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Chair: Ahmed Hussien





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• (1535)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 25 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 12, 2026, the committee is meeting on the situation in Venezuela.

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.

I would like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all the participants, including the interpreters.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

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

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have the Honourable Stuart Savage, ambassador, permanent representative of Canada to the Organization of American States, by video conference, and Wendy Drukier, director general of South America and hemispheric affairs.

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

I now invite Ms. Drukier to make an opening statement.

**Wendy Drukier (Director General, South America and Hemispheric Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and**

**Development):** Thank you very much, Chair and members of the committee.

Nicolás Maduro presided over Venezuela from 2013 until January of this year. During this time, corruption became institutionalized in the government and military at all levels. The regime co-opted the judiciary, the economy was mismanaged to a state of ruin, and authorities engaged in systematic political repression. The regime became a beneficiary of, if not an active participant in, illegal mining, money laundering, drug trafficking and other illicit revenue streams, working with non-state and criminal armed groups.

In response to this corruption, attacks on democratic institutions and systematic human rights violations, Canada has sanctioned 139 individuals since 2017. The EU and the U.K. have also imposed sanctions on the regime, and the U.S. has imposed both sectoral and individual sanctions.

Under the leadership of María Corina Machado, the opposition mounted a coordinated campaign for the 2024 presidential elections, which they handily won, as shown through official voting tallies collected by poll watchers. Maduro nonetheless declared himself the victor and unleashed an unprecedented level of political arrests and violence to counter popular protests. Canada, the U.S., the U.K., and the EU, along with at least eight Latin American countries, refused to recognize Maduro's claim of victory.

Then on January 3, 2026, U.S. forces executed Operation Absolute Resolve, deploying military aircraft and special operations troops in Venezuela to capture Nicolás Maduro in what they have framed as a law enforcement action. The arrest of Maduro was an unprecedented moment, and its long-term repercussions are still very much uncertain.

The context has now changed. Delcy Rodríguez is the de facto acting president and is being recognized as Venezuela's leader by the U.S. under what it sees as a three-step plan, consisting of an initial phase of stabilization and a secondary stage of recovery and institution rebuilding in order to prepare for what it sees as the third phase: a transition to democracy.

The Venezuelan economy remains fragile following years of hyperinflation and a massive contraction of GDP. Roughly 60% of households lack sufficient income to purchase basic food, and acute malnutrition remains high among children. Venezuela ranks among the least peaceful countries globally, characterized by high levels of organized crime and limited law enforcement effectiveness. As a result, approximately eight million Venezuelans have left the country since 2014, making it one of the largest displacement crises in recent history.

The regime in Venezuela that stole the 2024 elections and imprisoned hundreds of political opponents remains in power. Nonetheless, there is now cautious optimism in the country. Over 600 political prisoners have been released, although hundreds more remain incarcerated. An amnesty law has been passed, but it has limited scope, and loopholes may allow the regime to rearrest people. There have also been some nascent moves towards attracting international investment to rehabilitate crumbling infrastructure and generate oil revenue for the country, although the lack of rule of law and the unpredictability remain significant disincentives.

[Translation]

Canada has long been committed to supporting a Venezuelan-led democratic transition to end political oppression, serious human rights violations and the humanitarian crisis. In collaboration with other countries in the region, Canada has referred the situation in Venezuela to the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity committed by the regime since 2014.

Canada has played a key role in the international response to the Venezuelan migration crisis. The government has organized or co-organized two major donor conferences to support Venezuelan refugees and migrants. It has also provided capacity-building and technical assistance to countries in the region hosting these refugees, to facilitate their integration. Since 2019, Canada has provided over \$260 million in humanitarian and development aid to address the Venezuelan crisis and its repercussions in the region.

[English]

In Venezuela, Canada's primary interest remains the establishment and maintenance of long-term stability. We believe this must come in the form of a peaceful democratic transition led by Venezuelans. Further destabilization risks regional disorder, including heightened tensions, violence and criminality, all of which can reach Canadian shores. A democratic, stable Venezuela could become a valuable partner for Canada, strengthening co-operation on hemispheric security, democracy support and multilateral engagement.

Finally, in the medium to long term, Venezuela could offer significant opportunities for Canadian companies, particularly in energy, infrastructure, mining, agri-food, energy transition and environmental impact mitigation and related services. Venezuela is a large country with a relatively well-educated population and sits on a cache of natural resources that could bring about substantial prosperity if developed in a transparent, democratic and responsible manner. Such a Venezuela could be a middle-power strategic partner for Canada. We hope that Venezuela moves in that direction, and we are ready to help enable that change.

Thank you.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your remarks.

I will now open the floor to questions from members of the committee, beginning with Mr. Chong.

You have six minutes.

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills North, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for appearing to talk about the situation. I have a number of questions.

You have outlined that the Trump administration has a three-part plan that involves stabilization, institution building and, thirdly, transition to democracy. Does the Government of Canada support that plan, or does it have a different view of how things should unfold in Venezuela?

**Wendy Drukier:** It's a very important question.

We know that the U.S. is playing an important role in Venezuela right now with its work with the de facto regime. Canada believes, as I mentioned in my statement, that we need to transition to a democracy led by Venezuelans. How that is put into place will be developed as the situation unfolds. We're two months into this current situation, and the first priority is to ensure that the country does not descend into chaos.

We believe that the priority should be a democratic transition, and we stand ready to support that.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** You mentioned that the current government is being led by Madam Rodríguez. You also mentioned the overwhelming results of the last democratic election for Mr. González and his copartner Madam Machado. Does the Government of Canada support them playing a role in the Venezuelan-led democratic transition? If so, what would that role look like?

