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• (1105)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 17 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 23, the committee is meeting to study Canada's Africa strategy.

I would like to welcome our witnesses today. As individuals, we have Dr. Stephen Brown, professor, school of political studies, University of Ottawa, and Chris Roberts, political science instructor, University of Calgary, by video conference.

From Cooperation Canada, we have Kate Higgins, chief executive officer.

From ONE Campaign, we have Ms. Nwuneli, president and chief executive officer, and Ms. Legault, senior director of policy for North America.

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

I understand that Ms. Legault and Ms. Nwuneli will share the five minutes to make an opening statement.

I welcome both of you to start.

Elise Legault (Senior Director of Policy, North America, ONE Campaign): I'll go quickly, since Ndidi is on video. I'm Elise Legault, the senior director of policy for North America at the ONE Campaign.

I want to introduce our president and CEO, Ndidi. She will make the opening statement for us, and we will both be available to answer your questions afterwards.

Go ahead, Ndidi.

Ndidi Nwuneli (President and Chief Executive Officer, ONE Campaign): Thank you so much, Elise.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm honoured to take part in your committee's review of Canada's Africa strategy.

I am the president of the ONE Campaign, a global advocacy organization co-founded by Bono that is fighting for the investments needed to create economic opportunity and healthier lives in Africa. I speak as someone who has worked for many decades alongside farmers, entrepreneurs, innovators, youth and private-public civil society leaders across the African continent. Their incredible resilience and creativity have both informed and inspired my views on how the world can, and should, engage with the continent.

First, I would like to acknowledge the Canadian pledge to the eighth replenishment of the Global Fund. While the government has framed its \$1.02-billion pledge as a recalibration to pre-pandemic levels, this amounts to a significant 16% cut from its previous \$1.21-billion pledge in 2022. This cut comes at a critical time in the global fight against HIV, TB and malaria.

To be clear, let me state that Canada needs Africa, and Africa needs Canada. Prime Minister Carney has set a clear mission to double non-U.S. trade within 10 years and generate \$300 billion more in trade by 2035. If trade diversification and strengthening collaboration with reliable partners are current priorities, countries on the African continent must be central to Canada's plan. Canada must take a stronger, active role in supporting Africa's development and leverage its partnership to facilitate new markets for Canada.

To Canadians, I say with complete conviction that Africa is not risk. Africa is opportunity and presents a great return on investment.

ONE's report on why Canada should trade more with Africa, published in May 2022, showed that Canada is not trading with Africa at the levels it could be, despite the continent's growing economy and the opportunities it presents. Fewer than 1% of Canada's exports go to Africa, and under 2% of imports come from the continent. In 2023, Canada exported \$6.7 billion in goods to Africa, and Canadian imports from Africa totalled \$12.4 billion. In our report, we show that, with a stronger economic relationship with the continent, Canadian businesses could generate \$2.7 billion additional returns by 2030. Canadian importers could source \$3.3 billion more in imports by 2030, diversifying their supply chains and contributing to Africa's economic transformation. Comparatively speaking, Canada trades 15 times more with Asia than it does with Africa, despite Africa's growth trajectory.

Here are the facts on Africa's growth trajectory. Today, Africa's 1.2-billion population is the youngest and fastest-growing population in the world. This will double, accounting for 25% of the world's population in 2050. The implementation of the African continental free trade area is unlocking what will be the most important and largest free trade area in the world, with the potential to boost regional income by \$450 billion by 2035.

Canada has a vibrant diaspora population from the African continent, estimated at 1.2 million people, and this number is growing. These committed and talented individuals can build stronger economic and cultural ties with the continent. Canada also has strong leadership in governance, agriculture, plastic waste management, critical minerals and energy—areas that strongly align with Africa's development priorities.

To unlock what I see as mutually beneficial economic growth and prosperity, and to achieve the strategies listed above, ONE recommends the following.

First is funding. Canada's Africa strategy needs resourcing to move from a framework to action. The successful \$2.3-billion Indo-Pacific strategy, from 2022 to 2027, shows why a credible strategy requires attached funding, clear timelines and a concrete plan of action.

Second is enabling policies. We must ensure that the government's trade policies towards Africa are aligned with development objectives. Trade is a two-way street, and a coherent trade and development policy should not only enable more Canadian businesses to expand into African markets but also support African businesses in their efforts to build partnerships with Canadian customers and sell their products in Canada. Canada should support value addition in African countries, not just focus on the exportation of raw resources from the continent.

• (1110)

Third, on trade missions, although many African exports already have duty-free access to Canada, this has not been matched with trade promotion or official trade missions, unlike those for competitors such as China or the EU. The Prime Minister and the Minister of International Trade should direct Global Affairs Canada to organize at least one formal trade mission to Africa by the end of 2026. In fact, if Canada wants to send a strong signal that it's ready for business, Prime Minister Carney himself should visit the continent again.

Fourth, create easier and more transparent trade pathways. Canadian businesses and entrepreneurs need clearer support to expand into the African market. This includes a newly structured Africa trade hub at Global Affairs and expanding the foreign investment promotion and protection agreement, or FIPA, with African countries, ensuring that both sides benefit. Also, Canada has free trade agreements around the world, but none in Africa. Starting negotiations for a full free trade agreement with one or more of the major economies in Africa would be a game-changer.

Fifth, invest in and support Africa's economic transformation. Canada should ensure that it continues to support African-led effective institutions through its international assistance. Next week in London, Canada can send a clear message to its African partners by making a strong commitment to the African Development Fund, the ADF. The African Development Fund is the most important funder of infrastructure on the continent and is a key growth lever in driving job creation, agriculture, energy, private sector development and trade opportunities.

Lastly, Canada must leverage its influence in international institutions such as the G7, the G20, the IMF and the World Bank to address the systemic barriers that impede Africa's economic transformation, including high debt repayments, the high costs of capital, and inconsistent electricity access. These global challenges require leadership coordination, and Canada is well positioned to champion the solutions.

