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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Colleagues, welcome to meeting 5 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[*English*]

Pursuant to the orders of reference from the House of Commons of April 20 and September 30, and the order of reference of the committee on October 13, the committee is meeting to commence consideration of votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, L25 and L30 under the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development; Vote 1 under International Development Research Centre; and Vote 1 under International Joint Commission (Canadian Section).

[*Translation*]

The committee will also review the Minister of International Development's mandate letter.

[*English*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, and it is also the first meeting as part of the House of Commons pilot project for webinar formats. The pilot project is for public committee meetings, and is available only to members and their staff.

Members may have remarked that the entry into the meeting was much quicker, as they immediately entered as an active participant. All functionalities for active participants will remain the same. Staff will be non-active participants, and can therefore only view the meeting in gallery view.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank our witnesses for helping us to carry out this pilot project.

I hope you have a good experience.

[*English*]

As a reminder to all participants in this meeting, screen shots or photos of your screen are not permitted. This was highlighted by Speaker Rota on September 29.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I will outline a few customary rules to follow.

Witnesses and members may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available at the bottom of your screen.

[*Translation*]

Members attending in person must conduct themselves as they would normally if all committee members were meeting in person in a committee room.

Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for wearing masks, as well as health protocols.

[*English*]

Before speaking, please wait until you are recognized by name.

If you are on video conference, please click on the microphone to unmute yourself, and if you are in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. When you have 30 seconds remaining in your questioning time, I will signal you by holding up this yellow sheet of paper.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to extend a warm welcome to Minister Gould, Minister of International Development, and her team.

We welcome Leslie MacLean, Deputy Minister of International Development; Elissa Golberg, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy; and Caroline Leclerc, Assistant Deputy Minister, Partnerships for Development Innovation.

[*English*]

We have Peter MacDougall, assistant deputy minister, global issues and development; Anick Ouellette, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer, corporate planning, finance and information technology; and Shirley Carruthers, director general, financial resource, planning and management bureau.

For the benefit of members, I will quickly note that the votes on the main estimates will take place next week, after we have heard from both ministers.

Minister Gould, it is my pleasure to give you the floor for your initial presentation of 10 minutes.

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is really a delight to be with everyone, to see all of you right across the country virtually, and to have this conversation.

[*Translation*]

I'm pleased to be here today to present the 2020-2021 Main Estimates for the international development component of Global Affairs Canada's portfolio.

We must remember that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries were faced with the challenge of achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth, maintaining social cohesion and managing prices. While concrete gains have been made to reduce extreme poverty with Canadian support, including increased access to education, health and nutritious food, not all have benefited equally. More than 1.3 billion people living in poverty face several interrelated challenges, often compounded by inequalities and, in many cases, by prolonged humanitarian crises or the impacts of climate change.

COVID-19 added to these difficulties. The pandemic is expected to drive between 88 million and 115 million people into extreme poverty this year—the first increase since 1998—while also delaying progress in development, especially for women and children already living in extreme poverty. It is also expected to increase exclusion and marginalization.

This is not only a problem abroad. COVID-19 provides a profound and compelling demonstration of how the health and prosperity of Canadians depends on a coordinated global response and recovery. Until this crisis is resolved globally, until we help build more resilient and sustainable social and economic systems, we will continue to be impacted domestically.

Canada has demonstrated its commitment to vigorous efforts to address the devastating effects of COVID-19 around the world. Beyond a doubt, the COVID-19 crisis and the economic disruption it is causing represent the most significant shock to global development since the Second World War.

The Government of Canada has organized its international response to the pandemic around three pillars of strategic action where Canada can have a direct impact.

First, we are fighting the pandemic by building capacity to achieve sustainable, health-related development goals and supporting equitable access to COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccine.

Second, we are striving to manage financial stresses and stabilize economies by restoring global supply chains and ensuring financial liquidity and stability in developing countries.

Lastly, we are supporting the most vulnerable by strengthening recovery through our humanitarian response, by supporting food security and education, and by addressing the long-term socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

• (1540)

[English]

Canada's feminist international assistance policy provides the necessary framework for action. The priorities set out in the policy target the issues where support is needed, focused as it is on helping the poorest and most vulnerable, especially women and girls and those living in fragile states, to recover.

Since the policy's launch in 2017, we have made significant progress on implementing the policy and its related initiatives and commitments. I will come back to these accomplishments shortly, but would first like to turn to the main estimates.

Because of the timing of the main estimates, which were originally presented on February 27, 2020, the 2020-21 main estimates did not include additional international assistance funding specific to the COVID-19 response.

The 2020-21 main estimates include an amount of \$823.4 million to further the implementation of the feminist international assistance policy. This includes \$410.5 million in international assistance envelope funding to support initiatives linked to specific policy action areas such as the women's voice and leadership initiative, Canada's humanitarian assistance, and sexual and reproductive health and rights programming; \$195 million to support the establishment of the equality fund; and \$145.1 million to support the implementation of the international assistance innovation program and sovereign loans program.

Additionally, the 2020-21 main estimates include a net increase of \$297.3 million, compared to the 2019-20 main estimates, to implement programming to help developing countries address the impact of climate change.

For example, Canada is supporting the World Bank Canada clean energy and forest facility to help reduce deforestation and forest degradation through sustainable forest management. Canada is also supporting the Canadian climate fund for the private sector in the Americas, phase II, which aims to catalyze private sector investments and climate change mitigation and adaptation across Latin America and the Caribbean region. Recognizing that the Paris Agreement aims to limit global temperature increases, a majority of Canada's climate finance programming targets mitigation efforts primarily through renewable energy.

I would like to note that significant progress continues to be made in advancing the feminist international assistance policy, and the majority of Canada's commitments are on track to be achieved. In the 2018-19 report to Parliament on the Government of Canada's international assistance, we outlined how the policy is being pursued and what results have been achieved. It was the first combined report on international assistance as part of our efforts to increase transparency to Canadians.

However, I should flag that new funding to help respond to the COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact on the department's ability to meet targets for the current fiscal year.

More broadly, over the past fiscal year, I have also been focused on realizing the commitments outlined in my mandate letter as minister for international development. As of March 2020, we've fulfilled the 2015 commitment to allocate \$3.5 billion for maternal, newborn and child health, as well as the 2017 commitment to allocate \$650 million towards sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Preliminary statistics show that in 2019-20, Canada met its commitment and is on track to meeting the 2021-22 target of directing 95% of Canada's bilateral international development assistance to initiatives that advance gender equality.

The women's voice and leadership initiative now supports local women's organizations and movements in over 30 countries and regions. We are moving forward with supporting innovative programming by Canadian small and medium-sized organizations in partnership with local organizations.

Equitable access to education is critical for everyone, particularly the most vulnerable. To this end, I will be launching an international campaign in early 2021 to ensure that refugee and displaced children get the education they need and deserve. Additionally, we are well on our way to directing 10% of our bilateral international development assistance towards education initiatives—currently at 9%. Officials are also developing new programming to address other key issues, including the unequal distribution of unpaid care work.

We are also supporting women in developing countries who are at the front lines of climate adaptation efforts through new investments such as a \$150-million loan to the international fund for agricultural development to support climate-smart agriculture in developing countries and by providing \$20 million for the Canada-CARICOM climate adaptation fund.

Canada continues to be recognized for our leadership on innovative financing in support of the SDGs. We co-chair the UN Group of Friends on SDG Financing, in New York, and, building on this work, Prime Minister Trudeau, alongside Prime Minister Holness of Jamaica and UN Secretary-General Guterres, is leading a process with leaders from around the world on financing for development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond to encourage inclusive and creative solutions to finance the recovery.

