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• (1105)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 29 of the Standing Committee on International Trade.

Before we go to our witnesses, we have an administrative item. We are hosting the Swiss Speaker, I believe, in a few weeks' time, and we would like agreement to cover the hospitality expenses.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 12, 2026, the committee is resuming its study of Canada's trade with Mercosur countries.

We have with us today, from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Mr. Evan Lewis; from the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Axel Ndayisaba; and from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we again have with us Mr. Aaron Fowler, and also Ms. Justine Smith.

Welcome to the committee.

I understand that there are two opening statements.

Mr. Fowler, I'll invite you to make the first statement.

Aaron Fowler (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, International Trade Branch and Chief Trade Negotiator, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-Chair. Good morning to you and to the other members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear again and to address you on this important topic.

As you know, I'm the associate ADM for international trade at Global Affairs Canada and chief trade negotiator. I am here today primarily in my capacity as the chief negotiator for the Canada-Mercosur FTA.

Mr. Vice-Chair, I'm pleased to be here to talk to you about strengthening and diversifying Canada's trade relations with the Mercosur countries.

[*Translation*]

Last fall, the Prime Minister launched a new trade diversification strategy with the goal of doubling Canada's non-U.S. exports over

the next decade. The case for diversifying Canada's trade has never been clearer.

In the context of trade diversification, Mercosur is an important partner. Together, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay have a combined GDP of more than \$4 trillion Canadian and represent a market of over 270 million people.

[*English*]

The government is strengthening trade and investment ties with this high-potential market. This includes expanding critical minerals collaboration with Argentina and Brazil and leveraging the trade commissioner service to identify opportunities in priority sectors such as agriculture, mining and clean technology.

The committee will recall that trade negotiations between Canada and Mercosur first began in 2018 and were later paused with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the fall of 2025, in the context of trade diversification, Minister Sidhu and his Brazilian counterpart announced the resumption of negotiations towards a Canada-Mercosur FTA that would secure commercial opportunities by establishing preferential market access, along with predictable rules for Canadian businesses.

Shortly thereafter, at the G20 leaders summit in South Africa, Prime Minister Carney and Brazilian President Lula agreed to intensify those negotiations. Negotiations have now resumed and are proceeding expeditiously, with the objective of concluding negotiations on a commercially meaningful agreement as quickly as possible and ideally sometime this year.

Most recently, negotiators held a round of negotiations in Brasilia at the end of February and will hold another round at the end of April. Technically, that round at the end of February was the eighth round of negotiations, but it was the first round held in over six years. The next round will be officially the ninth round.

A set of public consultations was held from December to January to supplement consultations carried out earlier in the process. Through that, Canadian stakeholders have indicated that a Canada-Mercosur FTA could unlock opportunities in important sectors, including agriculture and agri-food, industrial machinery, pharmaceuticals and plastics. Stakeholders have also indicated the potential to create important opportunities for Canadian service exporters, for example, environmental and engineering services.

[Translation]

As negotiations advance, the government is committed to working closely with all interested stakeholders with the goal of creating real opportunities for Canadian workers and businesses, strengthening supply chains, expanding access to diverse and reliable markets and making life more affordable for Canadians.

[English]

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you, Mr. Fowler.

Mr. Lewis, you have the floor for five minutes.

Evan Lewis (Senior Director, Market Access Secretariat, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you very much.

Mr. Vice-Chair and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

My name is Evan Lewis. I'm the senior director in the market access secretariat.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible for leading the negotiations of obligations on sanitary and phytosanitary measures alongside officials from Global Affairs Canada in free trade agreements. We do so in close collaboration with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, including Canada's chief agriculture negotiator.

SPS measures, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, are the requirements that are applied by a country to goods in international trade for the protection of food safety, animal health and plant health. SPS measures can take many forms, such as requiring products to come from a pest-free or disease-free area and inspecting products to verify that they meet Canada's food safety requirements.

[Translation]

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is also responsible for administering the Government of Canada's Health of Animals Act and the Health of Animals Regulations, which govern the control of animal diseases and toxic substances. These requirements stipulate that animal health import requirements must be based on the scientific evidence of the risk of that import, which is determined by the animal disease status of the originated country or the method of processing to mitigate disease risks.

• (1110)

[English]

Similarly, under the Safe Food for Canadians Act, Canada's strict food safety requirements prohibit the import of unsafe food. Imports of meat must adhere to both Canada's food safety and animal health requirements. These strong animal health and food safety requirements apply within Canada as well. This enables Canadian exporters to compete on the global stage, offering high-quality and safe meat products to customers around the world.

I want to emphasize that none of Canada's free trade agreements compromise the right of the Government of Canada to take the SPS measures necessary for the protection of food safety, animal health

and plant health. Simply stated, Canada's trade obligations do not diminish the strength of Canada's food safety, animal health and plant health requirements for imported goods.

Canada's trade obligations on sanitary and phytosanitary measures require that the Government of Canada apply its SPS measures in a fair manner that does not discriminate between imported and domestic goods or between imported goods from different countries. These trade obligations also require Canada to apply SPS measures in a manner that is transparent, to base SPS measures on scientific risk, and to take SPS measures that are the least trade-restrictive as possible while achieving Canada's appropriate level of protection.

Lastly, Canada's FTA has established co-operation mechanisms for regulators to address and avoid unnecessary trade impediments.

This concludes my opening remarks. I'd be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you, Mr. Lewis.

I will remind committee members that our first round is six minutes.

I'll start with Mr. Mantle.

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for their testimony.

Mr. Fowler, you mentioned a February negotiating round with Mercosur. Could you briefly tell us the top highlights from that round of discussions?

Aaron Fowler: I'll do my very best.

It was the first round that we held in more than six years, as I indicated. I wouldn't normally get into negotiating dynamics in detail in a forum like this, but I think it's reasonable to say that in the six years since we had last met with Mercosur, there have been important developments, both in industrial and trade policy in Canada and in the Mercosur members; evolutions in terms of how we approach negotiations; and examples and precedents established through the conclusion of agreements that weren't in place when we were last at the negotiating table. We spent a lot of time at the last round going through what had already been discussed and what had already been agreed, and determining whether any of those developments in Canada or in Mercosur partners required us to go back and take another look at texts that may have already been agreed on or proposed by one of the partners earlier in the negotiations.

I would describe this as sort of a level-setting round in many respects, which isn't to say that we didn't achieve substantive progress at the negotiating table. However, I think there was enough underbrush that had grown up that needed to be cleared away that it was a very good use of our time.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you.

Could give me one top issue that needs to be worked out that arose during this? What was the top concern that the Mercosur countries raised with Canada?

Aaron Fowler: I don't think I would characterize it as a raising of concerns. We have interests, obviously, in Mercosur, and we made sure to communicate those clearly. They have interests they want to see addressed in Canada: Those were communicated to us. They have recently concluded important free trade agreements, including with the European Union. Argentina concluded a bilateral agreement with the United States.

We took advantage of the opportunity to ensure that we understood those outcomes, and to stress what the forward path would look like in terms of critical milestones, like exchanging tariff offers, services offers, improvements and scheduling future rounds. There were a lot of logistical—

Jacob Mantle: You mentioned issues, or interests, as you said. Could you just tell me one or two of the interests that they identified for you?

Aaron Fowler: We had detailed discussions about market access for merchandise products and agriculture services, how we would protect investment. They have—

Jacob Mantle: That's everything.

Aaron Fowler: Well, it is a comprehensive free trade agreement, so, yes, we had multiple tables meeting.

Jacob Mantle: You mentioned a public consultation that took place. Would you be willing to provide the committee with copies of those submissions?

Aaron Fowler: I would be happy to summarize them. In fact, I could give you an overview now if it would be of interest to you.

• (1115)

Jacob Mantle: I'd prefer a written overview, if you could. I have limited time.

Aaron Fowler: I understand.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you.

Mr. Lewis, and maybe Mr. Fowler wants to add to this as well, we've heard from several agricultural witnesses at this committee who have raised SPS concerns about the Mercosur countries. In particular, the Canadian Cattle Association essentially said that Mercosur's animal health standards are not sufficient for food safety.

Do you agree with that assessment, or do you take a different view? Could you give us your response to some of these concerns, and assure us that food coming into Canada will be safe?

Evan Lewis: I'm happy to take that question. Thank you.

None of our free trade agreements impact or impede the ability and, in fact, the obligation of the CFIA to make sure that imported

food and other products meet Canada's stringent requirements. Canada assesses the ability of our trading partners to meet those requirements, based on a thorough assessment of the facts and the science at hand. Our current approvals for import of products from Mercosur countries reflect that, and they will continue to reflect a sound assessment of science moving forward.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you.

I have about a minute and a half left. Mr. Fowler, maybe you'd want to give me, in 30 seconds or in a written response.... While I have you, I'd like to ask about Ukraine and an update on Canada's trade with Ukraine. We just passed the anniversary of the invasion. Can you give us a brief update?