For the outcomes, we need political will. Thank you to all of you for leading and for demonstrating that Canada can fill the gaps that the rest of the world has created.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your remarks.

We now invite Kate Higgins to make an opening statement.

[*Translation*]

Kate Higgins (Chief Executive Officer, Cooperation Canada): I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear today on behalf of Cooperation Canada, the national independent voice for international co-operation representing more than 100 Canadian development and humanitarian organizations.

When Canada released its Africa Strategy in March, we welcomed it as a long-needed step toward a more coherent, forward-looking approach to the continent. However, its success depends on clear investments, measurable goals and sustained diplomatic, economic and international-assistance efforts.

Today's meeting is an opportunity to assess the strategy and reflect on Canada's broader international co-operation efforts. My remarks highlight several priorities Canada must uphold to effectively and responsibly engage African partners.

[*English*]

First, Africa presents enormous opportunities for deeper Canadian engagement in trade diversification, for example in critical minerals. These opportunities offer real potential for shared prosperity, but mutual benefit requires more than commercial activity. It requires partnerships grounded in shared values, including inclusive and sustainable growth, and high standards of transparency, environmental protection and human rights.

International assistance can create and support long-term economic benefits. By helping build stable economies and stronger institutions, it expands future markets, supports predictable trading relationships and contributes to global security. This benefits African and Canadian entrepreneurs and businesses, but Canada's interests in pursuing economic opportunities must not lead to a return of practices such as tied aid, which is aid that is made conditional on purchasing goods and services from a donor country. Tied aid distorts priorities, limits impacts and reduces value for money. Canada untied its aid for a reason, and reversing that decision or moving in that direction would undermine our credibility.

Second, recent cuts to Canada's international assistance budget, which is under two per cent of federal spending, put the ambitions of the Africa strategy at risk. Budget 2025 announced a \$2.7-billion reduction over four years. Cuts of this scale undermine Canada's ability to honour commitments at a time of escalating humanitarian needs.

Third, Canada must prioritize actions that address structural barriers to development, especially the debt crisis. More than half of low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa are in or at high risk of debt distress, with some spending more on debt service than on health or education. Trade and investment are important, but trade and investment alone cannot unlock development when countries are trapped in unsustainable debt.

Fourth, humanitarian crises, such as in Sudan, underscore why principled international assistance remains essential. This catastrophic conflict, marked by mass displacement, famine and governance collapse, shows that development is not optional; it is often a lifeline. A focus on economic co-operation is important, but it cannot come at the expense of indispensable humanitarian, peacebuilding and stabilization efforts.

Sudan also highlights the need for policy coherence across Canada's foreign policy tools, including on arms exports. Canada cannot credibly advocate for peace and human rights if Canadian-origin military goods reach fragile or authoritarian environments.

Finally, locally led development, civil society engagement and gender equality must be important parts of the Africa strategy. African civil society is foundational to democratic resilience and inclusive development. Gender equality is a driver of economic transformation, accountable governance and sustainable peace. The strategy must embrace this leadership and civil society and gender equality across its pillars.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you all this morning. The Africa strategy is a welcome step forward. Its success will depend on grounding it in sustainable and inclusive economic development, principled development co-operation, support for African leadership and coherent foreign policy.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Higgins, for your statement.

I now invite Dr. Brown for his opening statement.

[*Translation*]

Stephen Brown (Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you very much for inviting me to speak to you today.

My name is Stephen Brown. I am a political science professor at the University of Ottawa. I have been studying Canadian development assistance for some 20 years, and African politics and development for about 30 years.

[*English*]

Let me start by admitting that I'm a bit confused by what Canada's strategy for Africa actually is. I've read the strategy document. I've even blogged about it. Much of what it describes is very worthwhile, but I'm still confused by some things, including how much Canada actually plans to do differently under the strategy.

The strategy itself lists a lot of activities that Canada is already doing. It's actually a quite backward-looking document for something that should be more forward-looking. What is it going to do that is different from what Canada is doing, or has been doing, for the past 10 or even 20 years?

The second point, or main point, of confusion for me is this: How many new things can it do without any additional resources or without abandoning any activities that it currently undertakes? The budget that was released last month has left me even more confused vis-à-vis Canada's intentions towards Africa. Though the strategy brags about opening three new embassies or high commissions in Africa, now there's talk about Canada closing embassies. There's going to be less money for aid, but the budget document also mentions that Canada will focus support on countries that need it most. Does that mean more aid for Africa, or less aid?

The strategy emphasizes the importance of health, but the budget singled out cuts for health, very specifically, suggesting that Canada has actually lost interest in being a leader in this area, especially in sexual and reproductive health and rights. More broadly, how can Canada be new, innovative and ambitious in Africa while cutting Global Affairs Canada's budget and staffing?

I endorse the recommendations made by the witnesses who have just spoken, and I'd like to make a few more of my own.

First, trade and investment are important, but we mustn't forget about human rights and environmental protection. Canadian mining companies in Africa are particularly problematic in that area, but both Conservative and Liberal governments have proven unwilling to do anything serious about that.

The second thing would be to maintain vital work in the health sector, which is all the more urgent with the U.S.'s withdrawal from assistance in this area.

Third, the same would go for LGBTQI+ rights. There's an urgent need to support local efforts all the more, because funding is already scarce, and the few donors that are active in this area—above all, the U.S.—have reduced or even ended their assistance.

The fourth thing is to be careful about jumping on the bandwagon of innovative and blended finance, whose contributions to poverty reduction are a lot less clear than the proponents claim.

Finally, number five is that Canada has a long history of forgetting about Africa, then remembering and forgetting it again. My colleague David Black at Dalhousie University calls this “consistent inconsistency”. If Canada wants to be taken seriously as a reliable partner, we need a clear policy to put our rhetoric into practice and invest in real long-term partnerships.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you for your remarks.

I now invite Mr. Roberts to make an opening statement.