I also remain committed to ensuring that Canada's international assistance is effective, transparent and accountable. For example, Global Affairs has streamlined funding applications and is implementing the civil society partnerships for international assistance policy. Furthermore, restructuring the international assistance envelope has provided Canadians and the international community with clearer, more comprehensive information on our international assistance programming.

Finally, our government is also increasing Canada's international assistance and will be doing so as we work toward 2030 in support of the SDGs. In 2021, we allocated \$4.9 billion toward international assistance objectives, an increase from \$4.6 billion the previous year.

• (1545)

Mr. Chair, committee members, our government is working hard to implement the feminist international assistance policy, especially during this unprecedented pandemic, and seeking to build a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We are now going to our first round, which consists of six-minute interventions. First up is Mr. Genuis.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Minister, and I want to thank you for your service to Canada in this important role.

My first round of questions will be about Canada's involvement in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a Beijing-controlled development bank that is part of the Chinese government's neo-colonial belt and road initiative.

Is the money that the Government of Canada contributes to the AIIB considered part of the government's development assistance?

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Genuis, for the question. And I note that we first started working together four years ago on this committee when I was the parliamentary secretary.

With regard to the AIIB, this is part of Canada's development assistance. However, it is managed through Finance Canada, and not through Global Affairs Canada.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

How much money has the government sent to the AIIB to date?

Hon. Karina Gould: I would have to refer to one of my colleagues on the call, but as I noted, this is Finance Canada's, and not Global Affairs Canada's. So it's really the Minister of Finance who is the governor for the AIIB. I'm the governor for the Asian Development Bank.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Right. But it does, as I believe you've just said, contribute to what you perceive to be Canada's overall ODA spending.

Hon. Karina Gould: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is a multilateral development bank. Canada, alongside like-minded countries like Germany, and France and South Korea, is a member of this. I would note that the AIIB also co-funds projects with other partners with whom we work, such as the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank. But again, these questions are better placed to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister.

They are questions about international development and I'd like to know your perspective on them, in particular as it pertains to our foreign policy. Is it reasonable to infer from Canadian participation in the AIIB that Canada supports the belt and road initiative?

Hon. Karina Gould: The AIIB and the belt and road initiative are not linked initiatives. They are separate. The AIIB undertakes development projects in Asia-Pacific. Canada's participation in the AIIB is part of our engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. We work with the AIIB, and they adhere to multilateral standards with regard to the development projects they fund. I would note that the AIIB does not directly fund projects that are associated with the belt and road initiative.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Minister, I would somewhat disagree with that. In my disagreement, I would reference page 63 of your own transition binder, which reads as follows:

The Chinese government has been pushing for reforms to the global governance structure to reflect its rising status. China is no longer a rules-taker, but increasingly a rules-maker in the global arena, as exemplified by its establishment of the AIIB.

It later says on that page:

The Chinese government has established alternative multilateral forums, such as the AIIB and Belt and Road Initiative to provide soft loans and infrastructure investment with fewer conditions. China has utilized these alternative forums to leverage its economic prowess to gain regional influence and export its model of governance around the world.

I wonder if the minister could clarify if she agrees with the words of her own public servants in that transition binder.

• (1550)

Hon. Karina Gould: I would note that you're making—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, before the minister answers, I have a point of order. I'm hearing the French translation back while speaking.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, let me just take that point. We'll suspend briefly to see if that's something that can be fixed quickly.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm not hearing it anymore, so maybe it's been resolved already.

The Chair: Okay, perfect.

Minister, please continue.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Hopefully that will not come off my time.

Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

I would just note that you are making an inference that there is a connection between the two initiatives, which was not actually stated in the transition binder. In the binder they mentioned two initiatives to be aware of, but they did not explicitly link them.

What I would say is that what is very important for Canada, whether it is within the multilateral development bank system or whether it is with other multilateral organizations, is that we continue to push everyone, whether they are traditional OECD DAC donors or new donors, to abide by the best rules of aid effectiveness and ensure that they follow the rules.

Furthermore, part of Canada's being a member of the AIIB is that we have a seat of the table, and thus are able to have a seat when it comes to governance and to push China and other actors to follow the best principles when it comes to international assistance.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister.

The crucial point from that transition binder, as far as I'm concerned, is the fact that the AIIB is part of China's strategic agenda to push forward its model of governance around the world. I don't know why Canada would want to be part of that. I'd be curious about your thoughts on why Canada is part of a body that, as your own public servants are telling you, is aimed at exporting the Chinese state model of governance.

I also want to ask you about this argument about having a voice at the table. You said this gives Canada a voice at the table. Canadian membership in AIIB, which costs us hundreds of millions of dollars, gives us 1.03% of voting power. My staff went through records of meetings. As far as we were able to identify, Canada wasn't mentioned in any agenda items and made two recorded statements in board meetings over the entirety of our membership thus far.

What is the purpose, then, of having a voice at the table, if Canada has ostensibly spoken twice in the course of our presence there and if the objective of this bank is to advance the strategic objectives and governance models of the Chinese government? Why are we putting taxpayers' dollars...?

By the way, how much more good could we be doing around the world if those dollars were put towards actually helping children and vulnerable people who are suffering from malnutrition and lack of education?

The Chair: Please give a very brief answer, Minister.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would say that Canada puts close to \$1.1 billion into health, nutrition and human dignity initiatives around the world.

Of course, as I mentioned at the outset, I'm not the governor for the AIIB. That is the Minister of Finance.

I am the governor for the Asian Development Bank. While it is part of our international development assistance overall, it's not part of the portfolio that I manage.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Our next round of questions goes to Ms. Sahota.

Go ahead, please. The floor is yours.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you.

Minister Gould, it's nice to have you at committee today. I hope Oliver is doing well. I definitely miss seeing him around the House of Commons. It looks as though he's grown quite a bit.

My first question is along the lines of the feminist international assistance policy objectives to have 95% of Canada's bilateral international development assistance target or integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. I believe 6% is what is being spent now, and we want to get to about 15% in the years 2021 and 2022.

I am wondering if you can highlight how we intend to get there, what the different programs are and where this money is going and if you can elaborate on some of the help that is being provided and will be provided through this program.

• (1555)

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you so much, Ruby, for the question. It's nice to see you as well. Oliver is doing great; thank you for asking.

When it comes to the feminist international assistance policy and our gender equality target, we have set a target for ourselves that 95% of all of our development assistance would incorporate gender equality within its programs. We are on track to meet that commitment for this year.

I would note that since we brought in the feminist international assistance policy in 2017, Canada has become the top donor in the OECD DAC for gender equality. That is a huge achievement. Kudos of course, to the former minister, Marie-Claude Bibeau, for putting that forward and driving that agenda, and to all of the incredible public servants at Global Affairs Canada who have made that a reality.

We have also committed to having 15% of our programming be classified as a GE-3 or gender equality 3 project, which means that the primary objective of the project is to enhance gender equality. Whether those are projects that are advancing women's rights, fighting gender-based violence, advancing sexual health and reproductive rights or increasing women's political participation, these are the kinds of projects that we're talking about. In fact, we are set to meet that target for this year as well. That remains a top priority for us as a government moving forward.

I would note that one of the projects that I'm quite proud of is the women's voice and leadership program. This came about because of conversations that the previous minister and I had when I was parliamentary secretary. We were travelling and visiting partners around the world and hearing specifically from women's rights organizations and women's rights activists saying that they were doing incredible and difficult work, but didn't have the funding to back them up.