**Wendy Drukier:** The Government of Canada believes how that democratic transition takes place should be determined by Venezuelans, and that includes all political parties, opposition and civil society. That would include, of course, Madam Machado, Mr. González and the other major players, and they've pronounced on the desire for new elections in Venezuela.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** In other words, the Government of Canada would support both these individuals having a role to play in a transition to Venezuelan democracy. Is that correct?

**Wendy Drukier:** I can absolutely say the answer is yes.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Good. I am glad to hear that. Thank you. That's our position as well.

The Government of Canada has not had diplomatic relations with the previous Maduro regime, and that continues with the government led by Madam Rodríguez. What are the conditions for establishing diplomatic ties with the government in Venezuela?

**Wendy Drukier:** Canada has not recognized the current regime in Venezuela. We didn't recognize it when it was led by President Maduro and we don't recognize it now. A number of senior members of the regime are sanctioned by Canada. The de facto power that this regime has is the result of fraudulent elections or elections being stolen in 2024.

Canada would be looking for a recognized, democratic, transparent process in Venezuela to be able to officially recognize the government.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** What is the democratic process? Do elections have to take place first, with the appointment of a new head of government and head of state, before Canada will re-establish diplomatic recognition of the Government of Venezuela, or does it happen earlier than that?

**Wendy Drukier:** I wouldn't want to speculate on the steps involved, which Venezuelans will determine, in the transition to democracy. At the moment, we don't see conditions for official recognition of the government. We would have to see the process that unfolds to determine when the right moment would be.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** The other question I have is about Operation Absolute Resolve. It was characterized by Secretary of State Rubio as a law enforcement action, and if that is the case—and this is my assessment—then it would fall within international law.

Is it the view of the Government of Canada that Operation Absolute Resolve was a law enforcement action and therefore fell within international law?

• (1545)

**Wendy Drukier:** The Government of Canada understands the U.S. legal analysis done by U.S. authorities on the legality of that action. They do characterize it as a law enforcement activity. The Government of Canada hasn't done that sort of assessment of the application of U.S. law to those actions.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Therefore, you don't have an opinion about whether or not that operation was within international or U.S. law.

**Wendy Drukier:** I certainly don't have an opinion. I don't think it's my place to have an opinion on it.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you. I appreciate you answering that question.

I don't have any further questions.

**The Chair:** We go next to MP Rob Oliphant.

You have six minutes.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Thank you to both of the officials for being with us today.

I'll be asking three questions. One is with respect to displaced persons, who make up about a quarter of the population. The second is with respect to the role of the OAS and Canada's position

within the OAS. The third one will be on any possible normalization—or not—of diplomatic relations.

With respect to displaced persons, estimates are that about a quarter of the population, or maybe eight million or nine million people—it's hard to get the number—have left Venezuela. We know they've gone to a variety of countries in the neighbourhood, as well as to some island states nearby. Is there any sign of them returning to Venezuela with the so-called operation, or is there a sense that this will be a longer, protracted displacement of people?

**Wendy Drukier:** This is an important question, because the volume of displacement is so large and the vast majority have remained in the region.

The Government of Canada, through its missions in the region and from Global Affairs headquarters here, has been consulting with those who work on the issues the most, including the International Organization for Migration and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Our missions on the ground have been consulting with partners. We haven't seen a significant return of Venezuelans, nor a significant change in the number of them leaving the country, since January 3.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** They were leaving at a rate of about 2,000 a day, even as recently as a month ago. That continues.

**Wendy Drukier:** That's correct.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

When he last spoke, my colleague had not switched on his microphone. Could he repeat his question for the benefit of those following our proceedings?

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** In French?

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** No, in English, but you have to turn on your microphone when you speak.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** I can do it in French as well, but I prefer to do it in English.

[*English*]

What did I ask? It was just about the 2,000 people a day who are not returning. That was it.

The second question, for Mr. Savage, is on the role of the OAS in this. Venezuela has had, I believe, a suspended position within the OAS of late. Has the OAS made proclamations about Venezuela since January? Is there any change in the positions? What is Canada's position at the OAS vis-à-vis Venezuela?

**Hon. Stuart Savage (Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Canada to the Organization of American States, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** The OAS, as the hemisphere's main political forum, has taken the issue of Venezuela seriously and continues to follow it with great interest. In the OAS, Canada attempts to play a leading role to ensure that the situation in Venezuela remains on the agenda, and we've had been quite successful in that regard.

Over the last year or so, since the last elections in Venezuela—which were, as my colleague Madame Drukier said, not recognized for being fully free and fair in 2024—the OAS has had nine separate discussions on Venezuela in different ways, shapes and forms, including in August of that year, 2024.

The OAS was the only international organization able to come together on a consensual document calling for restraint and the publication of election results, in respect for the popular will of the Venezuelan people in the face of what was apparently happening in Venezuela at the time and the Maduro regime's effectively stealing those elections. Since then, there have been a number of other topics. I could go through them if you'd like, but it certainly has remained on the agenda. Most recently, we discussed Venezuela at the OAS on January 21. That was about the situation of political prisoners in Venezuela. I'm happy to expand if you want more information.

• (1550)

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** That's fine. I will go on with respect to the possible normalization of diplomatic relations and whether there's a process in mind for that.

Right now, we do not have an embassy open. We have a skeletal staff apparently working out of another country's mission. Is there any plan on reopening an embassy or establishing a normalized relationship?

**Wendy Drukier:** It is true that we have a small number of locally engaged staff on the ground in Caracas. Canada hasn't had any diplomats in the country since 2019. We did not formally close the embassy, but we were not able to send anyone in because Venezuelan authorities would not grant visas to Canadian diplomats. This is a situation that we will continue to examine under the change in circumstances.