Chris W. J. Roberts (Political Science Instructor, University of Calgary, As an Individual): Great, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for having me back to the committee to discuss Africa-Canada relations and progress on Canada's Africa strategy. Much has happened since my last visit to the committee in April 2024.

Important policy milestones, of course, have been generated over the last 18 months, which have generated both enthusiasm and

healthy debates. This is a good time, as we're doing right now, to re-evaluate and rejuvenate Canadian strategic intention towards the continent.

I've written previously of the urgent need for Canada's Africa strategy to leverage and operationalize four Ds: demographics, demand, democracy and diasporas. Many of these issues have, of course, already been mentioned by previous speakers today.

After a year of major shifts in domestic priorities in response to American and global challenges, three additional Ds need to be added urgently: delivery, defence and drones—in the same category—and diversification.

The initial four Ds are broadly understood but not fully internalized. Demographics focuses on that gradual shift from China and India to Africa as the future global workforce and growth node. However, there can be no future sustained global growth nor poverty reduction without demand being met across Africa for jobs, infrastructure and social services, and particularly a concurrent massive provision of affordable, reliable and accessible energy for both household and industry. This includes African fossil fuels.

Additional demands include local ownership up and down the value chain, including in mining and critical minerals, and a more equal playing field, as others have mentioned, in global equity and debt markets.

Another demand, successfully exhibited by voters in South Africa, Ghana, Senegal and Botswana in 2024 but curtailed violently in Cameroon and Tanzania more recently, is for democracy. Despite propaganda to the contrary, Africans are generally more convinced than citizens in other regions that democracy is preferable to non-democratic government, according to many Afrobarometer surveys. As others back away, Canada must get serious about supporting democratic institutions and human rights, or at least not enabling electoral facades that allow autocrats to linger on. Hypocrisy around democracy undercuts our long-term security and commercial interests.

Lastly, Canada has a huge advantage in terms of its diverse African diasporas, which have been mentioned, as they maintain cultural, business, language and other linkages to the continent. However, empowering diasporas within the context of the Africa strategy remains a work-in-progress. Hopefully, this will end up as something more than a web portal, occasional consultations, or a Global Affairs Canada presence at diaspora-organized events.

What I want to turn to quickly are the newer 3Ds, which the last year has presented as things that we need to focus on to push the Africa strategy ahead in productive ways.

First is the issue of delivery. This builds a bit on what Dr. Brown has just been saying, but “delivery” refers to the challenge we seem to have in meeting the basic promises that have already been announced since November 2024 and March 2025, and to ensure that any future commitments relevant to enhancing mutually aligned priorities are operationalized, resourced, implemented and evaluated. Here I have concerns—though I hope to be corrected if my information is not up to date.

From my own experience visiting Zambia in late August, but also checking online yesterday, I could not find any substantive movement on the promise to convert our modest office in Lusaka into a full-fledged resident high commission—and apparently the same goes for Benin. If budget cuts end up in embassy cuts, we will have actually gone in the opposite direction to what we were promising over a year ago.

I also haven't seen any evidence of the promising ideas around the Africa trade hub concept, intended to shift the mandate of our trade commissioner service to a more integrated approach that facilitates two-way trade and investment rather than the traditional focus on simply promoting Canadian exports.

Also, the appointments of the two special envoys just seem to have added titles to overworked ambassadors and their tiny staffs without any corresponding additional financial or human resources.

From the perspective of those of us in the small and under-resourced academic, association and think-tank community focused on Africa, the promise to expand our analytical capability and understanding of economic developments in Africa and their implications for Canada was critically important, but there is no evidence to date of that kind of knowledge mobilization.

• (1125)

I'm also not convinced of the benefits of prioritizing additional FIPAs, which would overexpand dual taxation and other practical or technical agreements across more countries, including, as others have mentioned, bilateral or even a continental free trade agreement.

We know that 2025 was a difficult year, and we know Canada needs to solve this issue of delivering on its promises—our modest promises—that apparently didn't require additional financial commitments. We still haven't gotten there, almost a year after they were initially announced.

One of my key recommendations, as it has been in the past, is that the committee nudge the government to consider reinstating a secretary of state for Africa. It's a position that coincided with that last golden age of African attention in Ottawa, in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

I'd like to talk a bit about defence, but I'm going to skip over some of my notes because I don't want to run out of time. I'm going to say, without acknowledging African security challenges as potential priorities, which we tend to do in Canada, that Canada will inevitably sleepwalk into a future deployment without sufficient

preparation, or, as the recent Red Sea shipping crisis illustrates, we might not even have the capabilities to fully support multilateral operations in certain domains on or near the African continent in support of global and/or African regional security measures.

Lastly, on defence, another issue is autonomous warfare. We have been watching the use and the evolution of drones during the war in Ukraine, but drone evolution is also occurring across African conflicts. This includes many non-state armed groups, including those affiliated with al Qaeda or the Islamic state that may have direct connections to global networks that could deploy those capabilities against key infrastructure or civilians and in ways not yet contemplated.

Besides the internationalization of local conflicts on the continent, the disinformation wars and the expansion of Russia's military economic footprint across the continent, Africa's escalating level of conflict over the past decade increases a range of regional and global threats that make generating the prosperity that Africa and the world need much more difficult.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you. We're way over time. Thank you so much for your remarks, Mr. Roberts.

I now open the floor to questions, beginning with MP Ziad Aboultaif. You have six minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thanks, Chair, and thanks to all of our witnesses for appearing today.

My question is for both Dr. Roberts and Ms. Nwuneli.

The mention of a new strategy and of the political will regarding the visit of the Prime Minister to Africa is an important thing. We know there's a focus on business as a way to get into the continent, based on a partnership. Africa is not asking for handouts. It's asking for partnerships and asking to work together to improve that relationship. I know Canada does have a good rapport overall with many countries. It may not be enough.

There's a place of comparison here between what Russia, China and India are doing on the continent and the approach suggested by witnesses such as the ones we have with us today and others.