Fast-forward three, four and five years and we now have women's voice in leadership programs in over 30 countries and are supporting hundreds of women's rights activists. When I was in the Democratic Republic of Congo earlier this year, I had an opportunity to meet with some of the women's rights activists who Minister Bibeau met with when she was in Kinshasa in 2017. They expressed their gratitude for being part of this program and for the fact that a Canadian minister travelled to Kinshasa, heard their concerns, listened and acted upon them. Now they were being supported by Canada to do their really important work.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think it's an incredible achievement that Canada has become the top donor.

Can you list some of the countries that are receiving the most assistance through our bilateral international assistance program?

Hon. Karina Gould: I can. Canada is on track to have bilateral assistance programs with about 44 countries this year.

The top 10 recipients are Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Syria, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Jordan, Nigeria and Colombia. Of course, we also have multilateral and regional projects that provide development assistance to well over a hundred countries around the world, but those are the top 10.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yesterday it was very interesting in the House. We were debating Bill C-3, the bill that will require judges to take training when it comes to sexual assault. During that debate, Mr. Genuis was also very interested in the assistance that Canada could provide to developing countries to help women there to be able to access justice and protections for themselves when it comes to some of these terrifying atrocities that are committed against mostly women.

Can you describe any programs that may be assisting in that area?

Hon. Karina Gould: Yes. Again, when I was in Kinshasa, I had an opportunity to visit a hospital that receives victims of sexual violence and speak with some of the survivors and hear their stories. It's a project that we fund in collaboration with UNFPA. It's called JAD. This program not only trains hospitals and health care workers to receive and diagnose sexual violence; it also provides legal support for them to take their cases through the court system. It also helps them to build up their self-confidence, whether through education or economic opportunities.

That's one example. We also—

• (1600)

The Chair: Minister, I'm sorry to interrupt. We'll have to leave it there.

Hon. Karina Gould: Sure. Thank you.

The Chair: Feel free to circle back to additional examples in subsequent rounds.

[*Translation*]

I will now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for six minutes, please.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the Minister for being here. I want to pass on greetings to her from my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean, who unfortunately was unable to make it this afternoon. It is a great pleasure for me to be with you for this conversation.

Madam Minister, it has been suggested that one of the reasons for Canada's failure to secure a seat on the UN Security Council is that Canada's contribution to international assistance is significantly lower than Norway's and Ireland's.

To what extent do you feel this argument played a role in the factors that may have worked against Canada in the UN vote?

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you for your question.

Can you hear me all right?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Absolutely.

Hon. Karina Gould: Good afternoon to you as well, and please pass on my greetings to your colleague. It is always a pleasure to work with him.

With respect to the Security Council decision, several factors were involved. A number of developing countries who are our partners supported Canada's campaign and candidacy. I have had great conversations with many of our partners around the world about the support Canada is providing and the work we are doing together. I believe several factors played a role in the decision.

It is also a fact that two other countries had announced their candidacy before Canada, and several nations had already committed to voting for them.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: In a similar vein, Madam Minister, we know that the target for countries in terms of development assistance is a contribution of 0.7% of GDP. The OECD average is about 0.35% and Canada contributes 0.27%. It is well known that countries such as Norway and Ireland contribute significantly more.

I heard what you told us, that this may have been a minor argument for a number of countries to support Norway or Ireland at the expense of Canada. However, from a perspective where developed countries are expected to contribute 0.7% of their GDP, and given that our share is 0.27%, which is below the OECD average—as I am sure you will agree—what is the timeline for achieving a higher percentage for Canada's contribution to international assistance?

Hon. Karina Gould: I would like to confirm that Canada is the 10th largest donor in terms of volume of assistance, but not necessarily in percentage. However, in terms of total volume, Canada is one of the biggest players on the international stage.

In addition, in 2018, the government committed to spending an additional \$2 billion on international development and to increase that amount in subsequent years.

In my mandate letter, the Prime Minister asks me to increase international assistance. At this year's United Nations General Assembly, the Prime Minister confirmed that Canada's international assistance will be increased.

I would also like to point out that this year we announced more than \$1 billion in additional funding to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. We are in the process of increasing funding for international assistance.

• (1605)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Very good.

As soon as he was elected, the Prime Minister announced with great fanfare at the UN that Canada was back, and talked about international assistance, climate change and peacekeeping. On all three of these fronts, Canada has fallen short of the expectations raised by such a dramatic statement from the Prime Minister.

I accept being told that, again, the intentions are there. However, do we have a schedule for the next years and months to ensure that these good intentions are not just wishful thinking, but that they actually translate into steady and systematic increases in Canada's contribution to reach a higher level than we currently have?

Hon. Karina Gould: Yes, Mr. Bergeron.

As I just said, we have already taken action in that regard. In 2018, we announced an additional \$2 billion and it's on its way.

This year alone, not in the years to come, we announced more than \$1 billion. We have already made contributions and we are in the process of planning the distribution of these funds, which will be spent before the end of the current fiscal year.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

The final round of questions in this segment goes to Madam McPherson for six minutes, please.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the minister for being here today. Of course, I have more questions than I will be able to get through in six minutes, but luckily I go last and some of my questions have been asked already.

I just want to get a little more detail about ODA, and I'm sure that won't surprise you at all, Minister. Could you tell me what the expectation is for the percentage of GNI that we'll be spending? Is it 0.27%?

What will that increased percentage be? I don't want to know the volume of ODA; I would prefer to know the percentage.

Hon. Karina Gould: I'm not sure I could give you the percentage, unfortunately, because that will require us to do some calculations that I don't have here right in front of me, but I could tell you the volume because that is the ultimate dollar amount.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I more want to know based on our economy. Is there any way you could get those numbers and that percentage calculated and give it to the committee at a later date?

Hon. Karina Gould: Sure, we could do that. It will depend on our ultimate GNI number for this year, but certainly we could get that to you. I don't have it at my fingertips right now.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Okay.

Like MP Bergeron before me, we were really excited, of course, to see that the Prime Minister included increased investment in international development in the throne speech and that he did talk about it at the United Nations General Assembly. We look forward to seeing it. Will we see those increases in the next budgetary update?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Will we have a budget?

Hon. Karina Gould: Ms. McPherson, that's a question you'll likely have to ask my colleague, the Minister of Finance, because I'm not the one responsible for creating our overall government budget.

But I share your excitement. I'm also very excited to see the Prime Minister's commitment in the throne speech, and also the announcements that he has made, including the \$1.1 billion that has been already announced and is rolling out this year.

Ms. Heather McPherson: In terms of that ODA that's being spent, when you calculate some of those numbers perhaps you could let us know—maybe you know that now—what percentage of the money that we spend through Global Affairs Canada for international development goes to multilateral, goes to bilateral, and to the partnership branch as well?

• (1610)

Hon. Karina Gould: I would ask Shirley Carruthers to confirm that for us.

Mrs. Shirley Carruthers (Director General, Financial Resource, Planning and Management Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I have those numbers on my desk in front of me. If you give me a couple of minutes, I could provide the actual numbers and the—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Sure, and I could ask a question in the meantime, perhaps.

One of my next questions is about our contribution to COVAX. I'm delighted that Canada has contributed over \$500 million to that initiative. However, we have seen that Canada has also bought more than 10 times what we require for a domestic response.

It does seem reasonable that our international response would be equal to our domestic response, considering that all modelling shows that not only will we save about 28% more lives, but also that our economic outcomes will be much better as we recover.

Will there be further investment in COVAX and in making sure that less fortunate countries have access to vaccines in a timely manner?

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you.

Sorry, I was going to call you Heather, but Ms. McPherson, for the question.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Feel free.