Most, if not all, large, like-minded countries now have a diplomatic presence and have continued to have a diplomatic presence on the ground. In Venezuela, the U.S. has re-established a diplomatic presence. As the Government of Canada, we are looking at the conditions that may allow Canadian diplomats to return there.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

You have six minutes, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

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

I just have a quick question, following on from what was said a moment ago by the Conservatives.

Ms. Drukier, you say that you have no opinion as to whether international law has been violated or not. Are there people trained in international law at the Department of Foreign Affairs?

**Wendy Drukier:** Yes, we have the International Law Bureau at the department.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** When something like this happens, do you consult these people?

**Wendy Drukier:** Yes, of course, if necessary.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Did you consult these people when it happened?

**Wendy Drukier:** Yes.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** What was their response?

**Wendy Drukier:** The responses were provided in the form of advice to the minister. I am not in a position to discuss the advice that was given to the minister.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** What you are saying is that you are not aware of what was said to the minister.

**Wendy Drukier:** I am not a lawyer and I have no training in international law.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** In fact, my question is not directed at you, but rather concerns the department's expertise. You tell me that people trained in international law assess whether or not international law has been violated in certain situations and that advice is given to the minister. You, who are responsible for South America and Hemispheric Affairs, were not aware of the advice given to the minister in this specific situation.

**Wendy Drukier:** I was aware of it, but I am not at liberty to share those views, as they were advice given to the minister.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Even though it is within your own department, you are unable to provide us with the department's findings. Is that correct?

**Wendy Drukier:** This was advice given to the minister, so it is not my role to disclose it.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Could the ambassador tell us whether it is his role to inform us of the advice given to the minister? Is this really a state secret? Do we need to submit a freedom of information request to obtain the response from Foreign Affairs staff who are advising the minister—advice that, as I understand it, cannot be made public?

[*English*]

**Hon. Stuart Savage:** The question is clearly intended to get at some information that, as my colleague said, gets into the realm of ministerial privilege. As public servants, we are here to advise and support our ministers. We are not at liberty to express or share the advice provided to ministers in their decision-making processes.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That's fine, thank you very much.

However, you say that the minister could tell us whether the advice she was given leaned one way or the other. In that case, we could ask the minister directly if she would be willing to speak publicly.

Ms. Drukier, could you tell us whether the economic situation has improved since the exfiltration of former President Maduro?

**Wendy Drukier:** This is a difficult question to answer, as we do not have much information on the situation. We know that, under the agreement between the United States and the Venezuelan regime, a portion of the revenue from oil sales is returned to the country to meet essential needs such as education and health care. We understand that the economic situation has improved somewhat, but we have no quantifiable data as to the extent of this improvement.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Very well. Thank you.

Ambassador, within the Organization of American States itself, is there a consensus on how to assess the situation that prevailed when former President Maduro was exfiltrated? Do all countries agree that this was a good thing or a bad thing, or are they somewhat divided on the issue?

[*English*]

**Hon. Stuart Savage:** There is clearly a subject here that has not had a formal discussion or any direct exchange at the OAS per se. I would be able to intimate and guess only.

A number of the government member states of the OAS have made their own specific bilateral indications of their views on that operation. I would refer you to those rather than trying to interpret them for you, but I can fairly say that there are a variety of views and there are also a variety of perspectives taken, which are not all starting from the same point.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Just to be clear, Ambassador, I imagine you have access to press reviews, that you attend briefings, and that as part of your duties, you are able to analyze a situation as well as the positions of the various countries.

We are fortunate that you are here, because you have considerable expertise and a far greater understanding of the situation than we do.

The reason you have been invited here is not to speak on behalf of others, but rather to share facts with us. I imagine you are in a position to tell us how the various countries stand in light of what has happened with Mr. Maduro's removal from Venezuela.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Give a quick response, please, because we're running over time.

**Hon. Stuart Savage:** The expertise that I and the team here have is shared, of course, with our headquarters, which works to develop Canadian positions based on multiple sources of information, including that which I provide to the OAS through our channels. However, we are not the only ones providing that information and input to the decision-making process.

Rather than trying to give you the views that may or may not be the most recent from the 31 other member state governments of the OAS, if you would like, I could try to seek the statements and provide those to the committee. We assess those things from here at the OAS, from our missions abroad in the capitals of those countries and through the missions resident in Ottawa. Therefore, I think mine is but one part of a larger puzzle in coming together to the Canadian position.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll start the second round of questions, beginning with MP Ziad Aboultaif.

You have five minutes.

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

Thanks to the witnesses.

Does Canada approve of Operation Absolute Resolve?

• (1600)

**Wendy Drukier:** It's a very clear question. Unfortunately, I cannot provide a very clear answer in terms of the meaning of the word "approve".

Canada, certainly, as I explained in my opening remarks, had great criticism of Nicolás Maduro and how he ran Venezuela, with corruption, human rights abuses and a lack of respect for democracy. As the Prime Minister has said, we are now "taking the world as it is" and trying to look at how things will go, moving forward, with the situation in Venezuela right now and how it may progress.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** The impression out there is that the Canadian government approves of the operation—after the operation was done, just to be fair. After that, the Prime Minister said, on January 3, 2026, "Canada has long supported a peaceful, negotiated, and Venezuelan-led transition process that respects the democratic will of the Venezuelan people." He further said, "We stand by the Venezuelan people's sovereign right to decide and build their own future in a peaceful and democratic society."

The operation led to the replacement of Maduro by his vice-president, despite the democratic process that took place. They were supposed to end up having Mr. Urrutia as the President of Venezuela, and you indicated that Canada would support that direction.