Aaron Fowler: I will give you a brief update now, and I'm happy to supplement this after.

As you know, in July 2024 the modernized Canada-Ukraine FTA entered into force. The key features of that agreement were to maintain the terms of market access, particularly for goods that were contained in the initial 2017 agreement between the two countries. The modernized agreement upgrades commitments in the investment chapter with respect to services trade, temporary entry of business people, and financial services. Digital trade introduces chapters on trade and gender and trade and indigenous peoples.

The impact on bilateral trade up to this point is very difficult to distinguish because, of course, commercial relations with Ukraine are heavily impacted by the ongoing conflict and Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. The new services and investment provisions in particular have been difficult to assess in light of that situation. We will certainly be well situated to engage with Ukraine following the conflict, including for reconstruction.

We'd be happy to provide periodic updates to the committee in respect of that relationship.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you, Mr. Fowler.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lavoie, you have the floor for six minutes.

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank the witnesses for travelling to be with us today.

My first question is for you, Mr. Fowler. Please excuse me, but I'm going to provide some background before asking my question.

As part of the study on Canada's trade relations with the Mercosur countries, we heard from people in the chicken and beef industries, who shared their concerns with us, and they are entirely legitimate. During a discussion with Ms. Citeau, vice-president of the Canadian Meat Council responsible for international trade, she told me that there were agreements with Asian countries and that she wanted to focus more on that market, but that there had been nearly 25% growth in Mexico. That surprised me.

Why has there been such significant growth in Mexico, while it's more difficult with Mercosur? Her answer was very interesting. She spoke of a free trade agreement built on 20 to 25 years of trade that is now, inevitably, yielding results.

So here's my question to you: Whether it's for chicken farmers or other meat producers who are concerned today, could this trade agreement, although it may be threatening in the short term, be beneficial in the medium or long term, just like the agreement with Mexico, which seems to be bearing fruit and generating significant growth 20 or 25 years later?

• (1120)

Aaron Fowler: Thank you very much for the question.

I agree. We're well aware of the concerns expressed by Canadian industries, especially the farming sector, regarding a potential agreement with the Mercosur countries. We're taking that into account at the negotiating table. Obviously, these are sectors of interest to the Mercosur countries in terms of exports, and this is something we have to manage during our negotiations.

With respect to the agreements that have been in place for a number of years, that's the case with our agreement with Mexico. We've had a trilateral agreement with the United States and Mexico since 1994. Our relations with Mexico are therefore much more advanced than our relations with the Mercosur countries, with whom we've never had an agreement like the one we're currently negotiating.

Our statistics show that, for bilateral agreements between Canada and its partners, we typically see an increase of over 100% in goods exported to the other country in the first 10 years after an agreement comes into force, compared to about 50% for countries with whom we don't have a free trade agreement.

We know that the agreement we're currently negotiating fundamentally changes the nature of our trade relationships. That's why it's so important to make sure that all interests, including those related to the farming sector's concerns that you mentioned, are addressed in a way that's acceptable to everyone.

Steeve Lavoie: Thank you, Mr. Fowler.

Mr. Ndayisaba, I didn't hear from you, since you didn't speak. I'd like to hear your comments on the agreement.

Axel Ndayisaba (Director, Trade Negotiations Division, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Yes, of course.

I'd like to start by explaining Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's role at the negotiating table.

Together with Global Affairs Canada and our colleagues at Finance, we're working to negotiate tariffs and rules of origin. In this

context, we're promoting the interests of the agricultural sector, not only for export-oriented sectors, but also for sensitive sectors, such as those subject to supply management.

We hold fairly regular consultations with businesses and exporters. Mercosur is a highly protected market. There are many tariffs and non-tariff measures. We have, of course, heard concerns related to meat, such as chicken, pork and beef, but there are also opportunities for certain sectors, such as grains and cereals. For example, there are opportunities to export wheat to Brazil. It's a market where a lot of wheat is consumed to make bread and other products. The same is true for legumes, processed products and dog and cat food. These are significant opportunities.

Right now, we have a fairly big trade deficit with Mercosur. We import a lot of sugar, coffee and orange juice. There are therefore opportunities to address this trade deficit, while of course protecting our defensive interests. We're well positioned at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to work closely with Global Affairs to ensure that the agreement is sufficiently balanced.

Steeve Lavoie: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): You're right on time, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have the floor for six minutes.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot—Acton, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us. I also thank them for their presentations.

Mr. Lewis, first of all, can you tell us how often the Canadian Food Inspection Agency conducts audits in Mercosur countries?

Evan Lewis: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

I do not have the specific information before me. I'm happy to follow up separately with that information.

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Do you have anything else to tell us about the audits the agency conducts in Mercosur countries?

• (1125)

Evan Lewis: I'm sorry, but I'm going to speak in English to express myself more clearly.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: No problem, we have interpretation.

[English]

Evan Lewis: We carry out audits to establish access, or terms for that access, for our trading partners. The countries of Mercosur have various types of access to the Canadian market, depending on the country and the product. That existing access is based on a thorough assessment of those systems, such as the limited pork access from Brazil to Canada.

In order to expand that access, the CFIA would need to conduct additional audits and assessments. There's currently no timeline to conduct such audits for expanded, new access. That's what I'm able to say for sure.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Are there documented cases of exports from Mercosur—which would therefore be imports from our perspective—that have been rejected or intercepted at the border for non-compliance with health requirements?

[English]

Evan Lewis: It's normal to have notices of non-compliance in a perfectly healthy trading relationship. I would be happy to find the number of recent notices of non-compliance with respect to trade with those partners. For context, I would indicate that a number greater than zero may or may not be an indication of a systemic problem.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: So you don't know whether or not the number is greater than zero right now.

[English]

Evan Lewis: I don't have the numbers before me at the moment, but I'd be happy to find them.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: You don't know if there are any either.

Is that correct?

[English]

Evan Lewis: I'm sorry. I don't have that information with me.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Without that information and the other indications, I don't know if you're going to be able to answer my next question.

Does the agency have the staff, funding and resources needed to ensure that controls are in place?

[English]

Evan Lewis: Ensuring the safety of the Canadian food supply, including imported and domestically produced product, is the top priority of the agency. I'm not able to comment on any recent changes to the resource allocation. We can certainly seek to provide information on resources and budgetary matters of the agency separately, if that's the wish of the committee.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: There are human resources too, in addition to budgetary resources. It's a matter of knowing whether we have what we need to maintain inspections, knowing that, in the event of an agreement with Mercosur, the volume would be considerably higher than it is currently. We also know that Brazil is the largest agricultural exporter in all respects.

[English]

Evan Lewis: The allocation of our resources is based very much on risks and how best to protect Canadians against real, scientifically established risks to food safety, animal health and plant health.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: For example, have the risks associated with the use of pesticides that would be banned here but are allowed in Mercosur countries been assessed to date?

[English]

Evan Lewis: There is monitoring for specific issues, such as pesticides or other contaminants across the board, that's applied equally and impartially between domestic and imported products, as well as imported products from different sources.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Now, let's talk about beef produced in Brazil.

In September 2024, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency authorized the import of beef produced in Brazil from regions free of foot-and-mouth disease without vaccination.

What mechanisms have you put in place in concrete terms to ensure the reliability of monitoring systems in those regions?

[English]

Evan Lewis: We are vigilant against risks from various animal diseases, including foot-and-mouth disease. In that particular case, we looked carefully at the products and the risks of those products. In this case, we were focused on pH matured beef, which has a different risk profile than some other products.

● (1130)

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: How do you conduct those assessments?

[English]

Evan Lewis: It's an assessment based on the scientific literature of the products, and pH matured beef has a different risk profile than others. When needed, we conduct on-site audits, as well as virtual audits.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: However, you can't tell me how many audits are done in those countries and how many imports have been rejected at the border. That's what you told me earlier.

[English]

Evan Lewis: I don't have the information on non-compliance in front of me, but I'm happy to dig into that.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: We'll look forward to receiving that information.

Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Mr. McKenzie, you have five minutes, please.

David McKenzie (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to pick up where my colleague has left off.

I'm looking at a summary of an audit of Colombia's meat inspection system. A number of deficiencies were identified. I wonder if you're aware of that study, that audit and those deficiencies. If you're not, I can quote some of this for you.

Evan Lewis: Thanks.

I'm not aware of the details. I could speak in general terms about audits, but I'd be happy to hear it.

David McKenzie: That's exactly where I want to go.

I would like you to try and explain to us at a real grassroots level exactly what happens in the CFIA process. You're obviously here today. You're not out on the dock inspecting shipments, which is fair enough, as others within CFIA have that responsibility.

Exactly what may have happened when an audit took place in Colombia as a foreign country?

