizations have been set up by Haitians living in Canada or the United States. It almost makes you wonder whether they're true Haitians. You can't get around it.

I'm not sure whether you've heard of Lanmo Sanjou. This first-class illiterate became a superstar thanks to the help and support of certain individuals looking to disrupt our country. He also has a lot of money. Where is that money coming from? It comes from individuals looking to feed this crisis, because it benefits them. There's no doubt about that. If we could find those individuals living in friendly countries such as Canada and do what needs to be done, I can assure you that could—

• (1255)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Unwittingly, financial institutions in Quebec, Canada and the United States are helping these individuals. Cutting the flow of funds to these organizations would be one way we could co-operate, would it not?

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Exactly.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will next go to MP Fred Davies.

You have five minutes.

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Thank you for being here today.

I appreciate the insight and the update on what's happening in your country. I hope the next few days result in good news rather than bad news on the weather front.

I have a couple of questions, sir.

Earlier, you said that Haiti gives more to Canada than Canada gives to Haiti. I'd like you to clarify that statement, but I want to follow that up with a question about the Haitian diaspora here in Canada. Is the community mobilized? Are you in contact with them? Do you know how many people from Haiti live in Canada? Are they interested in helping you rebuild the country for both their benefit and your country's benefit?

[*Translation*]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: Did I misspeak?

Here's what I meant to say: Since François Duvalier, a lot of Haitians have had to leave the country to go to Canada. Some of them had financial means and others didn't, but a large majority of them were professors and teachers. They had to leave Haiti and they came here. I think they've been very helpful to Canada since the 1960s. Afterward, many young Haitians who studied in Haiti—God knows some of them did a fair bit of schooling in Haiti—left the country to go to Canada and elsewhere.

Those people were our assets, and they moved elsewhere. That's what I meant earlier. Education in Haiti is now poor, but a few years ago, I can assure you that we had professors who enabled Haitians to receive very high-level training. We also took advantage of Canada, as I said earlier. I myself studied in Haiti with the Canadian priests who were there. I learned a lot from them.

What needs to be done now? As we discussed a little earlier, it would be good for Canadians to go to Haiti to ensure that money sent there is managed properly. I'm sure that every single Haitian in

Canada dreams of Haiti almost every day. I would bet on it. Unfortunately we've been going through very difficult times for years. The Duvaliers have been gone since 1986. I'm talking about Jean-Claude Duvalier, because the father had already died. It has been 40 years since 1986. We had a few good years during which the country was governed properly, but it hasn't been going well at all for at least 30 years.

That's what we need to fix. That's what we need help with. I'm talking about financial assistance as well as help to achieve that.

• (1300)

[*English*]

Fred Davies: Thank you for that.

I'm sorry to interrupt you, but in your view, what needs to happen sooner? What is the key barrier to stopping the gangs and developing a strong governance structure? What is the first thing that needs to happen, from your perspective, either from an international point of view or a domestic point of view?

[*Translation*]

H.E. Anthony Dessources: I think that identifying whoever is funding the gangs will be a huge step forward.

We definitely need help from outside because the national police doesn't have the means to fight the gangs. If we have 10,000 officers against 50,000 armed gang members, I don't think we can manage without help. We need help. I think that's what we need to focus on so we can try to eliminate.... With help, we might be able to do it.

The Chair: Thank you, Your Excellency.

[*English*]

Finally, we'll go to MP Rob Oliphant.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I'm okay.

The Chair: You're okay.

[*Translation*]

Ambassador, thank you for your participation in this meeting and this study.

That concludes this meeting.

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

A voice: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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