Hon. Karina Gould: I share your passion for access to equitable vaccines, which is why I was so pleased that we made the contribution to both the COVAX facility for self-financing countries and the AMC to assist low-income countries' access to the vaccine.

I would note that Canada contributed the same amount to the AMC that we did to the COVAX facility. Canada is the second-largest contributor to the COVAX facility, after the United Kingdom.

When it comes to the ACT Accelerator—which is with regard to access to vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and health systems—Canada is the fourth-largest contributor overall in the world at this point in time.

Obviously, when it comes to vaccines, we understand that this is going to be an ongoing process. We have been very involved with research and development, and we are having lots of conversations with Gavi, with the WHO, and with other partners involved in the ACT Accelerator process.

We're continuing to encourage other countries to also join and to increase their contributions. We will continue to have conversations to see what Canadian leadership will continue to look like within this facility.

Ms. Heather McPherson: There will probably be no more additional funds from Canada, though, at this time.

Hon. Karina Gould: I would say that we are having active, ongoing conversations, and we are working with our international partners to make sure that COVAX is a success.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Minister.

To follow up a little bit, I'd like to squeeze in one last question. In terms of Canada's response to COVID-19, I know that you are aware that the sector has asked that 1% of our federal COVID spending go to international development and the COVID response.

Could you talk about what we've done and perhaps indicate when the funds are new funds, and when the funds have been reallocated from within the Global Affairs Canada budget?

Hon. Karina Gould: As I said, we have announced \$1.1 billion to respond to COVID specifically. I will get Shirley to confirm the numbers, but I believe that is new, additional funding. We had \$200 million that came from existing reference levels that was announced back in April. In addition to that, we have reallocated \$350 million internally to respond to COVID-19 from existing resources.

If you add all of those together, we're well over \$1.5 billion, but \$1.1 billion is new resources not existing ones. Perhaps Shirley—

The Chair: Thank you very much for that, Minister. Maybe you can follow up in a subsequent round.

We will now go to the second round of questions. I remind colleagues and witnesses that these next rounds consist of tighter time frames. They are for five minutes or two and a half minutes. I'm encouraging everybody to be as concise as possible in their questions and answers.

The first questioner will be Mr. Genuis, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to say that I'm struck by the lack of response to what is the most predictable and most basic question, Minister. Everybody knows, generally speaking, that international development assistance levels are measured as a percentage of gross national income. For you to say that it requires calculations that you don't have in front of you for our current or projected levels is, I think, quite surprising.

Going back to your transition binder, I note that it says “the ODA ratio is currently projected to be”—and the number is redacted—“percent in calendar year 2019”. The lack of willingness to talk about that percentage is, it seems, consistent.

We could talk about projects and impacts all we like, but I think everybody knows that the ability to run a certain number of projects or not is dependent on the level.

I would like to try to get more clarity from you about the government's policy with respect to ODA levels. In particular, you have spoken about the government's intention to increase ODA spending every year towards 2030. We know, though, that because of inflation, every dollar becomes worth a little bit less every year.

I want to know from you, Minister, whether the government policy is to increase ODA levels in nominal terms, in real terms or as a percentage of gross national income.

• (1615)

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

With all due respect, when the question was posed by Ms. McPherson on what the impact will be on the percentage of our ODA moving forward, right now we're projected at 0.28%. However, with the additional resources that have come online, particularly in recent months, and with fluctuations and changes in GDP, that is something we will be able to get back to the committee with greater detail, as those numbers are changing.

What I am doing right now is committing to provide the numbers I have on hand, which is with regard to the total overall percentage. It is always interesting from a Conservative member of Parliament to—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister.

I think you were going to talk about the Conservative record. Under Stephen Harper, aid as a percentage of GNI was actually much higher. It was always over 0.3%. I wonder if you want to confirm that current spending, as a percentage of GNI, is lower than it was at all points under the Harper government.

I also want to pin you down specifically on the commitment of the government. Is the government committing to increase aid spending in real terms, in nominal terms, or as a percentage of GNI? Which of those three is it?

Hon. Karina Gould: Actually, Mr. Genuis, I was going to comment that your party campaigned on cutting ODA by 25% in the last election, so it's a little interesting that you're so concerned about this. I hope this means that you're actually supportive of our increasing international assistance.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I am concerned about that, and I'm asking you—

Hon. Karina Gould: I hope that's what this is about, and perhaps your party would go on the record on that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, you're the minister and I'm not. Maybe I will be at some point, but for the time being you're the minister.

What is the commitment of the government? I'll give you one more chance to answer, and if not, the record will show that you didn't answer it. Is the commitment to increase nominal spending, real spending or spending as a percentage of GNI? Which is it?

Hon. Karina Gould: I hope your interest in this is a confirmation—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's not the question, Minister.

Hon. Karina Gould: —that your party would increase international assistance. I would note that when Stephen Harper was prime minister, he actually froze any increases to the international assistance budget. When we came into power, we increased it by \$2 billion in 2018, and we're continuing—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, are you answering the question?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Dr. Fry, on a point of order.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I know we disagree a lot at committees, depending on our party objectives or our party ideologies. I do think we should do one thing on the committee. We should respect the witness.

The minister has been asked to answer, and every time she tries to answer, the honourable member cuts her off. Could we let her share what she has to say, please, if he really wishes to hear the answer?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for the point of order, Dr. Fry.

Mr. Genuis, just one second, please.

There's an additional argument to be made here, which is that it's impossible for translation and interpretation to follow if members talk over the top of witnesses, and vice-versa. I would just encourage all members to please ask their questions and then wait for the answer, just like we do in the House of Commons.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, just on that point of order, I hope members will understand that this is my time. I have limited time, and I'm asking a specific question that the minister isn't answering. If she's not prepared to answer the question, I'll move on.

However, if we can go back into the questioning, Minister, you're attacking the Conservatives. Fair enough. You disagree with some of the things we've done. Aid levels as a percentage of gross national income were higher under Stephen Harper consistently.

The question is, what do you mean when you say "increase"? Is it a real increase, a nominal increase or an increase as a percentage of GNI? Which is it?

• (1620)

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

We have already increased international assistance. We did so in 2018 when we committed an additional \$2 billion. We did so this year with an additional \$1.1 billion. We will continue to increase that. It is something that—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, respectfully, the question just isn't being answered, so I want to just ask one brief question.

Why aren't you the governor on the AIIB? Why is the Minister of Finance the governor on that development bank uniquely, and not you?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, I'm afraid we're out of time. I've given you extra time because of the point of order that was raised. We can circle back to that in a second round of questions.

The floor goes now to Dr. Fry for five minutes, please.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much, Minister, for coming. It's a difficult job, especially since COVID-19 and that we now have to look at extra funding to help all of the problems that COVID-19 has inflicted, especially on the poorest countries.

You said earlier that there is obviously climate change and poverty causing people to be on the move. Conflict is also the third reason that people are on the move. You've talked about Africa. I know that the government has decided that Africa is one of the poorest continents and has the poorest nations there, but I wonder if you have ever recognized, looked at or worked with Europe through the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe?

They're 57 nations, and many of them are extremely poor because they are post-Soviet nations. They don't have a lot of income, and they don't have a lot of resources. I know that you're very interested in the feminist agenda, and I know that the OSCE requires a lot of help with that agenda. Specifically, hundreds of thousands of people who are on the move in Europe are facing extreme poverty, violence and trafficking. I know that Canada is not as involved as it would be, because we all think that nations on the continent of Europe and in South Asia must be rich and they don't fit the mould, but they do.