Evan Lewis: In a practical sense, our auditors are trained and experienced in inspecting foreign systems. They perform a desk review of all available information. We provide questionnaires to the foreign competent authority to obtain any information that's not readily available to us but is necessary for our assessment. We travel to the country. Of course, the specifics depend on the nature of the audit. We visit establishments and other sites as needed. It is not at all unusual to find some areas of concern in any audit that happens, including with any trading partner.

David McKenzie: What would be your process to try to address deficiencies or concerns, such as a non-equivalency between a Canadian processor and a foreign processor? What happens then?

Evan Lewis: It's done through dialogue between the regulators, primarily. The report is an important reference point for that. There is always a process of dialogue to explain and elaborate on the nature of those concerns and to discuss means to address those concerns.

David McKenzie: What's our ability to follow up? When it comes to actual inspections.... We're on the dock in Canada and the shipments arrive from a foreign country where we've identified some concerns. What percentage of shipments coming into Canada would the CFIA have the capacity to inspect?

Evan Lewis: The actual inspections are performed by our colleagues at the CBSA in border services. The import check frequency is adjusted based on the risk models that are in place.

However, before we get to that point, through that dialogue between competent authorities, there's the opportunity to adjust the certification requirements as needed, to adjust the equivalency, if that's in place already, to delist establishments or to cease recognition of equivalency of certain measures. Those things can all be adjusted, as well, depending on the nature of what's found.

David McKenzie: Thank you.

Mr. Ndayisaba, I think you mentioned ongoing conversations with producers in the agricultural sector. Can you speak to any concerns that have been identified by domestic Canadian producers with respect to increasing or opening up trade with Mercosur countries?

Axel Ndayisaba: As I mentioned, we have not only regular consultations as part of the public consultation process that Global Affairs leads, but regular engagement through various mechanisms within our department. With those national organizations and industry groups, we have non-disclosure agreements whereby we can talk about details of the negotiations and their concerns.

What we've heard so far is concerns from the meat sector about competition coming from Brazil, Argentina and some of the other countries in the Mercosur bloc, as well as from our sectors on supply management. They're quite worried about any additional access that may be provided. We have also heard from other sectors that are interested in export opportunities.

Generally speaking, the ideas we hear most from the sectors are that there are opportunities in Mercosur, but the priority should be in other, fast-growing markets in Southeast Asia, and that the renewal of CUSMA should be top of mind.

• (1135)

David McKenzie: A greater priority.

If I can interrupt you, have you heard concerns about increased imports from other countries that may affect our trade relationship with the United States?

Axel Ndayisaba: Yes, we've heard concerns from the beef sector with respect to any potential increase in imports from the Mercosur countries. We've tried to reassure the sector that there are very strong rules of origin within the Canada-U.S.-Mexico agreement that prevent any potential leakage. There are also restrictions on the sanitary side that prevent that from happening.

We have continued engagement with the sector to better understand its concerns. Obviously, it is heavily reliant on the U.S. market, and we want to make sure that we protect its interests.

David McKenzie: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you very much.

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

Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, distinguished witnesses. It's always interesting to hear your perspective and experience in connection with all these negotiations.

Mr. Fowler, my colleague Mr. Mantle asked you a question earlier about the highlights. He asked you where things stood. You said that there hadn't been a round of negotiations for six years.

Were you there six years ago during those negotiations?

Aaron Fowler: Thank you for the question.

No, I wasn't involved in those negotiations. There was another chief negotiator for Canada.

Linda Lapointe: Actually, I was thinking that if you had been there, you would have been able to see whether they had changed their attitude toward opening up markets by signing this agreement.

Have they changed their attitude toward Canada and decided to ensure that the agreement is concluded as quickly as possible?

Aaron Fowler: Thank you for the question.

I don't think their attitude toward Canada has necessarily changed. It has always been a market of interest. We're fairly strong partners in other contexts, at the World Trade Organization, for example. We have extensive trade relations.

What has changed is the necessity. The global context has changed a lot in the past six years. Getting deals like this done is more important to them, just as it's more important to Canada. There are also new approaches that were not part of the negotiations before, but are now possible. This is also the case for Canada, which has more innovative and flexible approaches than before.

Linda Lapointe: Both the Mercosur countries and Canada are therefore more open to the idea of negotiating and moving things forward.

Mr. Ndayisaba, you said that we had a trade deficit, but that we buy a lot of sugar and coffee.

Axel Ndayisaba: It's sugar, coffee, orange juice and soybean oil.

Linda Lapointe: You said that there are opportunities for Canada when it comes to wheat. I know we have significant capacity here in Canada.

Do you think our trade agreement with the Mercosur countries could really enable us to export this product to those countries?

Axel Ndayisaba: We already have access to Brazil. We export about 100 million dollars' worth of wheat to Brazil. We're currently limited by the tariffs from Mercosur countries, which reach higher than 10%. By eliminating those tariffs and dealing with some of the non-tariff measures, we could open up the market on a larger scale.

• (1140)

Linda Lapointe: Who are our competitors in the wheat market in the Mercosur countries right now?

Axel Ndayisaba: There's already a major producer and exporter in Mercosur, namely Argentina. However, there are other wheat-exporting countries that have the capacity to do it. Those are obviously countries like Ukraine or other major wheat exporters.

Of course, in Canada, we have a high-quality product that many countries are looking for. It stands out quite well, and there's a lot of demand for that wheat.

Linda Lapointe: Mr. Lewis, there was talk earlier about health risks, particularly when it comes to poultry and beef. The committee touched on that. I'm also thinking of avian flu and mad cow disease—that must be the special fever.

Are there any other things to be wary of regarding products from those countries and the livestock practices there, from a health standpoint?

Could those products transmit diseases?

[English]

Evan Lewis: Thank you very much for the question.

The assessments undertaken by the CFIA review the full suite of foreign animal diseases that are set out in Canadian regulation and legislation. The animal health diseases of the countries are closely monitored and recognized by the World Organisation for Animal Health. That's an important reference point for us. We also need to undertake our own assessments of the presence and controls of those diseases.

Among some of the diseases that are relevant in the case of Brazil, as an example, foot-and-mouth disease is an important consideration. They've recently received enhanced status under the World Organisation for Animal Health with respect to their controls on foot-and-mouth disease. We would need to—

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): I'll have to ask you to wrap up.

Evan Lewis: Okay.

That's one example.

[Translation]

Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you.

Monsieur Savard-Tremblay.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Ms. Smith and Mr. Fowler, since last year, the law has forbidden negotiators from breaching the supply management system. As we know, as we have said and are repeating, Brazil is the main exporter, particularly for chicken.

No breaches and no future concessions, is that still your position? Can you solemnly tell us this while looking into the camera today?

Aaron Fowler: Thank you again for the question.

Bill C-202 was pretty clear about that. Negotiators aren't allowed to open up access to other countries for products that are part of the supply management system. They also don't have the right to reduce the applicable tariff when it's in excess of the tariff rate quota or to increase the tariff rate quota for those products. This legislation is pretty clear. We have clearly explained to our partners in Mercosur countries what is and isn't possible in this area.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: That's fine.

I'd be curious to know what they asked for in return. If they lose that big piece, they have to wonder what they can get.

Canada imports four times more goods from Mercosur countries than it exports to them.

At the end of the day, is this agreement likely to increase the trade deficit?

Aaron Fowler: Yes, it is. We currently import many more goods from these four countries than we export to them. That's because Canada is a market that's much more open to international trade than our partners in the four Mercosur countries. That means Canada is in a better position to benefit from tariff reductions and the opening of services and investment markets than our partners in Mercosur countries, simply because our market is already essentially open in most sectors.

We did a preliminary assessment of this agreement's economic impact, and we estimated that exports to Mercosur countries could increase by about 37%, which represents at least \$2.4 billion. Mercosur would see an increase of about 3% to 5%, which represents \$300 million.

● (1145)

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: You say that our market is already open. If I understand your logic correctly, we have virtually nothing to offer the Mercosur countries in that regard, so I'm wondering how you're negotiating.

If you say that we have everything to gain, that the Mercosur countries are going to open their market and that our market is already open, what are they asking of you at the end of the day?

If they don't gain anything from it, they will end up not signing the agreement.

What are your thoughts on that?

Aaron Fowler: I am pleased to be the one who is currently dealing with our partners to tell them about the many benefits that will result from a comprehensive trade agreement with Canada. Our market is more open today than the markets of the four Mercosur countries, but there are still parts of our economy that are protected or more difficult to access, where the rules are a bit more complicated and where the protection currently offered isn't necessarily aligned with the main interests of the Mercosur countries.

There are many things we need to discuss with them. There's no doubt that there are benefits for our partners. When it comes to exports of goods and commodities, the reality is that the average tariff rate to access these markets is currently much higher than the rate for accessing the Canadian market.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: You're telling us that there are benefits for them as well and that you're the one explaining them to the Mercosur countries. Can you explain them to us as well?