You're giving me an unclear answer. You've given me no answer, basically, on the Canadian approval of the operation, and on the other side, there are two statements from the Prime Minister. How can we reconcile those things so we can give to the public the clear position of Canada on this important issue?

**Wendy Drukier:** I thank the member for quoting the Prime Minister, who said it much better than I could. I think his position is very clear on that question.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** His position is very clear, but the position on supporting the operation is not clear. As I said, there's a clear impression out there—I'm not going to quote anything—that Canada supported the operation. Basically, there's a fundamental contradiction between the official statement made by the Prime Minister and support of the operation. Each one of them leads to a different outcome, and that is a clear contradiction. It leaves Canada, basically, with an unclear position on the whole situation.

I'd like to ask you the question again: Can you confirm to this committee that Canada had no position on Operation Absolute Resolve?

**Wendy Drukier:** I'm not sure where the member got the statement around the impression out there that Canada supported the operation. I certainly don't have that impression either way. As I said before, the Prime Minister's statement was very clear, and I certainly wouldn't want to—

**Ziad Aboultaif:** With all due respect, you did not deny and you did not say otherwise. You said you don't know.

This is a fundamental element in this whole conversation. I would love to see clarification on that position. Whether it's yes or no, it doesn't matter, but we need to at least know what the exact position is on that.

[Translation]

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, Lib.):** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I believe the witnesses answered very clearly that they supported the statement made by the Prime Minister on this matter. As the witnesses answered quite clearly, I do not think it is necessary to revisit this point.

[English]

**The Chair:** Can you conclude the question? You've asked it a number of times.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** My question was very clear. For the first answer, she said that she did not know. It was no, yes, no, no. I would like just a yes or no, and there are no hard feelings.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Madame Drukier.

**Wendy Drukier:** I just want to clarify that I don't believe my response to that specific question was, "I don't know." I would just call the member's attention again to the Prime Minister's statement.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** We'll move to the agreement between the Venezuelan government and the U.S. administration on the facilitation of the sale of Venezuelan oil.

Do we have any feedback on that agreement between the two parties? It definitely affects our industry and our position in general. Can you advise us on what Canada's knowledge is of this agreement?

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Give a very quick response because we're out of time.

**Wendy Drukier:** We're not aware of a written agreement or specific details of that agreement. We know that the sale of oil is happening, and we know under what general conditions, but a number of executive orders and other measures from the U.S. government have governed the evolving situation.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[English]

Next we have MP Mona Fortier.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for joining us so that we can shed light on what is currently happening, on the current situation.

I have information about the past, but I would like to focus more on the current situation. That is what I would like to explore at this point.

Ms. Drukier, what tools do you have to assess what is happening on the ground in Venezuela? How can we support the Venezuelan people? What tools do you have to make certain recommendations to the United Nations Human Rights Council, to the minister, and by extension, to the Prime Minister?

**Wendy Drukier:** Mr. Chair, I think it is very relevant to discuss how to address the situation in order to support the Venezuelan people in this process, and to discuss the source of our information.

Unfortunately, we have had no one on the ground for several years. However, officials and diplomats are monitoring the situation in Venezuela very closely, including our embassy in Bogotá, Colombia. We speak regularly with Venezuelans both inside and outside the country, with NGOs, UN agencies and, above all, with our colleagues on the ground, such as the United Kingdom, for example, which is our protecting power in Venezuela. We use all these sources of information to paint a picture of the situation.

As regards Canada's contribution, as I mentioned in my presentation, our development projects involve working with local groups, NGOs and other organizations in Venezuela to provide humanitarian aid, as well as support related to human rights and the protection of vulnerable individuals and groups. We also respond to appeals for international assistance from the United Nations or the Red Cross regarding humanitarian aid.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Since the U.S. intervention at the start of the year, can you tell us whether any additional aid has been provided to the Venezuelan people? If so, what is the total amount of these investments and to whom have they been granted?

**Wendy Drukier:** The humanitarian situation hasn't really changed much on the ground. We have continued to work with the humanitarian aid organizations already there. There has been no international appeal for more humanitarian aid.

Development projects take a little longer to get off the ground and the situation is evolving. We hope to be able to do more on the ground in the future.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** I would like to come back to what you said earlier. At present, we obviously do not have the necessary conditions to ensure a greater presence on the ground. You mentioned that you are examining the conditions that would be necessary to achieve this.

Could you tell the committee what will enable us to return to the field? I imagine we will be able to do so once we have met these conditions.

**Wendy Drukier:** We always put the safety of our diplomats first. We ensure they are safe in the field and we ensure we provide them with the appropriate conditions.

There is also the issue of accreditation. For example, if we want someone to be stationed there on a permanent basis, accreditation would need to be granted by the Venezuelan authorities.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** I have the privilege of seeing what is happening on the consular services side. Do you know if there is a Canadian presence there and if there are any consular service needs at present?

I imagine we can work with Bogotá, in Colombia, or with our allies. Are there any requests for consular services at present?

• (1610)

**Wendy Drukier:** The number of requests relating to consular services in Venezuela is not very high at the moment. One of our local staff members, who is based in Caracas, handles consular services. This work is also carried out by our consular officers in Bogotá. We have not really seen an increase in the number of requests around January 3, nor since then.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** There is, therefore, nothing new that we should be doing to ensure greater investment or capacity in support of consular services.

**Wendy Drukier:** Not at the moment, no.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** All right, thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next we have MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

You have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Savage, I believe you studied international relations at the University of Windsor, if I am not mistaken. Is that correct?

[English]

**Hon. Stuart Savage:** Yes, I do have some studies in that.

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I imagine that this training includes courses on international law. I looked into the curriculum and, as it stands, I see that there are courses on international law. Was that the case in 1989?