I was just going to ask you if you feel that it would be possible for your office to look at an OSCE component to what you do in future, because I think you would find that it is needed a lot in some of the poorer countries.

Secondly, tell me what you are doing in your portfolio with dealing with refugees and migrants, because women and children are missing in parts of Europe and in parts of the world where they are living in camps.

You've talked about education. I'm interested in knowing how you are hoping to help that lost generation of children who don't have any access at all to education.

If you can elaborate on that, I'd be pleased. Thank you.

Hon. Karina Gould: Certainly. Thank you very much, Dr. Fry, for those questions.

I would note that, when it comes to Europe, you're correct. Many countries in Europe are high-income countries that wouldn't qualify for official development assistance, and Canada's international assistance is governed by the ODAAA that requires us to focus our assistance efforts on the poorest and to have poverty alleviation be central to the work we do.

However, when it comes to Europe, Canada has a very significant bilateral program in Ukraine. We work very closely with Ukraine on a number of different issues. Gender equality obviously features very prominently within that as well as governance and humanitarian response, particularly in the eastern part of Ukraine.

I would also note that we recently provided \$450,000 in humanitarian assistance to Armenia through the Red Cross. There are instances where we do provide international assistance to countries that are eligible in the European region. We obviously work very closely with our colleagues and friends in the European Union on projects right around the world.

When it comes to the work that Canada does with refugees, we work extraordinarily closely with the UN High Commission for Refugees. We have projects right around the world to ensure that refugees have access to basic services and their basic rights.

When it comes to education, this is something that is extraordinarily important. I remember a conversation that I had right at the outset of the pandemic with Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, about the number of children who were out of school because of COVID-19. At one point, there were 1.5 billion children. We talked about the fact that many refugee children were never in school to begin with. That's one of the reasons the Prime Minister has mandated me to lead an international campaign to increase access to education for displaced children, either refugee or internally displaced children. This is something that we're working on with partners like UNHCR, and through our contribution to the Global Partnership for Education working group, as well as organizations like Education Cannot Wait, to ensure that we are providing education for children in crisis situations.

● (1625)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you, Minister. Two and a half minutes is a very short time. So I will get right to the point, so that you can provide an answer.

You mentioned the impact of COVID-19 on international support and assistance operations. As you know, this committee will focus on vulnerable populations and the effects of the pandemic on these populations around the world. Could you expand on that issue?

Can we assume that countries will, albeit not maliciously, divert funds normally intended for international development to fight the pandemic?

How will the industrialized nations react to such a situation in terms of international assistance?

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

As you mentioned, the pandemic has had a very significant impact on developing nations. I recall a discussion with a colleague from Africa. He told me that the vulnerable population there had reached the point of deciding whether they were going to starve to death or die from COVID-19. We have seen some extremely difficult situations.

With respect to development programs, Canada is currently working with its partners to ensure that our plans and objectives are being met despite the pandemic. That's why the \$350 million will provide some overlap this year. This will ensure that the objectives of these projects are carried out.

Of course, we have been working internationally on the issue of debts and the interest payments on those debts. We kind of put things on hold so that the governments of developing nations could use the money intended for interest payments to address the health situation in their countries. Canada is currently making sure that the response to the pandemic is an effective one.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister and Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Madam Minister.

[English]

The Chair: The next round goes to Ms. McPherson.

You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

I want to express my disappointment that the minister won't give us some of the numbers that we require. I don't want to be argumentative, but hopefully those numbers can be shared with us.

If the goal is 0.7% and we can't find out where we are or how we're getting there, what the path is, it makes it very difficult for parliamentarians to do their job, to hold us on that path, I guess. I don't want to waste my time on this because I don't think we're going to get an answer.

I have two questions, very quickly.

The small and medium-sized organization funding, we know, was oversubscribed the last time it was run. We know that we are waiting for it to be implemented again. Perhaps the minister could talk a little bit about when that's going to happen. Also, she did speak about the international campaign for education for refugees and displaced children. Could she give us some sense of when we can expect news on that, what that will look like, something that we can give to the sector to inform them of when that will happen?

• (1630)

Hon. Karina Gould: Certainly. Thank you for that, Heather.

I'm happy to have Shirley jump in at the end to answer some of the questions on the numbers. I think she probably has them now.

With regard to the campaign for education for displaced children, January 2021 is when we're looking to launch that. We have been having conversations with our partners in the sector, but that is the date that you can expect. We'll be happy to share information as it becomes available.

As for the small and medium-sized organizations, very soon is what I can say. We're just finalizing the details, but that will be coming out very shortly. We recognize how important this is. It's been a key priority both for my predecessor and for me to make sure that we continue to support small and medium-sized organizations and the important work they do.

I don't know if you want me to turn it over to Shirley to answer your previous question.

Ms. Heather McPherson: If we could get some of the numbers sent to the committee, that would be awesome. Then we won't have to waste time on that.

Hon. Karina Gould: Sure.

Ms. Heather McPherson: The last thing that I hopefully have a few seconds to touch on is in terms of direction and control. We know how important it is that we are changing some of the regulations around direction and control for the sector. We've been pushing very hard on that.

Can you tell me what your plans are in terms of supporting direction and control? We know right now that organizations spend up to \$1 million on compliance, and that's money that is not going to help the world's poorest people. What's happening in terms of the direction and control piece?

The Chair: Be very quicky, Minister; then we can circle back in the final round.

Hon. Karina Gould: Okay.

Thank you, Heather, for that question. I note that Caroline Leclerc, our director of partnerships, is on the line. Perhaps she could speak to that a little bit more broadly.

This is something we have been pushing internally within the department, to make sure that we hear and understand the concerns of partners and are working to streamline processes.

If there's time, I would turn it over to Caroline.

The Chair: I think we'll have to leave it there, just in the interest of fairness. We have two more question sessions in this round. Then we'll go to a full third round.

Mr. Chiu, welcome to the committee. The floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for making yourself available. Our job is to hold the government to account. Sometimes we have to ask very difficult questions.

Minister, did you or your staff have any discussion with anyone regarding the export of the L3Harris Wescam drone system this past spring or summer?

Hon. Karina Gould: No.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Well, that's a straight no. Good. Thank you.

In July, in response to China's enactment of the Hong Kong national security law, Canada implemented a ban on the export of sensitive military equipment to Hong Kong. Would the minister be able to provide this committee with a list of the equipment that was prevented from being exported to Hong Kong and how much it was worth?

Hon. Karina Gould: I'm sorry, Mr. Chiu. I'm the Minister of International Development, so I don't actually have a line of sight into those areas.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Okay.

In that case, then, let me ask a question that my fellow member did not have enough time to ask. With regard to the board of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, why are you, the Minister of International Development, not on the board instead of the other minister?

Hon. Karina Gould: The Minister of Finance has the authority to determine which multilateral banks Canada is a member of, and this was a decision that was taken by the Minister of Finance. I am the governor for the regional development banks—the Asian Development Bank, the Latin American development bank, the Caribbean Development Bank and the African Development Bank.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Well, one can argue that the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is also regional, to support the Chinese investment of the one belt, one road initiative. I find it inconsistent that the Minister of Finance is sitting on that instead of you. Is there any comment from you?

Hon. Karina Gould: Again, this is probably a question best placed for the Minister of Finance. They're also Canada's governor at the World Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This is not a decision I take.

• (1635)

Mr. Kenny Chiu: All right. Thank you, Minister.

Finally, in the middle of the pandemic around the world, has Canada considered aiding international agencies in the supply of PPE? Would it be the Minister of Health answering that or would it be you? Can you outline to the committee what kind of work Canada has done to support international agencies in combatting COVID-19?