Aaron Fowler: We still have tariffs in Canada. That isn't just in supply-managed sectors. The partner countries with whom we already have free trade agreements can normally access those sectors without paying tariffs. Mercosur countries would like to compete with those other countries in the Canadian market on equivalent terms. Even if it's a fairly low tariff, ranging from 5% to 10%, for example, that isn't a problem for Canadian consumers, but it completely changes the situation for a Brazilian company trying to compete with a European or American company that doesn't have to pay it.

We also have the capacity to offer our partners quite high protection in terms of investment, services and intellectual property during the negotiation of free trade agreements. Those are things that aren't normally offered to these partners.

In short, there are many benefits for them, even if the benefits are a little different from the ones we get.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Bezan, followed by Mr. Fonseca, will round out our questions for this panel.

James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today.

As an old cattle producer myself, I had an office in southern Brazil in Porto Alegre many years ago, before politics and before BSE.

Mr. Lewis, knowing the impact of how animal health situations can devastate an industry, and knowing that foot-and-mouth disease exists in Brazil and in the Mercosur, what safeguards do you have in place to ensure that doesn't come back and haunt us here in Canada?

Evan Lewis: I will say that it starts with very rigorous science-based and evidence-based assessments prior to authorization of products, regions and establishments wishing to gain access to export to Canada. There is ongoing monitoring of non-compliance, as we touched on before. As patterns in that monitoring emerge, appropriate steps are taken between regulators.

● (1150)

James Bezan: Do you have confidence in the animal health protocols in place in the member nations of Mercosur?

Evan Lewis: For the products and regions and establishments that are approved, yes. We do not currently have an open door to all products, regions and establishments in the market. That's largely in part due to the need to carefully assess the animal health and other sanitary controls in place.

James Bezan: As we witness the food inflation that's happening in Canada and around the world, the U.S. has started importing Uruguayan beef to drive down the price of beef in the United States, much to the chagrin of U.S. ranchers and cattle feeders.

Are we concerned that the Mercosur region, especially Uruguay and Argentina as low-cost producers, will exploit the opportunity to move beef and other animal products, as well as wheat, canola and other agriculture commodities, into our market to undercut Canadian farmers?

Evan Lewis: The competitiveness angle is not front and centre for the agency.

Aaron, I don't know if you or Axel would like to speak to that.

Aaron Fowler: I'll take the question in the first instance and then see if my colleague Axel wants to add to it.

Yes, these are very efficient producers of a lot of agricultural products. They're competitors for Canada across a wide range of agricultural sectors, mostly in third markets around the world where we're both exporting. I think we are aware of how competitive these countries are in some of these sectors, and we're approaching the negotiations with a good understanding of that.

The reality is that we are importing these products from these countries already, as is the United States. If anything, the volume of importation from these countries has already increased in recent years, even in the absence of a free trade—

James Bezan: On manufacturing beef, for example, we need more hamburger. More manufacturing product is coming in, but it is a lower-quality product than what we produce here.

Let's look at history, though. Mercosur has signed other FTAs with other jurisdictions. Have you studied those to see whether or not there was a legitimate benefit for those countries that have signed FTAs with the Mercosur region?

Aaron Fowler: We always look very closely at the free trade agreements that the countries we're negotiating with have concluded with other countries around the world to get a sense of what they see as a reasonable landing zone, what they seek to achieve in their FTAs and to get inspiration for how we might approach issues.

James Bezan: In your analysis of that, which ones are you looking at and saying it worked, but for this other country it might not have?

Aaron Fowler: I would say that the free trade agreements they have that are most relevant to us are still relatively new. They've concluded with the European Union and they've concluded with the EFTA states, but these are not fully implemented yet. In terms of the opportunity to assess the impact, we just don't have enough data there yet. They don't have—

James Bezan: Mercosur has been around for 30 or 40 years. Why is it only now that they're starting to look at having FTAs with other jurisdictions?

Aaron Fowler: I would have to speculate. I don't speak on behalf of Mercosur. Those countries speak for themselves.

James Bezan: You're talking to those guys, though.

Aaron Fowler: Like us, I think they've realized that trade liberalization and diversification are essential components of economic

security and stability, particularly in an era when the international trading regime is volatile and unpredictable. They have redoubled their efforts to secure their access to important markets around the world, just as we are doing and many countries are doing right now.

James Bezan: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Mr. Fonseca.

Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To continue on that line of questioning, how important is Mercosur to our diversification strategy?

Aaron Fowler: It's important. Everybody we negotiate with is important, but these are markets that represent a bit of a gap in our coverage, particularly in this hemisphere. We have a very extensive network of free trade agreements throughout the Americas. Mercosur has been, I think, a clear hole in that coverage up until this point. It informed the decision to launch these negotiations back in 2017-18.

Look, it's a population of over a quarter of a billion. It is an economy of \$4 trillion. These are mature markets, in many respects. They're growing markets. They are a significant opportunity. I think they offer the possibility of meaningfully moving the needle in terms of the government's objectives to double non-U.S. trade in the next decade. I see it as one of a series of very important initiatives that we're negotiating right now.

• (1155)

Peter Fonseca: In your negotiations, I'm sure you've been informed about what has happened, as MP Bezan mentioned, with the agreement between Europe and Mercosur. How has that worked its way into your negotiations?

Aaron Fowler: We have been watching that negotiation unfold for a very long time. There has been almost 20 years of active negotiations between Mercosur and the European Union and more than one conclusion before the most recent one, which I think is going to actually form the basis of an agreement that will be implemented.

We, I think, have a broad understanding of what the core provisions of that agreement are. Our understanding is that, effectively, it's going to enter into force on May 1 on an interim basis, much as our agreement with the European Union does. It provides pretty useful insight into the precedent that Mercosur has set on some of the issues we've been talking about today and how we might want to approach them. We take those outcomes into consideration in advancing our own negotiations, and we're confident we can secure an outcome with Mercosur that will provide Canadian companies with at least as much opportunity as their European competitors are offered in those markets, if we move quickly, and that's what we're trying to do.

Peter Fonseca: I would say the main stakeholder that's come before our committee with some concerns is the beef industry. They produce, I think it's about 1.3 million tonnes or so a year, and that has been pretty steady. There hasn't been a lot of increase to that 1.3 million tonnes. They mentioned they export 50% and 50% stays here domestically.

Mr. Ndayisaba, I don't know if you would be able to answer this, but in terms of the diversification of that particular sector, and looking at Mercosur and other markets that we've opened up, like Indonesia, what are your thoughts on that sector? How would you inform them?

Axel Ndayisaba: As you mentioned, the cattle sector, the beef sector in Canada is heavily export-oriented. They export about \$5.3 billion as of last year, and 75% of that goes to the United States, but we also have access in Japan, South Korea and Vietnam. We continue to see growth in that region, the Asian market.

Recently, as you mentioned, we opened up Indonesia. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency and our minister were successful in resolving one of the non-tariff issues that were still outstanding. The introduction of the Canada-Indonesia CEPA will open up further access through the removal of tariffs. With China, we recently opened up the non-tariff barriers.

I see opportunities for the sector to continue to grow. There are capacity issues right now given the size of the herd, but we see those issues potentially coming together and being resolved and the sector continuing to grow over time.

Peter Fonseca: That is as far as exports are concerned, but the production of beef here hasn't really grown much over the last number of years. It has pretty much stayed the same, so they'll still continue to export around the world. Mercosur would be another market. You mentioned the U.S. and Argentina. Was that to address the fact that consumer prices for beef had gone up significantly at grocery stores?

Axel Ndayisaba: Yes. As you mentioned, there are issues with production in Canada. We have the smallest herd because of a number of issues that have happened over the last couple of years. I think the industry is working to rebuild that herd. It takes time to rebuild capacity, and we're trying to support them as much as we can. Obviously, that opens up opportunities for imports, so we're seeing more imports coming in from Mercosur and other countries as well.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you very much. That concludes our rounds of questioning.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Given that the witnesses have already told us that they will be sending figures and briefing materials to the committee, could we also ask them for an update on access to the beef sector under the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement?

• (1200)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Mr. Fowler, would it be possible to include that in your response?

Aaron Fowler: I think that data is readily available. We'll work with our colleagues at AAFC to ensure that the committee gets it promptly.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Many thanks.

Thank you for your testimony and your appearance here today.

We'll suspend before we go to our next panel.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): I call this meeting back to order. Welcome to our guests.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 12, 2026, the committee is resuming its study of Canada's trade with North and West Africa.

We have with us today, from the Canada-Arab Business Council, Mohamad Sawwaf, the chair of the board.

It's nice to meet you.

From ONE Campaign, we have Anthony Salloum, associate director of Canada and government relations. Anthony is known to many folks in this room as a member of one of the lobbies.

Welcome back to the House of Commons, sir.

We have time for opening remarks of five minutes each.

Mr. Sawwaf, I'll give you the floor. You'll have five minutes. When you're getting close to the end of your time, I'll catch your eye, but you have five minutes to make your opening statement.

Mohamad Sawwaf (Chair of the Board, Canada-Arab Business Council): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Distinguished members of the committee, good afternoon.