What are these countries doing differently from what we're doing? They're more successful than we are. Of course, they're doing multifold the business Canada is doing. I know we have some disadvantages due to distance and many other aspects.

The million-dollar question is, what are Russia, China and India doing differently from what we do? This could mean setting the base for us to change our strategy and approach on Africa.

That big question goes to Dr. Roberts and then to Ms. Nwuneli for your comments. Thank you.

Chris W. J. Roberts: As you mentioned, that is the million-dollar question.

If we look at the rise of China in Africa from 2000 to maybe 2010, those first 10 years, China started in two-way trade with the continent back in 2000 at levels—again, inflation is a factor—that weren't that much different from what Canada-Africa trade levels were. We're talking less than \$20 billion dollars in two-way trade with China and Africa in 2000. Today, the level is \$200 billion. The level of investment is at the level of tens of billions of dollars.

What did these countries do? Again, China was sort of leading that charge, and Russia in some different ways, but also India. What have they done? They have had comprehensive, coordinating strategies.

Let's put it this way. Africa was made a priority by political leadership. That's what it takes. We can talk about these small policy changes that we're considering, as Dr. Brown mentioned. It doesn't seem a lot different in the scheme of things to what we've done, and we can't even deliver on the things that we've announced over the last year that don't even cost that much money, yet, in these countries, they are miles ahead of us in the coordination of the public sector itself but also the coordination with the private sector.

I know there's been work done to try to point out some of the mechanisms of what this looks like, but Canada has lots of problems because of its federalism and the way it's distanced from Africa, although I will point out that Beijing and Ottawa are exactly the same distance from the centre of the continent, so that's not an excuse.

Ziad Aboultaif: We'll go to Ms. Nwuneli, please.

Ndidi Nwuneli: I'll add to what Dr. Roberts has said and underscore two points. One is that, not only did these countries have a comprehensive strategy in engaging with Africa, China and India in particular, but also they followed with financing, affordable financing for their entrepreneurs to trade and build companies and also to ensure value addition. The Bank of China and the Bank of India have followed the businesses.

We have compared that to, for example, FinDev Canada. FinDev Canada's commitment to Africa and the amount of resources they have to invest in Africa pales in comparison. It's not even enough for one country investment.

Then, the return on investment expected is also a key issue that one has taken on, because the cost of capital and the risk premium associated with investing in Africa is too high, is unfair and is linked to the lack of data.

I would suggest, in partnership with organizations such as ONE and many of the academic institutions in the room, that we really produce high-quality data in Canada, like ONE has done, with a trade report that demonstrates what we are missing out on if we don't put our money where our mouth is. It's affordable financing and it's increasing the investment appetite and following Canadian businesses to priority countries where there is a return on investment and where that can be demonstrated.

We also mentioned trade missions. If you look at the trade teams in every priority African country that China has built up, they're in

it for the long game. They have equipped their embassies with knowledge, insights and very committed engagement on the ground. We've seen that quite reinforced in countries like Nigeria, where I am from.

The final thing I'll say is that for me, it's also critical that we change narratives. We have been working a lot with the diaspora populations in Canada to change the face of Africa from that of a hungry child to that of a successful female entrepreneur. What are we introducing into the Canadian curriculum?

If you speak to the average Chinese young person, they'll tell you what Africa has to offer China. The average Canadian citizen doesn't know where Nigeria is on the map or doesn't know what Nigeria or Morocco have to offer to Canada.

Thank you.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to Ms. Vandenbeld.

You have six minutes.

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

I'm really pleased to have all of you here today.

I'd like to start my questions with you, Ms. Higgins. I want to delve a bit into this idea. Obviously, we need to do more trade. Obviously, we need to leverage private financing. I think that's something we all accept, but there are limitations. To quote an often-repeated joke within Global Affairs, Canada is one of the countries that is financing the mine and financing the environmental protesters outside the gate at the same time.

That's a joke. That's not actually real, but I'm saying that because there are things that the private sector and trade cannot deliver, and when you're looking at...

You mentioned it, Kate, when you talked about famine and displacement and conflict. There are things like sexual and reproductive health and rights, climate action and work in fragile and failed states, conflict states. I want to get a sense of this from you. You did talk about values. Sometimes, when we talk about human rights and democracy, that actually does conflict with the profit motive that some of the trade and business partners would have. I'd like you to give a bit of a reflection about what those limitations are and why it is really, really important that we continue to finance things like SRHR and democracy and human rights and climate.

Perhaps you could reflect on that for just a moment. I have other questions for you as well.

Kate Higgins: Thank you very much for the question. I will try to be brief.

Let me answer this in two parts. As I stated, when we look at the devastating conflict in Sudan, where more than 30 million people, including 16 million children, require life-saving humanitarian aid, from my perspective, that demonstrates a need for countries like Canada to step up and deliver life-saving humanitarian aid in this particularly devastating humanitarian context. At the same time, as I mentioned in my remarks, international assistance—for example, through the support of gender equality—can drive economic empowerment. It can support the rights of women and gender-diverse people. It can really support communities. Those rights and those values are incredibly important.

At the same time, by investing in things like sexual and reproductive health and rights, democratic governance and the regulatory environment for businesses to thrive, and there are lots of really interesting and impactful examples of Canadian international assistance supporting those things, it's not only supporting good governance. It's not only supporting human rights. It's also creating and supporting the economic conditions in which markets and trade and economic development can thrive.

To conclude, I really want to absolutely respond to your important point that we are in a context of escalating humanitarian needs. Only one-quarter of the humanitarian needs that are out there have been met in 2025. At the same time, when strategically and carefully invested and delivered, international assistance can support communities, can support rights and can support democracy, but it can also provide the conditions in which markets and businesses and economies can thrive.

• (1140)

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you. I appreciate that need for development and continuing the humanitarian and development assistance, but also diplomacy. In particular, you mentioned gender. Canada, through a motion here in Parliament, established an ambassador for women, peace and security. Can you talk a bit about the importance of that level of diplomatic status and what it has done for the African continent?