[English]

**Hon. Stuart Savage:** Yes, I have had some introduction to international law.

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Fabulous.

I'm going to ask you a completely hypothetical question. Suppose a democratic ally decided, without consulting its allies, to carry out an operation in a country that is not democratic and to exfiltrate the president of that non-democratic country, who heads a corrupt regime. Based on your training at the University of Windsor,

would that be described as a situation that violates international law?

[English]

**Hon. Stuart Savage:** I appreciate the thoughtfulness of this question, but I understand that I'm here to respond factually to Canada's relationship and actions at the OAS vis-à-vis Venezuela, and I would not want to get into speculation on hypotheticals. I want to respect what I've been told.

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That's fine, I understand perfectly, Ambassador.

If I am not mistaken, your role as ambassador is to inform the Government of Canada of what you know and what you are doing within the Organization of American States. That is your role. You send communications.

When there is a major event—I think the abduction of a head of state by another country is a major event—you normally send reports to Canada.

In your communications to the Government of Canada or the Department of Foreign Affairs, do you include the positions of the various countries that make up the Organization of American States, or do you say absolutely nothing about how other countries are positioning themselves when you send your communications?

[English]

**Hon. Stuart Savage:** On the matter in question, it would normally be part of what we do on matters that are of significant interest to Canada to indeed reflect the views of other countries, particularly the more important players around the table. This would be part of a broader information exercise that would involve other parts of the Global Affairs network as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next we go to MP Kramp-Neuman.

You have five minutes.

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

The Prime Minister said, “Canada attaches great importance to resolution of crises through multilateral engagement and is in close contact with international partners about ongoing developments.” Specifically which international partners has the government been in contact with, and through what forums or mechanisms did this take place?

**Wendy Drukier:** The Canadian government has been in contact with other governments at various levels, in part through discussions at the Organization of American States and through bilateral communications between ministers, for example, as well as officials.

Part of the work on the ground of our missions abroad is to speak to local authorities about important situations or developments in the world. We've been in touch with many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and we've spoken with European allies, as well as the United States.

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Thank you.

Was the Canadian government made aware of Operation Absolute Resolve prior to January 3? To follow up, did it receive advance notice?

• (1615)

**Wendy Drukier:** The Canadian government was not made aware of the operation prior to it being carried out. We were not given any advance notice.

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Did Canada coordinate its response through any other bodies, or was it unilaterally within the Canadian government?

**Wendy Drukier:** Canada responded to the developments. Clearly, this was a situation that happened quickly. We had a statement from the minister, I believe, the same day. The Prime Minister issued a statement very quickly as well. This was primarily done by the Canadian government.

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Primarily? Were there any other bodies involved?

**Wendy Drukier:** I'm not aware of any consultations that happened prior to those statements. That doesn't mean discussions weren't had that I was not aware of.

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Okay, that's fair.

In the department's opinion, what is the best-case scenario for, let's suggest, 12 months from now for Venezuela, and what is the worst-case scenario? How can Canada leverage our foreign policy to help effect positive change in Venezuela?

In your opening remarks, you suggested that ideally you don't want to have Venezuela descend into chaos. What are the best and worst-case scenarios?

**Wendy Drukier:** That's a great question.

The best-case scenario would be effective stabilization of the situation and an orderly democratic transition led by Venezuelans, as I've stated before. Hopefully that would mean the reconstruction of independent democratic institutions, amnesties for those who have been persecuted by the regime, and free and fair elections that would allow Venezuelans to choose their leadership.

On the other hand, a worst-case scenario might involve increasing violence and criminal activity and a loss of control of security forces in Venezuela, which could then spill over into neighbouring countries and even into North America.

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Approximately how many times has your department met with U.S. officials specifically on the topic of the regime change in Venezuela?

**Wendy Drukier:** Unfortunately, I wouldn't have a count on that. Our interactions with U.S. officials happen at many levels and on quite a regular basis.

I don't have a record of when this issue might have been raised that I could share.

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Could you please speak to the current situation for Canadians themselves on the ground in Venezuela? How are we getting the needed support to them?

**Wendy Drukier:** We take our consular responsibilities very seriously.

As I stated earlier, we haven't had an increase in demand for consular support in Venezuela. We have around 7,000 Canadians in Venezuela registered with our registry of Canadians abroad. There are likely more who haven't registered, but we haven't been asked to bring assistance to those Canadians.

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Has there been any discussion with Canadian businesses operating in Venezuela?

**Wendy Drukier:** We haven't had discussions with Canadian businesses, because there are very few we're aware of that are actually operating in Venezuela, because the conditions haven't been right. We anticipate that there may be more interest as the economy stabilizes.

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** This is my last question. Have there been any conversations about deploying CAF assets to the region in Venezuela?

**Wendy Drukier:** To my knowledge, there has not been any discussion regarding CAF assets, but that would probably be a question for the Department of National Defence.

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman:** Thank you.

Those are all my questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next we go to MP Steven Guilbeault for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank Ms. Drukier and the ambassador for joining us today.

Ms. Drukier, you said in your opening remarks that, so far, we have not seen much change on the ground regarding the situation of refugees. Is that indeed the case?

**Wendy Drukier:** Yes.

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault:** Earlier, you spoke briefly about humanitarian aid, particularly in response to my colleague Ms. Fortier.

Could you explain a little about what this involves? Who are the partners we are working with on the ground in Venezuela? As we do not have a significant Canadian presence there, I imagine we are dealing with local or international partners. Could you provide us with a little more detail on that?

**Wendy Drukier:** Yes, of course.

Allow me to check my notes, as we have several partners on the ground.

As regards humanitarian aid, we work mainly with the Red Cross and United Nations agencies. We support food aid, medical services, nutrition programs and other essential needs on the ground.