I am Dr. Mohamad Sawwaf. I appear before you as chair of the Canada-Arab Business Council, the CABC, an organization that for over 40 years has served as Canada's principal institutional bridge between the Canada business community and the Arab world, spanning the Gulf, the Levant and North Africa. I am honoured to contribute to this study, and I will be direct: The moment before this committee is more consequential than it may appear.

The African continental free trade area now counts 54 of 55 African Union members as signatories. It is creating the world's largest free trade zone by membership, and the rules, standards and institutional relationships that will govern market access across this continent are being established today, right now. Early mover nations will shape those rules. Latecomers will negotiate entry on terms set by others.

Canada has been a latecomer. This study is an opportunity to change that. We are not without assets. In fact, Canada holds three strategic advantages that few competitor nations can claim.

First and foremost is our diaspora. Over 750,000 Canadians of Arab origin and a significant African Canadian community carry language, cultural fluency, networks and market intelligence that no trade mission can replicate. These are not just cultural assets. They are commercial ones and we have never fully mobilized them.

Second is the Francophonie. Fourteen of 15 ECOWAS member states are francophone. Canada's bilingual identity is a genuine commercial differentiator in West Africa, one that anglophone competitors simply cannot match. Our membership in the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie gives us a multilateral platform that we are not using fully.

Third is sector alignment. Canada's strengths in clean technology, agri-food, Islamic and inclusive finance, mining governance and higher education correspond directly with the region's most urgent development priorities.

This alignment is not incidental. It is strategic, yet Canadian businesses, especially SMEs, face real obstacles. Export financing through EDC and BDC remains effectively inaccessible for many companies seeking African markets. Risk perception outpaces actual risk.

Non-tariff barriers and regulatory misalignment impose disproportionate costs on smaller exporters, and our trade commissioner footprint across North and West Africa is thin, significantly thinner than that of peer nations. This presence signals commitment. Without it, trust does not form and, without trust, trade does not follow.

Our commitment at the CABC contains a detailed analysis and supporting data, and I'll distill our recommendations further.

We would like to develop a Canada-Africa trade and investment strategy with a specific chapter for North and West Africa, having measurable targets and formal engagement frameworks with the AfCFTA secretariat and ECOWAS.

We should also modernize SME access to export financing through a dedicated blended finance facility for Canadian companies entering African markets, co-designed with the African Development Bank and modelled on comparable instruments deployed by the U.K. as well as the United States.

Last is the establishing of a formal diaspora trade diplomacy program, deploying Arab Canadian, African Canadian and francophone diaspora professionals as market advisers, trade envoys and investment connectors integrated within the trade commissioner service.

North and West Africa do not need Canada's charity. They need Canada's partnership on equal terms with long-term commitment and with the sophistication to match the ambition of a continent being built in real time. The Canada-Arab Business Council is ready to be a constructive partner in that work.

I welcome your questions and thank you sincerely for the privilege of appearing before you today.

• (1210)

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you, sir.

Mr. Salloum, you have five minutes.

Anthony Salloum (Associate Director - Canada, Government Relations, ONE Campaign): Thank you very much.

By the time you hear the end of my speech, you will swear that the same person wrote both of our speeches. It is a reflection of the consensus among the diaspora communities here and the similar concerns we're hearing as an organization that is Africa-centric and focused on Canada-Africa relations.

ONE recently published a brief marking the first anniversary of the Canada-Africa strategy, which is before you. Our central message was simple. If Canada is serious about trade diversification, then Africa must be part of that effort. The Canada-Africa relationship should be here at this committee. We're feeling really good about seeing this being debated here, because too often, the continent is seen solely as a charity case. It is always described in terms of a recipient of aid, as opposed to an opportunity and a strategic benefit for Canada. It is not accurate, nor is it in Canada's interests.

Africa matters to Canada for economic and strategic reasons. It is projected to grow faster than Asia in 2026. By 2050, one in four people in the world will be African. The African continental free trade agreement which my colleague just referred to is creating the largest free trade area in the world, connecting 1.3 billion people across 54 countries, as noted, with a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion U.S. These are big numbers that we need to take note of.

For Canada, this represents both an opportunity and a necessity. Our analysis shows that with the right implementation plan, Canadian exports to African countries could double over the next decade. We can reach \$13 billion by 2035. Imports from African countries can also double, reaching \$20.9 billion by 2035. That would not only give Canadian businesses and consumers not only new markets, but give Canadians new supply chains.

We would recommend three immediate actions. First, publish an implementation plan with measurable goals for trade, investment and diplomatic engagement. Second, organize a prime minister-led trade mission to Africa, involving Canadian businesses and priority sectors. Third, establish dedicated financing to support Canada-Africa investment and implement the diaspora engagement mechanism that was promised in the strategy. Throughout many of our consultations, the one echo we heard over and over again was the need for that.

The Canada-Africa investment facility fund could help mobilize private capital, reduce investment risks and support partnerships between Canadian and African firms.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Canada-Africa relations should be based on trade, mutual prosperity and genuine partnership, since that is the strongest foundation for an enduring and modern relationship.

Africa is not a passive recipient of foreign aid. It is a continent of growing markets and of entrepreneurs, innovators and young talent who will help shape the global economy in the decades to come.

It is worth noting that some African currencies are now among the world's top-performing in 2025, driven by high commodity prices and improved macroeconomic stability.

[*English*]

You will have all received our parliamentary brief, “Gazeti la Afrika”, in your inboxes on March 12. We hope to do this four times a year to keep information flowing to parliamentarians.

One of the examples we noted in our parliamentary brief to you is that in North Africa, for example, Algeria announced the construction of the long-planned trans-Saharan gas pipeline. The TSGP is a proposed 4,128-kilometre natural gas pipeline designed to link gas fields in southern Nigeria to Algeria via Niger for export to Europe. These are the kinds of developments that are happening today.

An example in West Africa is Nigeria signing an industrial agreement with South Korea to establish Africa's first large-scale electric vehicle manufacturing plant. The planned facility is expected to produce 300,000 vehicles annually and create approximately 10,000 direct and indirect jobs on the continent.

Canada can bring expertise, capital, technology and trusted institutions to the table. African partners bring opportunity, ambition and strategic value, but a serious relationship must respect both sides.

[*Translation*]

This means moving beyond an outdated mindset that focuses on charity and evolving toward partnerships that create jobs, expand markets, strengthen supply chains and foster healthier and more stable societies.

• (1220)

[*English*]

The case is urgent now because Canada is looking to diversify trade and partnerships in a more uncertain world, while Africa's

economic and demographic rise is accelerating. If Canada wants to build meaningful relationships in the growth markets of the future, this is a critical moment for us to act.

Throughout your considerations here, Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy will offer you a useful model. When that strategy was launched, it was backed by a clear implementation plan and significant funding commitments of \$2.3 billion. In short, Canada has a strategy, but what it needs now is execution. If Canada moves beyond intention and acts with focus and consistency, it can build stronger partnerships with one of the world's fastest-growing regions while advancing its own economic interests.

I'll stop there. I thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you, sir.

We'll now move to a round of questioning. As a reminder for our witnesses, it's a six-minute round for each party.

We'll start with Mr. McKenzie.

David McKenzie: Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chair.

First of all, gentlemen, I didn't think your speeches were the same, but they were complementary, certainly. You're both describing a tremendous opportunity that's in front of us.

From some of the materials provided, I note that the announcement of a new strategy, an African strategy, by the Government of Canada a year ago is described as seeing slow progress. For me, that evokes a pattern of big announcements and fewer results. I'm disappointed, frankly, to see that is the case here as well.

Clearly, you've both made the case about the size of the African market, the opportunities, understanding other countries and other systems, and taking the opportunity to participate in them. I'm going to ask each of you to tell me what you think the number one reason is that we've had such slow progress in Africa, and what your solution for that is, quite specifically. You've given us a great general overview, but pick one from the top of the pile that we can get to work on.

Anthony Salloum: Let me be fair, because it's important that I be fair. Sometimes from the outside it's very hard to see movement. One concern the diaspora communities have is that they don't always see movement on the government side.

One thing we have highlighted is the need to put in place a consultative mechanism that would bring the diaspora in a formal, organized way, into regular contact with the Africa hub—for example, at the pan-African division of Global Affairs Canada. There's a need to put in place a formalized mechanism that allows that kind of formal input and, also, a communication pipeline from GAC officials to the diaspora communities and the entrepreneurs.

There are so many entrepreneurs in this country who are eager to work. Their complaint all the time is there's an impression that sometimes the department is unresponsive or too slow, or there's not enough communication between the innovative finance division of Global Affairs and FinDev at the Export Development Corporation, for example. When we talk to our senior civil servants in government, they highlight an enormous amount of movement. The problem is that movement sometimes isn't transparent. We say that immediately, the first thing that can be done, that is tangible and doable in the short term is to put in place a formal consultative mechanism.