Kate Higgins: Absolutely. I'm certainly proud of the very long-standing Canadian leadership on gender equality. Across Conservative governments and across Liberal governments, I think Canada has a real legacy and deep expertise in partnerships that we have built on gender equality. I think elevating positions like an ambassador for women, peace and security does demonstrate in global spaces that we are absolutely serious about the importance of gender equality in multilateral spaces and in diplomacy.

One thing we've spoken about a bit but I would really like to make a final point on in the context of Canada's Africa strategy is the real importance of policy coherence across our foreign policy tools. I would like to see our foreign policy be better integrated between diplomacy, defence, commerce and development. That is absolutely crucial. It does require a whole-of-department, whole-of-government and whole-of-Canada approach to taking that coherent approach and perspective. I think, when we look at the particular geopolitical context we find ourselves in, there is some work for us to do as a country to be more coherent across these different foreign policy pillars.

Anita Vandenbeld: There seems to be this emerging idea that humanitarian assistance and development assistance are two separate things. Can you tell me your opinion on that?

Kate Higgins: I do not agree with that. A really useful way of thinking about that, I think, is reflecting on the current context of humanitarian crises. They are increasingly protracted. Increasingly, they are not just for a few days or a few weeks, but for years and years.

As someone who is in that situation, you are not thinking, "This is a humanitarian context," or "No, it is a development context," or "No, this is a peace and stabilization context." The integration between those things is very real and very profound for the communities at the forefront of these crises.

One of the calls we have been making to Global Affairs Canada is for increased integration between humanitarian, peacebuilding and broader development assistance efforts. There is a lot of work we could do from the perspective of the machinery of government and implementation. We could do a much better job there that would much better reflect the realities of communities and people on the ground.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we go to MP Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank all the witnesses for participating in this important study.

Mr. Brown, I listened carefully to your speech. As an MP, I have had the opportunity to participate in missions to Kenya, Rwanda and Cameroon, and in speaking with diplomats and visiting Africa, I have been told that Canada is clearly disengaging from the African continent. I have even been told that this is more obvious in francophone Africa. Perhaps that is incorrect, but I would still like to hear your opinion, given your expertise.

I would also like to hear your opinion on whether or not Canada's Africa strategy, which was published about a year ago, is changing the situation with regard to this perceived disengagement.

Stephen Brown: Could you please clarify? Are you talking about—

• (1145)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm talking about Canada's presence, whatever that looks like.

Stephen Brown: —making a distinction between French-speaking Africa and non-French-speaking Africa?

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: No. I would like to hear you talk about disengagement in general first, but if you have anything to add regarding disengagement in francophone Africa, I would be very happy to hear it.

Stephen Brown: Thank you for your question.

As I said in my remarks, there is this idea of “consistent inconsistency”. We turn to Africa when we want to show that we care about poverty, for example, or when we want a seat on the UN Security Council. That sets off numerous missions by ministers, prime ministers and governors general. Then, if we don't win a seat, the missions stop, and we are seen as unreliable partners, since our commitment to Africa is not stable and long-term.

We are starting to rediscover Africa a little bit right now. There is talk of critical minerals, but it's very self-centred. If it's balanced, it will usually be met with respect, but when it's too focused on our own agenda, Africans realize that Canada is acting in a very self-serving manner. They realize that Canada is not interested in long-term partnerships, but simply the profit we can gain.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Incidentally, you mentioned Canadian mining companies several times. There have been a few committee studies on the Office of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise. I don't know if you are familiar with this institution. What I've been told is that it clearly lacks clout. The office's mandate itself and funding are completely inadequate.

Given that we do business through our mining companies, wouldn't improving the situation at the Office of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise be a way to improve our image and the situation on the African continent?

Stephen Brown: Absolutely. The reputation of Canadian mining companies is damaging Canada's reputation in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

In addition, there seems to be an inability or lack of political will to do anything about it. We have been talking about this for more than a decade. There used to be a special adviser on corporate social responsibility. Then there was the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise. That position is now vacant, and the government is giving no indication of what it intends to do next.

The danger of this race for critical minerals and natural resources in Africa and elsewhere is that it abandons not only issues of ethical conduct, but also issues of consistency with international standards and internationally recognized human rights.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You pointed out a paradox in Canada's Africa strategy. You said that it seems to indicate that we want to improve our presence there, but at the same time, we are following in the footsteps of the Americans, who have reduced funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development. We are also following the path of Europe, which is reducing its international development funding. And don't forget Japan, which is slashing nearly 100% of its budget.

How can Canada present this type of strategy for Africa and then announce \$2.7 billion in cuts to development aid over the next few years in its latest budget?

Stephen Brown: I am wondering the same thing. Now is precisely when we should be making our mark. If we truly want to demonstrate that Canada is a reliable partner and ally to African countries, now is the time to increase our support for this continent, in the form of development aid, but also in other ways.

However, as you pointed out, the signals we are sending right now indicate quite the opposite. That is why I said earlier that I am very confused about the government's current policy direction.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You're not the only one.

I would like to ask Ms. Higgins a brief question about the government's policy direction.

Many people are concerned about the government's fairly explicit link between international trade and development assistance. According to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for International Development, who is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, there is no cause for concern and no reason to intrinsically link these two issues.

However, development aid should be one thing and international trade should be another. Some overlap is good, but that should not necessarily be the priority or, in any case, the government's vision.

Is the government somewhat off the mark on this issue?

[*English*]

Kate Higgins: This comes back to my point about policy coherence. There is absolutely a risk that we are focusing too much on.... We have to take a coherent approach to our development and our foreign policy. We need to be thinking about trade and investment, absolutely, and we need to be thinking about international assistance, diplomacy and defence in a really coherent way.

● (1150)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Brown, in your opinion, what is missing from the government's current approach? What is missing from Canada's Africa strategy, which seems to have been scribbled on the back of a napkin?