• (1620)

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault:** Let's try to look a little further into the future. Earlier, you mentioned that we were looking into the possibility of doing more, particularly in humanitarian terms. Do we have any idea of the criteria that would lead Canada to decide to intervene more significantly, again in humanitarian terms?

**Wendy Drukier:** Canada usually responds to international requests for humanitarian aid. So, it will depend on how the situation on the ground develops and how these needs have initially been assessed by the United Nations.

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault:** I have one final question for you: Could you confirm that we have granted amnesty to political prisoners from Venezuela in Canada?

**Wendy Drukier:** Unfortunately, I do not have that data. I know that many Venezuelans have applied for political asylum in Canada, including more than 1,000 over the past year. However, I do not have the figures on how many applications have been accepted or rejected. That would be a question best put to our colleagues at the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault:** I have no more questions, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll start the third round of questions, beginning with Madame Rood.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here today.

Given that Canada formally recognized Edmundo González Urrutia as president-elect in January 2025 and never recognized the legitimacy of Nicolás Maduro, who does the Government of Canada currently recognize as the legitimate leader of Venezuela?

**Wendy Drukier:** It's a very complicated situation. Canada recognized Edmundo González Urrutia as the president-elect of Venezuela back on January 9, 2025. The Government of Canada did not recognize him as the president. We actually do not have a recognition of a legitimate leader of Venezuela at this time.

Given the change in the situation on the ground and in the political situation as well, we've heard from representatives of the Venezuelan opposition, such as Mr. González and María Corina Machado, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, that they would be looking towards a transition where there would be new free and fair elections.

**Lianne Rood:** Why has Canada not taken stronger steps to support Nobel Peace Prize laureate María Corina Machado, the clear choice of the Venezuelan people, instead of tactically accepting a U.S.-backed arrangement with the deeply corrupt and long sanctioned Delcy Rodríguez?

**Wendy Drukier:** I would not characterize Canada's position as a tacit acceptance of the U.S.'s working with the regime. We have been working with the Venezuelan opposition, including María Co-

rina Machado, for some time and have engaged in dialogue with her. The Prime Minister spoke with her following the events of January 3 this year as well. We are also looking at the situation right now. Venezuelans did pronounce themselves in July 2024. That was more than a year and a half ago. The situation, of course, has changed, and we support any measures that would lead to a democratic transition led by Venezuelans.

**Lianne Rood:** Delcy Rodríguez remains sanctioned by Canada under the special economic measures regulations for her role in human rights abuses and corruption. How can the Government of Canada interpret her recent actions, such as prison closures and amnesty law and oil sector reforms, as anything more than cosmetic changes designed to preserve the same corrupt chavista network that looted Venezuela for decades?

**Wendy Drukier:** That's an interesting characterization. I'm certainly not in a position to read the motivations of Delcy Rodríguez in terms of the measures that have been taken.

As I mentioned in the opening statement, we have seen modest progress. We will have to see how things evolve over time. I think time will tell whether these changes may lead to more changes and more opening up of the country. We are very cautiously optimistic about the situation in Venezuela, but we certainly don't believe that we've turned the corner just yet.

**Lianne Rood:** Is Canada actively considering lifting any sanctions on her or other regime figures, or will sanctions remain until verifiable, irreversible anti-corruption reforms and free elections are achieved?

• (1625)

**Wendy Drukier:** The Canadian government reviews the sanctions regime and does undertake new consideration of sanctions—whether to impose new sanctions or take other measures on an ongoing basis. We have not made any changes to the sanctions regime since January 3 and are monitoring the situation.

**Lianne Rood:** Looking ahead, what specific measurable actions will Canada take to ensure that the Venezuelan transition results in real democracy rather than a rebranded version of the same corrupt regime? Will Canada lead efforts at the Organization of American States to impose strict anti-corruption conditionality on any future assistance, actively support María Corina Machado's role and maintain sanctions until free and fair elections are held under international observation?

**Wendy Drukier:** Those are a lot of points in one question. I will try to unpack some of them.

We certainly will maintain pressure. We are working on this with our partners and with the international community to continue to bring attention to the situation in Venezuela.

Canada has not set up strict conditions such that once you meet A, B and C, we will lift sanctions or we will move to recognition. We are following the situation as it evolves, and we will take those decisions as they are warranted. I wouldn't want to speculate as to what the next steps might be.

**Lianne Rood:** The U.S. government is now marketing Venezuelan oil and controlling proceeds through U.S.-managed accounts. What is Canada's detailed understanding of this arrangement, and does the department share the view that routing revenues through transparent U.S. control mechanisms is the only way to prevent the same corrupt chavismo insiders from once again stealing billions from the Venezuelan people?

**Wendy Drukier:** From what the Canadian government understands of the arrangement for the proceeds of the sales of Venezuelan oil, the Venezuelan government needs to submit very detailed plans for spending those funds before they are transferred from the U.S.

I'm not a financial expert. I don't know whether there would be other viable mechanisms or this would be the only mechanism. I would not be able to provide comments on that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll next go to Rob Oliphant.

You have five minutes.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the witnesses for being here.

I want to pull the lens away from Venezuela for a moment and look at the Venezuelan neighbourhood, the immediate reactions to the January operation and whether there's been an evolution. I know there's been some discussion about the ways and means of the removal of Maduro from office, which may be different from the results of moving him away from the office.

I'd like to focus on Brazil, Colombia and perhaps Guyana as neighbours. What were their initial reactions? Has there been any evolution in those responses? Is Canada in discussion and collaboration with the neighbours as they're responding?

That could be for either you or Mr. Savage. Both of you would probably be aware of these issues.