I'll stop there and allow my colleague to speak.

David McKenzie: Thank you.

Mohamad Sawwaf: Thank you, my friend.

I want to focus more on the political will aspect. Last year we saw political will with the strategy being discussed, let's call it, put in place. However, it hasn't been advanced. What does that advancement need to look like? I would compare it to what we've recently seen within the Middle East, specifically with the GCC. There is a ton of activity happening right now between ministerial visits on both sides. Of course, Prime Minister Carney visited, and that sent a really strong signal. Not only does it say to the countries in that region that Canada is open for business and that we're willing to diversify and open strategic doors, but it also brings a top-down approach to the diaspora and the business community, saying that we can now engage with confidence in the region, and that will be reciprocated by the other side.

For example, I have members that export into the African region, and it was brought up to me just as early as last night, as I was preparing for these remarks, that EDC only supports or insures one side, meaning exports coming from Canada into...and it doesn't insure.... It is country risk on a specific basis. For example, Angola is only at 50% and up to certain limits, whereas if you go to an insurance provider like Allianz, which has good experience on the ground and has many partners able to assess that risk more credibly, you find that it is happy to take that business. From a top-down approach, that signal from the Prime Minister's Office will then carry through to all of the government organizations to say that this is a strategic and important region that we need to look at, and we will move much more quickly than we have in the past.

● (1225)

David McKenzie: Gentlemen, as we've just discussed, we've been slow. Canada has been slow to engage in some of the growth and opportunities that are taking place in Africa. However, China has not. China's belt and road initiative has been exerting influence in many countries in Africa. Does that not bear risk for us now coming second to try to establish relationships with those countries where China already has substantial influence?

Mohamad Sawwaf: I certainly agree with you, but I'd rather be second than last. China's initiative is exemplary with respect to that. Just yesterday, I saw an announcement within Egypt where they're building out a 22-station monorail to connect the administrative city to Cairo.

I've been to Dubai, and I've been to the GCC. Any time I go to any of those airports, I see Bombardier light rail trains. Where is

Bombardier when it comes to having access to these opportunities where we've provided for other countries? However, because Egypt isn't top of mind, these opportunities don't come our way, so others, of course, will have priority over that. That's an example.

I think there is a way to approach these opportunities with Canadian manufacturing and Canadian expertise. We are globally known within these particular areas, so we just need to put ourselves out there, bring that awareness, and be able to bid on these massive contracts and take advantage of these opportunities.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you very much.

Mr. Fonseca, you have six minutes.

Peter Fonseca: I want to thank our witnesses for their opening remarks.

I also want to thank my colleague, Madam Lapointe, for bringing forward this study to our committee. It is so important. I'm from Mississauga. We have a large Arab community. We have a large francophone community of African descent. Many have come to my office, many entrepreneurs, and have explained the challenges they have in growing their businesses into some of the countries they have come from.

This is a real opportunity to be able to leverage what we have here, our diaspora community. What would the strategy be to get out to the diaspora community here in Canada and then be able to leverage their knowledge and increase our trade? I see from your package, and thank you so much for it, that with exports and imports, things have been pretty stagnant for 10 years. We're looking at about \$7 billion in exports from Canada. With regard to imports, things have gone up a little, and now they're coming down. We're looking at about \$10 billion. I would like to know how we can change that and achieve what we want to achieve, which is the doubling of our exports over the next 10 years.

Mohamad Sawwaf: I think there has to be a strong review and analysis with respect to bureaucracy and red tape. How do we make it easier for that diaspora to connect with their home country? Relationships have already been established. Import-export is something that Africa can provide to us, and investment and expertise is what Canada can provide to Africa. We have to understand what our role is and what their role is to clearly create that connection within the diaspora community and take advantage of those prosperous opportunities.

We are a highly educated country. How are we exporting that knowledge and that human capital back into the region to then be able to uplift society? Skills and trades are things that need to be exported from a Canadian perspective, but we also need to have a mechanism that allows the diaspora to take that on and be able to export it with ease. If we can reduce those barriers over time, then it will be easier and easier, versus this region being looked at as an unknown or maybe as a high-risk region. Those sentiments and those perceptions really need to be removed.

● (1230)

Peter Fonseca: Okay. Thank you.

Yes, Mr. Salloum.

Anthony Salloum: If I may add to that, there is no lack of entrepreneurship in this country, and there is no lack of energy and enthusiasm in the diaspora communities here. What we hear are some of the same comments in the sense that they sometimes don't feel that the various departments responsible for opening these corridors are working in sync. They will talk about a silo effect between the innovative finance division at Global Affairs and FinDev.

I can say that, over the last year, there has been movement. For example, the government, to its credit, has created an Africa hub. It has centralized resources, human power and some of the biggest experts in Global Affairs into one area so that at least, across divisions, you have better communication and better coordination.

They've also worked to reduce the silos between the various divisions. Now, innovative finance has certain, more flexible tools that are available to FinDev, so one works upstream and one works in the third stream and in more advanced streams of investments, for example. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done, because that knowledge, that information and those pipelines have not really been formally put in place.

There is an ongoing concern. We all saw what happened with the budget last fall. The department is now facing one of the largest operational cost reductions in its history. That means people and that means resources, and that also means less staffing in trade offices. There is a consequence to a separate decision by the government, which is to reduce its operational costs, so there's a problem there.

We're saying that if you want to make this happen, then make sure, if trade is a priority, to prioritize trade offices on the continent and increase the number of trade offices on the continent. To its credit, FinDev just opened a new trade office on the continent, so do that, and improve the pipelines with the diaspora here and create these funds and these investment mechanisms that the diaspora needs here in order to be able to export.

One last comment I want to make is that a trade mission sends such important messages to the continent. When the Prime Minister or a minister goes on a trade mission, there are multiple ripple effects. It sends a message to the entire continent that Canada is serious about Africa. It also entails other people going with the minister. For example, when Mr. LeBlanc went to Mexico, there were 240 organizations and 370 individuals who went on that trade mission. We know how to do trade missions in Canada. Let's focus on Africa, let's do a trade mission to Africa and let's prepare it properly.

Those are some tangible examples of things we can do to move the strategy forward.

Thank you.

Peter Fonseca: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have the floor for six minutes.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I'd also like to thank them for their respective presentations. I'll start with Mr. Salloum.

First of all, welcome back to the House of Commons.

Essentially, you're saying that Canada should do more trade with Africa. There's no problem on that front, but you're also raising issues related to transparency and corruption.

There are all kinds of things you said in your presentation that are worth thinking about. However, what can be done about transparency and corruption?

How can we ensure that there is follow-up and that the local elites there don't misappropriate the money?

Anthony Salloum: Thank you for the question. It's very important, and it concerns all federal departments here. I'll explain why.

A trade agreement is the final step in a process that takes some time. That's why the government just signed the foreign investment promotion and protection agreement, or FIPA, with South Africa. There are stages that serve to address issues related to corruption and transparency, among other things. It's possible to prioritize certain countries. There's no need to have a free trade agreement with 50 countries in Africa. It's possible to decide to prioritize four or five countries and start with them.

If transparency improves in other countries over the next 10 years, particularly in terms of governance, we can establish economic relations with those countries. We take it step by step.

● (1235)

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: The best solution would be to pick a small group of countries to start with and look at the results. That means we aren't in a hurry.

Is that correct?

Anthony Salloum: No, all we want is to get started. We know that it takes time, and that's why we want to start right away. We want to pick four or five countries to begin with and sign a FIPA that includes stages. In 10, 15 or 20 years, we may be able to do a lot of free trade with many African countries.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Should governance requirements be established when such agreements are signed?

When we start trading with a country, investments are made, but should we be requiring certain changes?

We've seen this in the past. In the 1990s, when neoliberalism was at its height, they called them structural adjustments.

The International Monetary Fund, the IMF, and the World Bank Group issued loans with strings attached. Countries had to implement major reforms, including democracy and governance reforms, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but they were also very neoliberal by nature.

So, some people got rich, but others remained mired in inequality. How do we make sure these aren't similar conditions? Corruption is a factor, but we also have to consider respect for these countries' sovereignty. It's not very straightforward.

Anthony Salloum: I'll tell you about another report we did last year on the link between investment in development and free trade.

There's an important connection between trade and development. It's important that we fulfill our international obligations with respect to development because that's an important component of everything we do. We provide assistance with governance and with crises arising from things like pandemics.

We also offer assistance with technology exchange, and maybe with human resources as well. We send experts. We can offer this kind of assistance to a country initially. When it achieves a level we consider acceptable and the country is transparent enough, we can move on to the next stage, which is the economic stage and free trade.

[English]

Start with development, governance, aid and self-agency over the delivery of important programs. When the government gets to a certain stage in that country, and we feel secure that we can go to the next step, then we talk about a FIPA with that country. Then we talk trade.

[Translation]

It's an evolution, but we have to start now, because it takes time.