Stephen Brown: I feel that prioritization is missing. What I mean by that is a better idea of what we're going to do, what we're not going to do anymore, what we're going to focus on. It's like a list of good things.

As I said earlier, most of these are excellent ideas. They deserve to be recommended. However, there needs to be some clarification of priorities and how the various elements can be streamlined.

We have talked a lot so far about policy coherence, but what kind of coherence are we talking about exactly? Is it coherence for Canadian interests? Is it coherence for poverty reduction? Not only do we lack coherence, but we don't know what the goal of this coherence is.

If the goal is to advance Canada's commercial interests, it would be best if Canadian aid wasn't tied to trade policy.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start the next round of questioning with MP Kramp-Neuman.

You have five minutes.

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

To reflect on the last 40 minutes or so, these are some of the statements I've heard: confusion regarding strategies about how much Canada plans to do differently; being unable to deliver on what the government has announced; a lack of policy coherence; it's critical that we change the narrative; Canada has lost interest in being a leader; sleepwalking into deployment; and delivery, defence, drones and diversification. Lastly, what caught my ear was that cuts put the ambition for an Africa strategy at risk, speaking of the \$2.7 billion in cuts in international aid.

Ms. Higgins, the government, and particularly the Prime Minister, has tried to position itself as a multilateral, progressive and international partner when it comes to defence, yet on the international development front it seems to be doing the exact opposite, swapping its previous feminist lens for a more isolationist policy that would not be welcome in Washington, Tokyo or Budapest.

In your opinion, how will the Prime Minister's decision to slash aid affect our standing with international allies and NGOs?

Kate Higgins: Following the budget, Cooperation Canada released a statement, with more than 100 organizations that stood behind us, expressing disappointment at a time, as I said, of escalating humanitarian need, but also at a time when Canada is seeking to diversify its partnerships globally. One of the policy tools in our tool box is international assistance. As you said, slashing aid at a time when we are seeking to diversify our relationships and foreign policy posture, from our perspective, did not seem the right move.

As you have rightly said, other countries are slashing aid budgets. Obviously, with our neighbour to the south, the very fast dismantling of USAID has had devastating effects across the world.

Let me be very frank. We are aware that we are facing fiscal constraints as a country. There are very real affordability challenges that are facing Canadians, yet our point is that at less than 2% of the federal budget, this is a very strategic and sound investment for Canada to be making at a time when we need to be diversifying our foreign policy relationships, engaging in a very complex geopolitical context and really stepping up. We are not expecting Canada to fill all of the gaps left by countries like the U.S. retreating, but we do think it's important that we do our fair share. Our position is that slashing the aid budget by \$2.7 billion was not the right move at this moment in time.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Perfect. Thank you.

In the interests of time, I will switch gears a little, but it's still in relevance to your testimony. It speaks to the reports of the terrorist attacks against the school in Sudan, in which the WHO chief confirmed that 114 people were murdered, including 63 children, by the Rapid Support Forces.

Could you speak to the destructive forces that nations like the U.A.E. are enabling when they support destabilizing terror groups like the Rapid Support Forces, and to the way the Rapid Support Forces carried out this most recent targeted attack?

• (1155)

Kate Higgins: I can speak to why, in this very complex moment, Canada needs to be engaging and stepping into peacebuilding efforts in countries such as Sudan. I think that's absolutely critical.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Do you think Canada should be engaging economically with nations that directly act against our foreign policy and international development goals?

Kate Higgins: I think Canada needs to be careful and take care in the types of relationships that it's building globally. At a time of very challenging geopolitical context, we do need to be balancing our economic interests with really not forgetting our values and the commitments we have, as a country, to human rights, stability and peace around the world.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: What particular levers, from a legislative perspective, can we pull to let them know that this is not okay?

Kate Higgins: I think that's something I would have to come back to you on.

As I said, the importance of policy coherence is absolutely critical. This is why we have been, in the context of arms exports, for example, providing some very concrete recommendations to the government, including around launching a review of the Export and Import Permits Act. Instituting post-shipment verification, removing destination-based exemptions and strengthening the use of certification controls for military exports are absolutely important. We don't want to be in a situation whereby arms that are associated with Canada are finding their way to conflicts such as those in Sudan.

The Chair: Thank you. We're out of time.

MP Rob Oliphant is next.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

I'm going to encourage you to keep pushing the government. At times like this, I wish I were a witness rather than a questioner.

I also wanted to state clearly to the committee that I obviously have a vested interest in this strategy, having worked on it for two years and having had modest success with it. It obviously isn't everything I pushed for, and I will encourage you to keep pushing for its actualization in government policy.

I want to point out that I'm very pleased that the Conservatives are starting to find value in development and assistance. In the last campaign, they actually promised to cut billions of dollars in foreign aid to shore up defence. If there has been a change of heart on that side, I'm very pleased.

I also want to talk a little about—and it's perhaps an overused word—the nexus between trade and development.

I'll probably talk too long. I usually like to ask questions, but I'm motivated to say a few words. A core part of the strategy is to move from dependence and charity to mutual benefit and mutual prosperity, not tied aid. I would point out that there's a big difference between mutual respect and mutual benefit and tied aid. Tied aid has not proven to be beneficial to either country. It doesn't work to stimulate development in the countries that are the objects of the aid, nor does it really stimulate the economy of the country that is providing the aid. It's inefficient, it's expensive, and it doesn't work. Mutual benefit talks about looking at countries eye to eye and recognizing the opportunities.

Maybe the first question, after a long preamble, would be about the opportunities we have for bringing together our development world and our trade world to promote economic well-being in Africa as a strategic measure. I need to couple that with saying that if you don't know the answer to some of the questions you're asked, I have answers for them. You be the committee, and I'll be the witness somewhere. We'll have a cup of coffee, and I can talk about our new Africa trade hub. It is up and running, and it is a place where we are changing the way our trade commission works.