**Wendy Drukier:** Obviously, there have been a lot of reactions to what happened this January. We are discussing this with those neighbours and other countries in the region on a regular basis.

I believe the Brazilian statement was very clear in condemning the actions of the United States. Guyana, from what we understand, is relieved that attention has been drawn away from the contested Essequibo region, which Venezuela has been trying to claim as its own but which is currently under Guyanese control.

Colombia, of course, has certain considerations to take into account, in particular in security around the border area between Venezuela and Colombia. Colombian illegal armed groups—the FARC dissidents and the ELN—operate on both sides of the border. The main concern, in a practical sense, has been to make sure that violence doesn't spread or that it isn't displaced into Colombia.

It would be fair to say that every country is following developments. I think statements were made initially after what happened on January 3, but most countries, like Canada, are looking forward in order to see what the next steps might be and would want to support Venezuelans in a peaceful democratic transition.

• (1630)

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Moving from the south, east and west side to the north and the small island states, I understand that a number of them have been purchasing oil from Venezuela over the last number of years and may not have oil now—or they may. I'm not sure.

What would the state of the energy reserves be in these very small island states that would be quite dependent on Venezuelan oil? Are the Americans helping them with oil, or is it still restricted?

**Wendy Drukier:** It's an important question.

We're not aware of any need for help for these small island states. The supply of Venezuelan oil over the years had actually declined as production within Venezuela has declined. Aside from the very different situation in Cuba, most of these states can purchase oil on the open markets. They don't absolutely need to be receiving it from Venezuela, although they were receiving it at subsidized rates for some time.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Do I have more time?

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** I want to go back to political prisoners. You mentioned that back inside Venezuela, there's been a release of some 600 political prisoners. I have no idea what percentage that is. The Maduro regime was ruthless, vindictive and creative in finding ways to incarcerate anyone who was critical of the regime.

Do we have a sense of what percentage that might be, even though we probably don't have numbers? Are we making any representation towards their freedom?

**Wendy Drukier:** Canada continues to push for the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners in Venezuela. Estimates prior to the beginning of January were that there were perhaps around 800 to 900 political prisoners in Venezuela. That number has evolved as the weeks have drawn on, partially because it's believed that some family members have declared their family members as being political prisoners, whereas prior to that, they may have been afraid to characterize it that way.

It's very difficult for us to put a number on how many political prisoners are still in prisons. It would probably be fair to say that more than half have been released.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll go next to MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Drukier, do you have an idea of the situation of drug traffickers in the country? We can all agree that they were working hand in hand with President Maduro. Are they still in the country? Are they still doing damage there? Are they still using the free passage they used to have?

**Wendy Drukier:** We don't have a lot of data on that. As you can understand, it's not easy to measure illegal activity, but we haven't seen a lot of action against drug traffickers in Venezuela since January 3. We can only assume that they are still active.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Is public pressure being felt on the streets right now? Are there still people who support the former Maduro regime, or has it greatly dissipated and is the majority of the population encouraged by the change that has been made?

**Wendy Drukier:** Actually, the streets of Venezuela are pretty quiet. There aren't a lot of protests on one side or the other. It's speculative, but we're talking with contacts on the ground, because the legal situation is still very uncertain. After what happened on January 3, people who protested in favour of getting rid of President Maduro were arrested. There were also measures to criminalize any demonstrations in support of the United States's actions. Since there has been a lot of political repression, most people are staying home, hoping that the situation will improve.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** You seem to be much more in tune with the way neighbouring countries are responding than the ambassador, since you answered the questions I asked the ambassador twice and that he was unable to answer.

You are aware of the way these countries are responding, but are you aware of the measures they have taken in terms of humanitarian aid on the ground in Venezuela?

• (1635)

**Wendy Drukier:** Unfortunately, I don't have a lot of information on that. We don't think there have been many, precisely because there have been no requests for international assistance and there have not been many changes on the ground. If there had been an increase in violence or a decrease in food security, perhaps more neighbouring countries would have taken direct measures to help Venezuela.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Then we don't feel—  
[English]

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

Next is MP Michael Chong.

You have five minutes.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to talk about Venezuela in the context of energy and in the great power competition between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

You mentioned in your opening statement and throughout your testimony that Venezuela sits on huge oil reserves. I believe they are the largest oil reserves in the world. I think almost a fifth of the oil reserves in the world are in Venezuela. You also pointed out that production plummeted because of the pillaging of oil resources by the Maduro regime.

My understanding is that China holds about \$12 billion U.S. in Venezuelan debt and that China was being paid for that debt not with cash or money, but with discounted shipments of Venezuelan oil. I understand from reports that oil was discounted by as much as \$20 a barrel by the Maduro regime to pay for China's loan to Venezuela. That flow of oil and those payments in the form of oil have obviously stopped.

Could you talk a bit about what the Government of Canada's assessment is in how this impacts the great power competition between the United States and the People's Republic of China in this hemisphere, particularly as it relates to Venezuela?

**Wendy Drukier:** That's a very interesting long-term question. Thank you for the question.

I believe your characterization of the situation and the relations between Venezuela and China is more or less accurate. I don't have all the details of the price at which they might have been selling the oil, but absolutely oil sales to China from Venezuela have stopped.

The Venezuelans, we understand, have considerable debt to China. How that will be repaid is yet to be determined. We can presume that it won't be a priority in the discussions between the U.S. and Venezuelan authorities.

I'm not an expert on great power competition. It's certainly not within my area of responsibility, but as a foreign policy observation, China tends to be very patient in terms of its long-term interests. We haven't seen specific measures taken by China toward the Venezuelan authorities to address the current situation or to try to cash out those loans, but that may be because it's only been a couple of months.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I know that China has been characterized as such. I would say that we are a very patient country as well. We're the third-oldest continuous democracy in the world, and we've put up with this system for so very long because we are a very patient people in working with what we have—but I digress.