That's a good question, and it's one that concerns us.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Before I go on, I'd like to know how much time I have left, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): You have one minute left.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you.

One thing you mentioned was human resources, and you gave examples. Would that be humanitarian support or development assistance? Could it be part of some kind of agreement?

People often think of trade partnerships, but there can be trade partnerships that aren't solely commercial in nature. Humanitarian aid can be exchanged for goods as well. I know this isn't the best example, because these aren't exemplary regimes, but there were agreements with Cuba and Venezuela to supply oil in exchange for medicine.

Is that the kind of thing you have in mind?

Anthony Salloum: It's up to the government to decide how to proceed. The only thing we can say is that, at this point, the government isn't focusing on Africa enough.

[English]

The type of focus will depend on the government's trade priorities, but we need to start now.

• (1240)

[Translation]

It's important to start right away, but it's up to the government to decide which sectors Canadians can make positive contributions in.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you very much.

[English]

Go ahead, Mr. Mantle.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin my questioning of our witnesses, I want to put a motion on notice orally. It's based on my exchange with Mr. Fowler on Ukraine.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): That's just a verbal notice.

Jacob Mantle: That's correct. It's a verbal notice.

I provided a text to the clerk, but I will read it out on the record for the benefit of all members. It's with respect to the Ukraine goods remission order.

The motion would read as follows:

That the Standing Committee on International Trade:

1. reaffirms its steadfast support for Ukraine sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity;
2. acknowledges and supports the Government of Canada's assistance provided to Ukraine;
3. requests that the Minister of Finance immediately and unconditionally extend the period for which remission is granted pursuant to the Ukraine goods remission order or any other instrument from goods that are imported during the period beginning June 9, 2022 and ending on June 9, 2026 to goods that are imported during the period beginning June 9, 2022 and ending on June 9, 2031;
4. requests that the Minister of Finance respond in writing to the committee's request within 15 days; and
5. directs the chair to immediately report this to the House.

Just for context for other members of the committee, what this does is extend the timeline under the Ukraine goods remission order, which is the instrument that allows Ukrainian goods to enter Canada duty-free, from a one-year period to a five-year period.

The reason is that I've consistently heard that the one-year period provides too short a time frame for Ukrainian businesses to find customers, solicit sales, enter into agreements and produce goods. As a result, they're not able to take advantage of this and they have requested, in my conversations with them, a longer period. I've suggested a five-year period.

I have put that on notice, and we can discuss it at a later date or off-line as well. We'd be happy to do that as well, so thank you.

Thank you, witnesses. I apologize for taking a bit of my time to deal with a committee matter from our previous panel, but thank you for attending to give us your helpful advice.

Mr. Salloum, in the report you provided, your first action item was to publish an implementation plan with measurable goals.

Could you describe for us what your top five goals would be? If we're here in the committee looking at this next year or in two years, what are the five things that you would want us to be able to look back on and say that we did these top five things with respect to trade in Africa?

Anthony Salloum: Honestly, I won't be able to provide that to you here, because what we are literally doing now is consulting with diaspora communities on exactly those kinds of details. We'll share them with the committee later on, because two things are happening.

We're doing consultations. Lots of colleagues are doing consultations with diaspora communities on what they want that implementation plan to look like, and we've committed to sharing that with the government.

The government is also doing its own consultations with the diaspora communities and entrepreneurs across the country. In fact, GAC has had no less than 60 meetings over the last year to work towards it. When we have something really foundational and specific like that, I will definitely share it with you for sure.

That's an excellent question. Thank you.

Jacob Mantle: Is there anything you'd like to add on measurable goals that we could discuss so that we have some guideposts for the future?

There's always lots of talk and there's always lots of policy written, but I'm interested in results.

Mohamad Sawwaf: Yes, I couldn't agree more, if we could focus on what the lowest denominator is in terms of actionable results or just executing what we can do minimally to get things going.

My colleague here mentioned that we need to start. What does that look like? Is it stronger engagement? Is it a trade mission? That is very actionable. That is one result we would like to see within the next 12 months, some sort of outbound trade mission from Canada into one or many regions of Africa. It's split between north, east and west. We have multiple relationships with North Africa specifically. We've seen that.

We could also focus on what we can do to just expand trade, right? As Peter mentioned, trade has been stagnating. What needs to be done to increase trade? Is it working with EDC to ensure import and export? Is it looking at what Africa has to offer that we're not then bringing in? We're now in a period of a lot of tumultuousness. Food security is back on the table. What is Canada's stance on agri-food and technology? Are we supporting these countries to be...? LNG, oil and natural gas are all things that have now bubbled up again. They're back on the table. They're at the forefront. How do we then strengthen...?

One other thing, which I think is an easy one, is increasing flight routes. For example, we've seen that Air Maroc flies direct to Mon-

treil and now direct to Toronto. Increasing flight routes creates mobility. Being able to come to Canada on a direct basis naturally expands trade and cargo. It also expands the ability of people to visit our country, whether it's in delegations or non-delegations. Then, of course, there's the tourism piece too.

Maybe those are three items you can take away that are quite actionable over the next 12 months and are very measurable.

• (1245)

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you very much.

Madam Lapointe is next.

[Translation]

Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us. Your contributions are very interesting.

We received the ONE Campaign brief before the meeting and were able to peruse it. I would like to ask a few questions.

Africa is not homogenous. It's important to keep that in mind when deciding which countries to focus on.

For this study, which I suggested, what concrete and immediate measures should we recommend?

You said immediate action is needed. You talked about direct flights. That being said, what should we do right now to strengthen trade relations with North and West Africa?

You said earlier that there should be more trade missions. You also said Canada should look for inspiration in Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

Mohamad Sawwaf: Thank you very much.

[English]

To expand on an immediate basis what we already have, I think there has to be visibility. That means visibility on the ground, whether we're expanding our trade offices or expanding trade commissioners, and sending the signal that we have Canadians on the ground engaging at the governmental level.

What we've done as well is to ask how we connect our business council with the local business councils in the region, whether that's the Canada Egypt Business Council, which was recently established on the Canadian side, or moving towards Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia.

To your point, Madam Lapointe, who do we start with? Why don't we start with those who we feel are most advanced in their framework, their governance, their human rights and all of the rules and regulations?

[Translation]

Linda Lapointe: Which ones would those be, in your opinion?

[English]

Mohamad Sawwaf: I'm sorry. Could you repeat that?

[Translation]

Linda Lapointe: In your opinion, which of the countries that have made the most progress on these fronts, including human rights, would you focus on?

[English]

Mohamad Sawwaf: Those countries would be Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, and we could look at Ethiopia and Eritrea as well. South Africa, of course, is another one. These are all countries that are moving along and being more advanced within their governance structures, their governments and their economies, so we want to be able to capture that low-hanging fruit.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Linda Lapointe: What about countries that are part of the francophonie? Would you add any of them to the list of countries to focus on?

[English]

Mohamad Sawwaf: Absolutely.

As you already know, Madam Lapointe, strong francophone communities are already present in Morocco, as well as Algeria and Tunisia. Angola would be another one—oh, sorry—that would be Portuguese. Outside of those countries, I'm not quite familiar with who else has French as a second language.

[Translation]

Anthony Salloum: I just want to share some examples of opportunities we're not seizing.

[English]

Ethiopia is the world's third-largest consumer of peas, and Canada is one of the world's top producers, yet we don't export to them.

[Translation]

If you're looking for specific countries, Ethiopia is a good example. That's not a judgment on my part, but we know that lots of Canadians are looking for suppliers other than the United States for things like orange juice.

Linda Lapointe: I agree, absolutely.

What about coffee? In addition to orange juice, could it be the same for coffee?

Anthony Salloum: Yes.

Morocco and South Africa are two countries that have started growing oranges to increase their orange juice exports. Those are two more examples of countries Canada could initiate talks with. That could enable us to find other suppliers for products we like here in Canada.

Chocolate and cacao would be some other examples.

[English]

Despite producing 50% of the world's cocoa, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana capture only a fraction of the global chocolate market.

[Translation]

In fact, we import 56% of our chocolate from the United States. The United States imports cacao and produces chocolate, and we import the finished product. That's why the price of chocolate in Canada is so high now.

Why not set up a value-added process with Ivory Coast or Ghana to directly import chocolate products from those countries? That way, we could diversify our suppliers and support growth and economic stability in that sector.

Those are just two examples. We could provide many more. That's why we wrote our brief. We'll send you documents three or four times a year with lots of examples like that.

Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much.

[English]

Mohamad Sawwaf: May I add a couple more examples?

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): You may, briefly.

Mohamad Sawwaf: Very briefly, this is one that highlights Canada.

For those who don't know, Morocco imports, almost exclusively, 99% of Canada's durum wheat, and many don't know that. It's to the point that when wheat is sold in the market in its raw form, people know that it is Canadian wheat due to the shade and the colouring, because that's the higher quality one versus the less-coloured one.