We do have an enhanced presence on the continent. It's not enough yet, but we are also continuing to look at risk and at Canada's role in risk reduction to help businesses want to develop their footprint on the continent. Obviously, we have chosen Benin to upgrade our mission to an embassy. There was an attempted coup on Sunday. Let's be realistic about the problems on the continent without overemphasizing them.

This is a continent of opportunity, but there are risks. There are about 30 conflicts being waged on the continent right now. We're not naive, but we recognize that if we don't act today, we won't be there in 10 or 15 years, because we'll have missed a window that's opened, and other countries will be there.

I would love to be a witness. Let's delve in a little bit on that nexus between trade and development and mutual benefit, which is different from tied aid.

Perhaps, Elise, we can start with you.

• (1200)

Elise Legault: Thanks.

One of the good things that came out of this strategy is the pivot towards a more mutually beneficial relationship. A lot of the language was very positive on that. As you mentioned—and as other

officials from Global Affairs Canada mentioned last week when they were here—it's because we heard that's what a lot of African stakeholders and leaders want. They want an equal partnership. They want trade and commerce. To your point, and maybe in answer to Alexis's question earlier, I think trade and development should work together. It is a positive development to integrate trade and development better.

However, there are pitfalls. Tied aid is a pitfall we don't want to fall into. We also have to remember that trade is a two-way street. We often hear Canada talking about trade, and that's normal. We say, "Well, we want to export our products to the continent." That's true, but it's also about promoting and buying African products here. We're trying to look away, sometimes, from our neighbours to the south in terms of products we want to get. For example, we don't want to get orange juice from Florida. South Africa sells excellent orange juice. We can look to that. It's the same with things like coffee and chocolate. Supporting African countries develops greater value addition.

Let's not get into tied aid. That just doesn't work. Let's remember that trade is a two-way street. It's not just about pushing our things. Let's also remember that, although we want to see trade and development more closely integrated, not every development project is about trade. If you're providing humanitarian assistance, you're not there to make a business deal. You're there to save lives and provide assistance.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to follow up on that, Ms. Legault.

Yesterday, we had a meeting on a completely different subject at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. We heard from François Audet, a very well-known professor who told us that economic growth in certain areas does not necessarily guarantee prosperity or an improvement in people's quality of life because it can be exploited by corrupt authorities or criminal groups.

When we say that we need to do more trade or that international aid is important, do we agree that there is a way of doing it that must be relatively ethical and supervised, or, in any case, that ensures that certain criteria are met?

Elise Legault: Yes, absolutely.

We were talking about Canadian mining companies. Countries such as Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo want to develop their mineral resources, but they also want to add value and create good jobs on the continent. So we must not focus solely on extracting resources and simply tolerate human rights abuses. We have to do it the right way.

That said, however, there is a way to integrate trade and development to some extent. This does not mean that we should only seek to increase Canadian exports. It also means that we must promote economic development in African countries, as well as local added value.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Ms. Higgins, you represent several organizations. There are small international aid organizations. Here in Alma, in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, there is the Centre de solidarité internationale, which carries out very concrete projects that really improve things. This organization is finding it increasingly difficult to obtain funding from the federal government because the funding tends to go to large organizations.

I was wondering if you have any thoughts on that since these small organizations have a role to play in this whole debate.

• (1205)

Kate Higgins: That's a really important point you've raised. As Mr. Brown said,

[*English*]

we're "consistently inconsistent".

[*Translation*]

I think that if there is one community that is not like that, it is civil society organizations. Take the Quebec organizations that have long-standing partnerships with other organizations in Africa, in the francophonie, for example, for francophones in the east and west. I think that's really important.

We need a strategy. We have talked with representatives from other countries who are really invested in relations with the African continent. I think that NGOs, like the organization you mentioned, have really good long-term relationships. For me, that's very important.

That's the work we do at Cooperation Canada. We seek to develop relationships with Global Affairs Canada to ensure that small and large organizations can not only access government funding, but also have access to other partnerships. It's very important to note that NGOs have partnerships and relationships with other entities, not just the government.

I think that if we want to invest in our long-term relationships with Africa, it really has to be through NGOs, which play a very important role for us as a country.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to MP Holman next.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses today.

First of all, my questions are regarding trade and investment. My question is for Ms. Nwuneli.

You mentioned in your introduction that there's currently no free trade agreement between Canada and the African countries.

There is currently in discussion the African continental free trade area, AfCFTA, a flagship initiative of the African Union's "Agenda 2063". Canada's Africa strategy notes, "Once fully implemented, [it] will be the [world's] largest free trade area...by number of participating countries, creating an integrated market of 1.3 billion people."

I was wondering if you could share with us the status of the AfCFTA implementation. Thank you.

Ndidi Nwuneli: Thank you so much.

I would say that the AfCFTA has focused significantly on protocols and agreements: first, easing some of the barriers to trade within the continent, then developing those protocols and agreements within regions on the continent and now with other regions outside the continent.

Unfortunately, the pace has not been as fast as I would have wanted, personally. I'm speaking in my personal capacity as a former serial entrepreneur and someone who has worked across the entire continent, but we are seeing a lot of promising signs.

Number one, I think we're seeing a lot of promising signs when it comes to protocols that have been developed on trade with agriculture, produce and food. We're seeing promising protocols when it comes to manufacturing and trade in manufacturing, and a tremendous appetite and interest in trade for critical minerals and support for energy access.

I want to tie that to say that, beyond the AfCFTA, we also have some very credible partners. AFC, the Africa Finance Corporation, is leading the phenomenal work between three countries when it comes to critical minerals. Some of you have heard of the Lobito corridor. I was just in Norway. To see the Nordic interest in the Lobito corridor was phenomenal. To see the U.S. interest in that corridor is also quite noteworthy.

In addition, we have the Africa Access Bank, which is another formidable player that has reduced a lot of the barriers to financing trade on the continent. It's a very ready partner for Canada.

We have the African Development Bank. I mentioned in my submission the African Development Fund, which is committed to infrastructure development to ease trade between Africa and the rest of the world and within Africa under its new leader, Dr. Sidi Ould Tah.