On the issue of oil, Venezuelan crude is heavy crude. It's similar to the heavy crude produced by Canadian oil sands companies, but it's also different.

Has the Government of Canada observed any change in patterns on our west coast with respect to the purchase of Canadian heavy crude from the Lower Mainland of Vancouver or otherwise because of the disruption in oil shipments from Venezuela to the People's Republic of China?

**Wendy Drukier:** This is a question well beyond my remit. I'm certainly not an expert on Canadian oil exports.

I can say that Venezuelan production has marginally increased since January 3. However, experts on this issue don't expect the production to significantly increase for probably a decade given the requirements for investment and repairs to oil infrastructure. We hear this from energy analytics firms like Enverus and ADI Analytics, and from independent experts as well.

● (1640)

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I have some more questions, but I think I'm running out of time, so I'll just defer them to the next round.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We next go to MP Mona Fortier.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Mr. Chong, I almost feel like giving you my speaking time, because you're touching on some really interesting topics. That said, I'll ask my questions and, if I have any time left, I'll give it to you.

Ambassador, I would like to understand your role and that of the Organization of American States. I think many people would be curious to know what you could tell us about the situation we are currently seeing.

I saw that an initial statement had been made by the Organization of American States. However, were there any meetings? Have you proposed any approaches since then? I believe there was a meeting of the Organization of American States on January 21. Could you tell us more specifically how the Organization of American States is following the situation in Venezuela?

[*English*]

**Hon. Stuart Savage:** It's a very good question.

Of course, our eyes and ears are open for issues relating to Venezuela all the time. Things evolve. The OAS itself has a potential role to play if and when we can get to a willingness within Venezuela to move towards a democratic transition.

Canada would be willing to use the tools available through the OAS, such as technical assistance in organizing elections and eventually election observation missions, to ensure elections are free and fair, when and if that time comes. In the meantime, we've been working with such bodies as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to follow and monitor the situation there, read the reports and make sure that the information is shared and socialized more broadly among the OAS membership.

We just had, as a matter of practice, our biannual dialogue with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Their rapporteur for Venezuela spoke, and we had a good exchange on their perceptions there and the desire, which Canada supports, to have the commission go to Venezuela to do an on-site visit to verify the human rights situation on the ground. It's something that has not been possible for the last 20 years, and we continue to look at ways of supporting that initiative.

At this time, following the discussion on political prisoners last month, we are starting to look toward what we might do in the future. In particular, we are discussing with partners—including the United States, Brazil and Mexico—areas of constructive collaboration where we can work together. We continue to work on that, but I have nothing specific to report, other than that we continue those efforts now.

Of course, we also maintain close touch with the Secretary General of the OAS, who has the capacity to offer his good offices to work with contacts within the regime and with other players in Venezuelan society. He has, for example, met with María Corina Machado to discuss her views of the future, and there are other ways in which he can help facilitate dialogue, which we support.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Michael, I'm going to give you the rest of my time.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I want to continue the discussion a bit more about oil and sanctions.

As you pointed out, over 100 individuals in Venezuela have been sanctioned, including Madam Rodriguez, and those sanctions remain in place.

The Prime Minister indicated in his trip to ASEAN, but also elsewhere, that he wants to see Canada become an oil and gas superpower. There is Canadian expertise in precisely the kind of heavy crude deep-sea extraction taking place in Venezuela. Chevron is involved in Canadian deep-sea oil extraction in the Hibernia and Hebron oil fields off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Presumably there are Canadians, not just at Chevron but also at Exxon Mobil, Imperial Oil and Esso, who are experts at deep-sea heavy crude extraction, but the sanctions remain in place.

What is the Canadian government doing to ensure that we have an opportunity to be involved in rebuilding the Venezuelan oil sector, while at the same time making sure that people are not contravening the sanctions regime that has been put in place? Maybe you could talk a bit about what's going on there.

● (1645)

**Wendy Drukier:** I can give a few responses. They may be partial, as I'm not an expert on the oil sector either.

The sanctions that Canada has on Venezuela are on individuals within the regime. If any Canadian or Canadian company would like to operate or would operate in Venezuela, there would not be a sanction on the oil sector per se. There are U.S. sanctions on the sector, and they provide licences for certain companies to become involved. For the moment, they have only provided those licences to U.S. companies, although that may change.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** What if there are Canadians, for example, working at Chevron or Exxon Mobil here in Canada or Imperial Oil who are being asked to go down there to work and communicate with the office of Delcy Rodriguez, who is under sanction? How does that all work? How do we ensure that Canadians aren't going to be captured by the Government of Canada's sanctions regime, while at the same time ensuring that you're fulfilling the Prime Minister's commitment that Canada become an energy superpower, particularly an oil and gas superpower?

**Wendy Drukier:** For specific details on how to ensure that companies or individuals are not violating sanctions, our advice would always be for them to consult legally and consult the department.

I'm not the expert on exactly how that works. I do know that these individuals are sanctioned, which means that no Canadians can benefit economically from their relationship with them. There are certain rules in place about bank accounts and so on, but it's—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Is the involvement of Canadian oil and gas expertise a consideration in the government's path to the normalization of relations, including the lifting of sanctions?

**Wendy Drukier:** Unfortunately, I'm not sure I can answer that question adequately, not being a sanctions expert.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will conclude by thanking both witnesses for their appearance and testimony before the committee.

I will now suspend the meeting to go in camera to deal with a few items. We are ahead of schedule, so it should be good. Thank you.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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