This is a testament to Canadian durum wheat that's going to Morocco, but is it going to other countries within Africa? I'm unaware of that. This could be a jumping point to ask how we can get more Canadian wheat into the African region.

Vice versa, Egypt is the second-largest producer of dates in the world. I see Tunisian dates in Costco, which is great too, because that also benefits the African region, but are Egyptian dates being supplied? We know Egypt has the Nile, so it's very fertile. There's so much that could benefit Canada from an agriculture perspective, and, of course, we could also lend our technology and agriculture expertise, which we have here in Ontario, as well as within the Prairies and out west.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1255)

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you for the additional context and information. That was a good answer.

Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, you have five minutes—you'll get some time from the Conservative side—and then we'll end with Mr. Malette for five minutes.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sawwaf, clearly, China's interests in Africa are not a secret, nor are they taboo. At the beginning of this study, a professor told us that, instead of competing with China, we need to seize opportunities in sectors in which China is less competitive in Africa, such as high-value-added sectors and high tech.

We know that Quebec has expertise in aerospace, clean energy, critical minerals, engineering and AI. With that in mind, I see excellent opportunities available to Quebec's leading companies in North Africa.

Do you see that as well? If I'm wrong about this, please explain why.

Mohamad Sawwaf: Thank you very much for the question.

[English]

My understanding is that China has come in and invested heavily in the infrastructure pieces to get these countries established and going. Where Canada can come in is human capital or human expertise. As you mentioned, ICT, engineering, aerospace, technology, cybersecurity and AI are all areas where Canada has a lot of expertise and a lot of know-how and can help these African countries thrive. This would also allow us to differentiate ourselves from and put a wedge between us and China when it comes to their technology, which is potentially a threat to the west and to other countries.

This would allow us more on-the-ground partnerships, let's call it, with the people versus at the infrastructure level.

[Translation]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: With respect to Canada's Africa strategy, you and Mr. Salloum seem to have the same perspective: We should proceed bit by bit, inch by inch, step by step, targeting certain sub-regions or countries that are more stable and that would be easier to develop relationships with.

However, given that there's already the African Continental Free Trade Area, why wouldn't it necessarily be a good idea to target the entire continent or most of it at once? There's already a kind of institutional framework in place.

Mr. Salloum, you can add your thoughts on that too.

Anthony Salloum: If I understand correctly, you're asking me why we don't start with the African free trade area. The reason is that it's not ready yet. Negotiations are still under way. It's not yet a done deal, so we have to wait a while. In the meantime, in the short term, we can do bilateral deals with four or five countries. In the long term, when the free trade area is ready, Canada can start negotiating with other countries. However, as you know, it can take a long time to get to that point.

That said, I just want to say that there are provincial and regional negotiations and projects happening between Canada and Africa. For example, the Government of Quebec hired Kasi Insight to analyze the situation. Kasi Insight produced a good, very detailed report on how Quebec can increase exports to Africa. For example, it showed that Quebec can increase its exports tenfold by 2035.

As you can see, there are lots of steps to this. For example, Canada, Ontario and Quebec can have agreements with some countries initially, and then with the entire African free trade area later.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Do you want to add anything, Mr. Sawwaf?

• (1300)

[English]

Mohamad Sawwaf: If there's still time, Mr. Chair, I just want to add that Africa is not as established as the EU. Although there is this continental free trade agreement, there is still a non-unification of currency. There is a non-unification with respect to borders, and that makes it quite difficult. It's not like you can enter one African country and then you're fully exposed in terms of free-flowing movement and mobility, amongst all others. That should be the goal of the African continent. However, that's not for us to intervene in, but that's highly encouraged.

I would say, to extend my friend's comments, we need to pinpoint the countries that are most advanced and work with them first, as an example for other countries to follow, because everyone will want to do trade with Canada. Everyone will want to have an agreement with Canada. We have to show them that this is how it can be done, as a precedent, and that this is the way forward in order to establish a strong trading partnership with us.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you very much.

Mr. Malette, you'll be our last questioner.

Chris Malette (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Thank you very much. I will be brief. I'm cognizant of the time, and I appreciate the time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Salloum and Mr. Sawwaf.

I'm not normally on this committee, but I'm very happy to ask this question. The last line of this discussion brings me around to a localized success story, Sprague Foods, which is in my riding of Bay of Quinte. Sprague Foods just celebrated 100 years as the last cannery, if you will, in the Bay of Quinte region, Prince Edward County. It's a success story that's nonetheless pretty intriguing, especially in the buy Canadian market right now. They're all across Canada now. Their products, beans, legumes, soups, are sought after. None of them contain meat.

I'm thinking about this market in Africa. For instance, they've cracked the U.S. market in every Costco across the U.S. They're bursting at the seams, but they are very ambitious, and I can see them accessing this African market. How should I talk to Rick, Jane and Keenan Sprague, and tell them what they have to do to get in on that market?

Mohamad Sawwaf: It's great to hear about these multi-generational success stories that are here in Canada. The ability for us to market ourselves and create the awareness that there are Canadian products that are globally wanted is, first and foremost, what we'd love to see.

I think the initial step is to work with the trade commissioners to identify the markets where products from Canada can enter into Africa quite easily. You're either doing it through shipping or through air, and there are different costs to that. However, with respect to this product, I would suspect they're non-perishable items, canned goods, so they would have a long shelf life. To your point, legumes are high in protein, so it would be great for the population from the perspective of the nutritional value they would end up getting.

We're happy to work with them directly as a starting point, to say, "Who are the points of contact that we need to engage with? How do we identify the markets that maybe don't have these goods, as a gap within their food industry?" Then, it's identifying that and saying, "Well, how do we get it out there, and what's required to get it out there?"

Anthony Salloum: It's an excellent example, so I may just quickly add a couple of things. First of all, Canada and Canadian products have a credibility factor that gives them that cachet. They feel confident the product is safe.

We also have an incredible reputation on the continent. We have no colonial history with Africa, so Canada is seen in a positive light. We're also a bilingual country, which means our products are already labelled in both languages, so there's a flexibility in terms of where they're able to be dispersed and sold. Because our requirements here already require bilingual labelling, there's no added work for Sprague to do to get their products to those markets, for example.

I just want to put it out there that there are opportunities, and there are folks we can point them to—EDC and FinDev, as examples—who would help them. They'll be very happy to talk to them, I'm sure.

Chris Malette: Thank you. I only used them as.... They jumped to the front of my mind when I heard that connection, so here's hoping we can introduce—

- (1305)

Anthony Salloum: You have a beautiful constituency. We love Prince Edward County.

Chris Malette: Yes. I don't have to sell it very hard on the tourism market.

Thank you very much, gentlemen.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you very much.

That concludes our second panel. The witnesses may excuse themselves if they'd like. We have some very brief committee business to finish.

I want to thank you both for your testimony today on the opportunities Canada has in Africa. Thank you for your appearance. We hope to have you back in the future.

As I understand it, we should be able to do this in a few minutes, relatively. There have been some discussions between the parties. We were on a motion by Mr. Mantle with respect to getting some information from the CBSA.

I'll turn the floor over briefly to Mr. Mantle before going to Mr. Lavoie, who I understand would like to speak as well.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You'll recall that at our last meeting, I moved the motion I had on notice with respect to CBSA outages. Since that time, the government has asked for some additional time to consider that motion. We've since discussed this, and I believe the government members have an amendment to my motion that they would like to move.

I would invite them to move that now.

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Before going to Mr. Lavoie—I will invite him to move his amendment—you do not need to read it into the record, if you choose not to. You may, if you'd like.

It is being distributed to all members of the committee now, with your approval, Mr. Lavoie.

[*Translation*]

Steve Lavoie: If that works for everyone, it's okay with me.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Okay. We'll wait two seconds for it to arrive in inboxes. Subject to that approval, we'll conclude the meeting, but we'll wait until it appears.

I'll mention that it's unfortunate the committee has to use motions like this to receive information, which it ought to receive through an Order Paper question. This will get sorted out, but it would have been easier if the government had just answered the question in the first instance, when it was posed, or the second.

We appreciate the flexibility and willingness of the government to work with members of the committee to ensure that their questions can be answered in a timely fashion. I think 45 days is reasonable in this instance.

Mr. Mantle.

Jacob Mantle: I've received the motion. It's not exactly as we had agreed. This might be an old version. In particular, the last highlighted point currently reads, "and that if the CBSA is unable to provide specific information listed above and in the timeline requested, the CBSA provides an explanation as to why they are unable to do so." It should read, "And that, if CBSA is unable to provide specific information listed above, the CBSA provides an explanation as to why they are unable to do so."

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): We will suspend for 30 seconds.

• (1305) _____ (Pause) _____

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

• (1310) **The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers):** I am resuming the meeting.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Adam Chambers): Thank you very much.

This updated version has been sent around. I'll ask for a show of support for the motion as amended.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for your indulgence. We'll end this meeting at 1:11.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

Happy Easter.

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