We are seeing so many promising signs. I want to assure you that, in a lot of ways, AfCFTA is just one of the many platforms that have been unlocked on the continent, and it's important to recognize that there are so many other partners that are eager to engage with Canada in addition to AfCFTA.

I'll ask Elise to chime in if she has anything else to add.

• (1210)

Elise Legault: I think that's great. Thanks.

Kurt Holman: Thank you.

It's interesting that you brought up critical minerals. My second question is, what steps could the Government of Canada take to further enable or encourage responsible Canadian investment in Africa's critical minerals sector, consistent with the objectives set out in the Africa strategy?

Ndidi Nwuneli: I can take that first. I'm sure others will chime in.

I think there are three steps.

Number one is that we must increase the transparency and accountability of our investments in critical minerals. Civil society has a critical role to play here to ensure that we are following standards when it comes to gender, youth, equity, justice, fair pay, investment in the continent and value addition on the critical minerals, along with the insistence that where Canadian companies come alongside African investors, they also pay credible livable wages, provide all the social protections to the employees and prioritize African employees in value addition on the continent. We've noticed that oftentimes—I wouldn't call out other countries—there's not a level playing field. I think Canadian values are so powerful, and those values should follow Canadian investment in Africa.

The second one is the critical role for investment that is affordable. We've talked about the cost of capital. I talked about FinDev Canada. We need to see more Canadian institutions and pension funds coming alongside private investment to ensure that patient capital is available to investors who are committing to value addition on the continent.

Finally, there is knowledge transfer. I think Canada has so much great experience in critical minerals. Your gold industry is so well advanced. Your critical minerals industry in Canada is so well developed. That knowledge transfer is a gift that Canada can give to many African countries.

I'll pass it on to Elise, in case she has anything else.

The Chair: We're out of time, unfortunately.

We'll go next to MP Bill Blair.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): If I may, I'm going to defer my time to my colleague, Mr. Oliphant.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I don't get to be a witness, but I get to talk some more.

I wanted to talk about competition on the continent.

First, Canada is supporting the African continental free trade area through its work in Ghana and is trying to look at some of the issues of exchange, money and internal barriers that are stopping trade. One of our goals is to increase internal continental trade.

We also want to increase development. There is a strong sense that you need energy before you can have development. Obviously, all of the work on poverty reduction, education and health care needs to continue. If you're going to have people not need development assistance, then they need jobs. If you're going to have jobs, then you need capacity. Part of that is infrastructure. Part of it is energy.

China is well known. China has 1.4 billion people, by the way. We have 40 million people. We will not necessarily be able to compete with China on everything, but we can do what we're good at doing.

I would offer that on energy, we have particular things we're good at. We have a "towards sustainable mining" program, TSM, with the Mining Association of Canada, which puts Canada on the map as being if not the most, then one of the most environmentally, labour and socially just mining sectors in the world. We have energy, with renewables, nuclear and fossil fuel energy capacity. We have agri-food and processing, which could help develop the region, so that Africa wouldn't only feed itself but could feed the world.

My thought on this is that energy is critical. Do you have any thoughts on how Canada could do that, so that we can alleviate poverty by creating employment, particularly for youth, with the largest youth population in the world?

Elise Legault: Sure. Maybe Mr. Roberts will have something to add on this energy question.

I'm glad to hear you raise it, because that's one of the recommendations we have in the document that we shared here.

When there are surveys of businesses on the continent that ask what the biggest barriers are to actually creating businesses and creating jobs, two things always come out on top. One is the cost of capital, which Ndidi was mentioning. It's the fact that it's too expensive to borrow money to invest on the continent because of, often, unfair credit ratings and so forth. The second is a lack of access to reliable electricity. These are the two things that consistently come out on top. That's why there's a very significant movement or initiative going back to the question of energy and electricity access on the continent.

I don't know if you've heard about mission 300. It is the World Bank and African Development Bank initiative to provide electricity to 300 million people on the continent. On the continent, there are still 600 million people who don't have access to electricity. That's a very promising initiative.

I'm very much hoping this is something Canada can support. Canada can support that through its contribution to the African Development Fund with the replenishment next week. Also, there is potential for actual bilateral, Canada-Africa partnerships around electricity and energy access, because we do have the expertise across many different types of energy.

I was pleased to see this mentioned during the Prime Minister's trip to South Africa for the G20. That's promising, but there is more. Is that where we could have more forward-looking, mutually beneficial bilateral partnerships between Canada and African countries? I think energy and electricity access has tremendous potential.

• (1215)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Perhaps Professor Roberts could add to that.

Do you want to add anything on the electricity and energy issue? They're combined.

Chris W. J. Roberts: As I mentioned in my opening statement, energy is critical. Energy poverty in Africa is the biggest drawback and the biggest obstacle to development, period. There are lots of other issues. However, regarding the lack of energy, the institutional infrastructure for energy and the physical infrastructure for energy—electricity particularly and other forms of energy—yes, Canada has a major role to play in that.

If we could give the Trump administration credit for anything—and I certainly don't usually do that—maybe one thing would be for changing the narrative about the west's approach to energy development in Africa. Many African countries have domestic sources of energy that are underused: coal—which is, again, not my favourite—natural gas and oil, as well as renewables like geothermal, hydro, etc.

For a long time, almost a decade, gradually, the international restrictions on investment, not only through western countries bilaterally but also through some of the IFIs, were that we will invest in renewables but will not invest in fossil fuels, yet Canada increases its fossil fuel exports every year. The United States has done it. In Norway, for all of its success, its sovereign wealth fund has been dependent on fossil fuel exports, yet we restricted it for a long time. That increased the cost of capital for Africa or for any companies doing business in Africa to develop fossil fuels in Africa that could be used for generating both domestic energy and export earnings.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes this round.

Thank you so much to the witnesses for appearing and for your incredibly important testimony before the committee.

We will now briefly suspend the meeting so that we can go into the in camera format.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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