Hon. Karina Gould: Yes, that is within my responsibility. We have provided support to a number of international organizations, such as Africa CDC, the WHO, the PAHO, or Pan American Health Organization, as well as ASEAN, to help them in the procurement of their PPE. Canada did not specifically procure PPE on their behalf, but we provided support for them to be able to make those procurements and distribute it around the world.

One thing we did that I'm quite proud of is that we supported the World Food Programme's logistics operation. As you will recall, in the spring a number of countries closed their borders, closed their airspaces, and were unable to deliver life-saving interventions, PPE and humanitarian assistance through normal commercial means. Canada provided the support to the World Food Programme, which is the logistics arm of the United Nations, to make sure that those really important materials could be delivered.

I note that Mr. David Beasley is coming to your committee on Thursday. I'm sure he could speak more to that as well.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Minister. That was in the past. Looking forward, what kind of plan does the Government of Canada have to aid the international community by helping them distribute the vaccines that will be coming available? Has any plan been struck?

Hon. Karina Gould: As was announced earlier this fall, Canada has joined the COVAX facility. The COVAX facility is a multilateral initiative with the World Health Organization and the global vaccine alliance to procure vaccines on behalf of member countries

who have decided to join and also on behalf of lower-income countries who wouldn't be able to make those purchases on their own. Canada has joined as a self-financing country and as well has made a significant contribution to the advance market commitment to support low-income countries in receiving and then distributing the vaccines, once they become available.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, and Mr. Chiu.

The final round of questions in this set goes to Mr. Fonseca, for five minutes, please.

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

Minister, we heard at the outset that you have a wonderful team at home. I know Alberto, your husband, and your little son Oliver. You also have a top-notch team here in Ottawa, and I'm glad they're all with you here. I had an opportunity to go through some of their illustrious biographies and to see the work they're done—your deputy minister, assistant deputies and your directors who are with us here today.

Minister, you can jump in here on the questions I'll ask, but some of them will be posed to the officials who are with you, because it's quite an opportunity for us to be able to reach out to them and hear about their experience and what they do within the ministry, and then also with you as their captain.

My first question is going to be for Ms. Golberg. Again, Minister, feel free to jump in at any time.

Through your previous experience working as a representative for Canada in Kandahar, Afghanistan, what can you say is the greatest difficulty in maintaining a focus on gender equality with Canada's international aid?

I hope I didn't put you on the spot, Ms. Golberg.

Ms. Elissa Golberg (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate the opportunity.

I would say that we're currently fully deploying all of the assets in our arsenal to support gender equality through our policy and our programming. Certainly the lessons we've learned from our experience in Kandahar are playing out in real time. The support that the minister spoke to previously concerning women's voice and leadership initiatives and supporting local human rights defenders and local women's organizations constitute perhaps one of the most important things we can do. Then, there is reinforcing this support through the work we do at the global level through international organizations, through active diplomacy and through a range of other activities at the regional level as well.

• (1640)

Mr. Peter Fonseca: That's true.

Minister?

Hon. Karina Gould: Yes, I would support Elissa's intervention on this. This is a top priority for Canada, and we are ensuring that we're doing everything possible to support gender equality.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: I have another question for Mr. MacDougall. Given your experience working to assist Jordan and help stabilize the region, would you be able to elaborate on your work in providing humanitarian assistance, Mr. MacDougall?

Again, Minister, please feel free also to weigh in.

Mr. Peter MacDougall (Assistant Deputy Minister, Global Issues and Development, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, I think Jordan is in many ways a textbook case for Canadian humanitarian assistance and also of the link with development. Jordan hosts about one million Syrian refugees currently, as well as hundreds of thousands of other ones. What we continue to do there is bring together our humanitarian and development funding to help Jordan strengthen its own national response to supporting refugees, such as through direct support to the education system or to social and health systems. We are also working with local organizations to build their capacity to support refugees.

I think it's been a remarkable success story. Jordan stands out globally as a country that has between ten and twenty per cent of its population living as refugees, with virtually no social unrest. Canada has played a very important role in achieving that outcome.

Thank you.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Minister?

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you for that, Peter. I guess both of you are named Peter, so thanks to both of you.

I would like build a little on Peter MacDougall's response. One of the really interesting innovation that Canada has been leading in over the last number of years is that when we are responding to a refugee crisis, we are also providing support to the host community as well.

We have done this both in the instance of the Middle East, in terms of our Middle East strategy, but also in response to the Rohingya populations in Bangladesh and in Cox's Bazar. We're also doing it as we're responding to the Venezuelan migrant crisis.

We've seen this be a very successful strategy for local harmony and the importance of making sure that we're serving both of those populations to the best of our ability, and I think we're seeing the results of it.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you.

We're in the midst of COVID, and we have your deputy, Ms. MacLean, here.

You have done extensive work with Service Canada, Deputy MacLean. What measures could be put in place during this second wave of COVID-19 to help with some of the difficulties that arise for the staff when dealing with casework remotely? You can—

The Chair: I'm sorry to cut you off. I think we'll have to wait for the answer at another opportunity in the final round, which we will go to now. I will continue to watch the clock carefully, because we do have some committee business at the end of our session.

Leading off in our third round is Mr. Morantz, for five minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you very much for being here today and answering our questions.

When the calculation is done at the end of the year to determine the percentage of GNI that's attributed to ODA, is that calculation of the dollars that are actually spent or is it the dollars that are budgeted? What does it include? Spent, or budgeted and unspent?

Hon. Karina Gould: I perhaps will turn to Anick Ouellette on that.

Ms. Leslie MacLean (Deputy Minister of International Development, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Minister, if I could suggest it, I think I might ask Elissa to speak to that. The OECD development assistance is part of her area of expertise.

I would note, Minister, that the question of gross national income is established every December, so that's one of the reasons why, even though we'd be aware of the funding that's been approved, we need to have the denominator of gross national assistance to be able to provide accurate percentages.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I understand the data you need. I only have limited time, though. Really, my question is, are you including monies that have been budgeted and spent or monies that have been budgeted and are unspent? Does someone know the answer to that question?

• (1645)

Ms. Leslie MacLean: Elissa.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: Spent.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Pardon me? I couldn't hear.

Hon. Karina Gould: She said spent.

Ms. Leslie MacLean: Yes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Okay. That's good to know.

I wanted to ask you about the international assistance innovation program. How much of the \$900 million that was announced by your government in February of 2018 has been spent under that program?

Hon. Karina Gould: Just to clarify, the \$900 million was over five years.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Yes.

Hon. Karina Gould: Of that, \$148 million was for this fiscal year. The number that has actually been spent, I believe, is only about \$120,000, but Peter MacDougall can correct me if I'm wrong. We are currently in the process of negotiating those projects and are on track to have a number signed by the end of this fiscal year.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Why would a program announced in February of 2018 and talking about setting aside \$900 million only have \$120,000 spent two and a half years later?

Hon. Karina Gould: It's a new program with new requirements and new tools that the Government of Canada has not used before. These are innovative financing tools. The program, once it was announced in 2018, was stood up in July of 2019. Of course, July of 2019 was just before a federal election, and it took a while to get off the ground. This is an area that is a top priority for me.

I'll be totally honest with you, Mr. Morantz. With COVID happening in the early part of 2019, we had to respond to the issues that were happening because of COVID.

I would also say that a large part of our department was seconded to the repatriation of Canadians, so now that things are—

Mr. Marty Morantz: I'm sorry. I just have limited time. I appreciate the answer. You did misspeak, though. COVID happened this year, not in the early part of 2019.

Hon. Karina Gould: I'm sorry. It was the early part of 2020.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Over two years went by between the time when the program was actually announced and when COVID happened. That's quite a bit of time.

Now, under the sovereign loans program, how much money has been spent since its announcement in February of 2018 of the \$600 million that was set aside?

Hon. Karina Gould: Again, this is over five years.

From the time a program is announced to getting everything sorted out and making sure all the agreements are in place and everyone understands what the objectives are, that takes time, and I think that's a fair thing.

On the sovereign loans program, these are currently being negotiated right now, so while money has not been spent, they are on track to be completed in the near term.

Mr. Marty Morantz: No money has been spent under the sovereign loans program. Is that correct?

Hon. Karina Gould: That is correct.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Okay.

It is a five-year program, but we're two and a half years in. Do you really think that—

Hon. Karina Gould: No. It's a five-year program, but starting this fiscal year, so we're not actually two years in. It started in July 2019, and that started with putting out a call for proposals and having conversations with different partners. That money will still be allocated into the future.

These are new things that we're doing as the Government of Canada and so we want to make sure that we get—

Mr. Marty Morantz: Are you happy with the progress at this—

The Chair: Minister and Mr. Morantz, my apologies, I think we'll have to leave it there. It was over five minutes.

The next round goes to Ms. Dabrusin, again, for five minutes, please.

Hon. Karina Gould: I'm sorry, I can't hear you.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Can you hear me now?

Hon. Karina Gould: Yes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Excellent. I'm sorry about that.

I was thanking you for being here, but I want to talk about food and food policy because that's an area I am particularly interested in.

I was looking up some information about how two billion people suffer from malnutrition in one form or another around the world, and that women and girls are at the highest risk—that 60% of the world's hungry are women, according to the World Food Programme.

I'm wondering if you can focus a bit on what we are doing now on food and nutrition.

Also, because you had mentioned earlier that we had taken particular action once the lockdown came into effect in March, what did we do to deal with food security because of COVID?

• (1650)

Hon. Karina Gould: Certainly, thank you, Julie, for that question.

When people ask me what keeps me up at night, it is the number of people who are going hungry and the increased number who are going hungry. David Beasley will probably tell you this on Thursday when you speak to him directly, but the World Food Programme is projecting a doubling of people in acute food insecurity this year, and we are seeing it play out in real time.

Canada's approach to food security is broad. We support programs like the World Food Programme, for example, which both delivers food to people in crisis and also provides a lot of school meals. One of the areas that was of great concern is that when schools closed down in many developing countries, it also meant that school feeding programs closed down.

Through support, partly from Canada, the World Food Programme—

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have a point of order, Chair.

I'm so sorry, Minister, but the French translation has gone to where I can't hear the minister now.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, let's suspend for a minute to see if that is a persistent problem or if it's fleeting.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think it's resolved now.

The Chair: Is it resolved?

Minister, please continue.

Hon. Karina Gould: On the school feeding programs, through support from Canada and other donors, the World Food Programme was able to quickly pivot to a delivery program for a number of children in need.

We also provided support to the Food and Agriculture Organization, which provided support to local farmers, as well as ensuring that they can continue to access markets, which was really important in a number of developing countries with severe lockdowns.

We also provided support to the IFAP, which is doing a lot of work to ensure that female farmers in particular continue to have access to markets.

Then when it comes to nutrition, we provided additional resources to Nutrition International, a Canadian organization that ensures that adolescent girls in particular get access to nutrition.

There is a whole range of activities and I could talk about this for a lot longer, but this has been a top priority and will continue to be in order to ensure that for those in the humanitarian space, we continue to make sure those in need have access to both food and nutrition.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you for that.

You mentioned an unbelievably disturbing number, that there would be a doubling in food insecurity worldwide because of COVID.

Have you seen anything to indicate whether that's impacting women and girls disproportionately, or is that just a straight doubling?

Hon. Karina Gould: I don't have the specific numbers on whether women and girls are more impacted, but anecdotally, that is certainly what we are seeing on the ground. Often, in lower income households in developing countries, women and girls are the last to eat, if they eat at all. That is certainly something that we are very concerned about.

I would note—maybe it seems tangential—that we are also concerned about the number of adolescent girls who won't be returning

to school. There are a number of countries where, for example, if you get pregnant, you are not allowed to return to school. UNFPA is predicting that 10 million adolescent girls won't return to schools even once they open. That is going to be very concerning when it comes to access to food, because of the role that many schools play in providing food and nutrition, particularly for girls.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: What can we do to alter that, so that girls are not kept out of school following the pandemic and disproportionately impacted in that way?

Hon. Karina Gould: There are a number of things we can do and are trying to do, but certainly, working with women's rights activists and organizations around the world is really important, particularly to have them advocate to change some of those laws and unfair discriminatory practices, but also supporting adolescent girls and encouraging them to return to school.

It's also working with organizations and local communities on harmful practices like child and early forced marriages, so that we can continue to make sure that adolescent girls have every opportunity at success.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, Minister, we know that, traditionally, international assistance has been directed to a number of countries chosen by Canada based on several criteria, which may vary from government to government.

My question is very simple: do you have any leeway? Is the government able to respond effectively to crises as they arise? I'm thinking, for instance, of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen owing to the war led by Saudi Arabia, to whom we are selling arms that are likely to be used in the conflict.

Are you able to help populations in crisis? I'm thinking, in particular, of civilians in Nagorno-Karabakh, nearly half of whom have been displaced in recent weeks and where homes have been destroyed.

Do you have the flexibility to react quickly to situations as they arise?

Has Canada intervened in these two specific cases?

Hon. Karina Gould: My answer to both your questions is yes.

Every year, we allocate \$800 million to humanitarian aid and people in crisis. Part of these funds is allocated at the beginning of the fiscal year to meet the humanitarian needs we know about. I have the list here.

We are responding to a dozen conflicts and situations where people are affected by a humanitarian crisis. We are currently helping Yemen, and I hope to be able to announce even more funds for that country soon. We have also responded to the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh. Two weeks ago we allocated \$450,000 to the Red Cross.

Our humanitarian assistance system has the flexibility to respond to crises as they arise.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, if I may, I'd like to make a very quick comment.

First, I'm not sure that \$450,000 for a crisis of the magnitude of the one in Nagorno-Karabakh is enough. Maybe it will have to be adjusted upwards.

Madam Minister, for the benefit of the members of this committee, could you send a list of specific crisis situations that the department has responded to in recent months.

Hon. Karina Gould: Of course. We can send the list to the committee.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

[*English*]

Next the floor goes to Ms. McPherson again for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think this will be a bit of a clean up round for me. If I could get those numbers on the percentage of money being spent on bilateral, multilateral and partnership branches that would be great.

Mrs. Shirley Carruthers: This fiscal year we're projecting about \$63 million to be spent through our multilateral channels, about 17% through our Canadian CSOs and the rest would be bilateral channels. Of course, these numbers could shift as we progress through the fiscal year and our spending is confirmed at the end of the fiscal year.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Ms. Leclerc, could you talk a little about direction and control? We cut you off and you didn't get a chance to respond.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Leclerc (Assistant Deputy Minister, Partnerships for Development Innovation, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you for allowing me to take part in this conversation.

As I am sure you know, this matter falls under the Income Tax Act. The Minister of Finance and the Department of Finance are therefore responsible for it. You also probably aware that Revenue Canada has established the Advisory Committee on the Charitable

Sector. Co-chaired by civil society, the committee has created a task force to look at this specific issue. A representative from the international development sector is on the task force.

We follow up very closely with our Canadian partners to ensure that we understand their situation. Of course, we interact with our colleagues at Revenue Canada and the Department of Finance to keep us up to date on the direction in which projects are headed.

• (1700)

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Ms. Leclerc.

My last question—I'll be very quick—is about the ACT Accelerator. We know that \$100 million has been given to the ACT Accelerator and \$580 million for development and humanitarian impacts. Will that be spent by the end of this year or by the end of this fiscal year, Minister?

Hon. Karina Gould: It will be spent by the end of this fiscal year.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

I'm ahead of time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson. That's always appreciated.

Next is Mr. Diotte for five minutes.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Minister, thanks for being here today.

I've got a large Ukrainian-Canadian population in my riding of Edmonton Griesbach, and they and a lot of other Canadians across the country continue to be concerned about the state of human rights and democracy in Ukraine.

How much money's being allocated by your department to support development in Ukraine and how does the money being spent correspond to the allocation since, say, 2015 or so?

Hon. Karina Gould: We provide \$50 million annually to Ukraine, and our support helps to build a strong and accountable democracy. As you mentioned, that is very important for us and contributes to peace and security in Ukraine. We also work on economic development, including through direct support to vulnerable populations such as conflict-affected populations, especially women. We are very engaged with our friends and colleagues in Ukraine. I remember having a meeting with the previous Ukrainian cabinet when I was the parliamentary secretary for international development, and they remain a very important partner for us.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: In April 2019, I had the privilege of being an official observer of the Ukrainian presidency election through the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. I was able to see first-hand the Ukrainians' commitment to democratic principles.

What tangible things is Canada doing to ensure the strength of that democracy in Ukraine? Could you give me a few examples, please?

Hon. Karina Gould: I may commit to come back to you more specifically as I don't have the Ukraine program here in front of me, but I know that we are working with the judicial system in Ukraine through the National Judicial Institute. They're providing direct support in Ukraine. There are a number of other initiatives, and I would be happy to send you the full details of our program in Ukraine if that would be of interest.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: I'd certainly appreciate that.

There are also non-governmental organizations that Canada is working with in Ukraine, I would imagine.

Is the bulk of our work with Canadian-based NGOs or large multilateral NGOs? Can you describe some of that work?

Hon. Karina Gould: I would want to get back to you on the specifics of it. We work with a range of partners in Ukraine as in other bilateral partners, some of which would be Canadian NGOs, international NGOs and multilateral partners.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: What about the RCMP? How many RCMP members are currently in Ukraine as part of the Canadian police arrangement?

Hon. Karina Gould: Again, I would have to get back to you. Public safety would be specifically responsible for that.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Just to recap, I wanted to get the amount of money that Canada is giving in foreign aid right now.

Hon. Karina Gould: How much are we giving in total or to Ukraine?

Mr. Kerry Diotte: What is the total to all countries?

I think you said it was about \$5 billion or \$4.1 billion.

• (1705)

Hon. Karina Gould: I believe it is \$4.6 billion.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: I thought I heard \$4.9 billion.

Hon. Karina Gould: Our total ODA is \$5.9 billion, but that includes multilateral development banks as well as direct bilateral programs with countries.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Okay.

One of those countries that you said was in the top 10 was Syria. With the country being practically in a state of anarchy, what would you tell Canadians who are worried that the money might not be getting to where it should be going?

Hon. Karina Gould: Let me just clarify that the money is not going to support the government of Syria. It's going to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and the people who have been displaced or are in need of housing, food, access to services for sexual and gender-based violence and education. That is being delivered through trusted international partners.

Obviously, Syria is an extremely fragile context, but it is one where there are extraordinary needs. That is one of the reasons they are one of the top recipients. It is serving the population. It does not go to the government of Syria.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Diotte.

The next series in this round goes to Ms. Sahota. Again, it's a five-minute round.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I'm just going to pick up from there. It kind of delves into the line of questioning I had.

What would you say, Minister, to Canadians or people who would be skeptical or have the worries, as mentioned by my colleague, about money going to organizations operating in countries where perhaps there is conflict and there may not be as much transparency in their system?

Hon. Karina Gould: I would say that GAC has very well developed and fine-tuned due diligence processes and tracking of the money that we send in international assistance. That is heightened in conflict and fragile settings, recognizing the challenging situations that these present.

However, we do work with trusted partners—both NGO and multilateral partners—with whom we have deep relationships. There's a strong audit function. We track the money that we spend very closely and very carefully. Our main objective at all times is to ensure that those who are targeted as beneficiaries are the ones who are receiving the assistance. When it comes to humanitarian assistance, that is extraordinarily important.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I know you touched upon it a little bit, but I wanted to give you more opportunity to talk about the work that's being done for Rohingya refugees and what the state of their camps or the state of the people is at this time. It's still a very concerning issue to a lot of people. It was highlighted in the news a lot last year, but now we're not hearing much about it since COVID has started. I imagine with the COVID issue layered on top it must be really a disaster.

Hon. Karina Gould: I know that for a number of members on this committee, the plight of the Rohingya is a top priority for you, and of course, it is for me and the government as well. As you probably recall, in 2018 we committed a \$300-million strategy for the Rohingya, supporting the Rohingya populations in Cox's Bazar and Bangladesh, as well as working with and trying to ensure humanitarian assistance and access to those who remain in Myanmar.

Of course, with COVID-19, this has been of great concern, and I've been in touch with partners, particularly in the UN system, and humanitarian operators on this issue to try to stay as current as possible on the impact that this is having on Rohingya communities. I think some concerns that we have seen are with regard to humanitarian workers' access in and out of the camps, making sure that there's transparency in terms of what the actual situation is on the ground.

I've had some good conversations with our Canadian mission in Bangladesh on this, which has been keeping me informed. Of course, like for everyone else, there are challenges with regard to access to health care and education and with regard to the impacts this is having on increased gender-based violence and ensuring that children and women are protected and have access to protection services. There is a whole range of issues.

We haven't seen a huge number of cases of COVID-19 in the camps, but we also recognize that there has also been a slowdown in testing. We remain in constant contact with our partners on the ground to try to get the most up-to-date information.

• (1710)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: With regard to the \$300 million that was invested in the strategy, how has it been spent?

Hon. Karina Gould: It has been spent in a number of areas. As I mentioned earlier, a large portion of that is obviously specifically directed at the refugees in Cox's Bazar, but we also have programming to support the local community that was already there in Cox's Bazar. It goes towards humanitarian assistance, education, providing access to sexual health and reproductive rights, and also to ensuring access to protection services for those who are experiencing violence.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much.

Thank you, Ms. Sahota.

We are at the end of three fulsome rounds of questions. I want to get a sense from the committee of whether everybody has had a chance to ask their questions or whether there are some burning questions that could still be accommodated.

The other thing we should keep in mind is that we do have some committee business on the schedule in order to help us move forward with our study that's on the books with respect to COVID in the context of fragile states and conflict zones.

Could I quickly get a sense of the views of members on where we are?

Yes, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'll say, Mr. Chair, that I know from our perspective that we're hoping for the full two hours that had been previously agreed upon unanimously by the committee, and we're prepared to stay past the 5:30 time to ensure that committee business is complete.

The Chair: Okay.

Optimistically, I don't think we need a lot of time for committee business. I don't want to prejudge that.

Are there members who have had their rounds of questions and who do not wish to ask any further questions? Maybe we can just arrive at some middle ground instead of doing another full round for 20 minutes.

Dr. Fry, you have your hand up.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There is one particular thing that I know that Canada has led the world in since 1995, and that is the issue of looking at paid and unpaid work. I know that's in your mandate.

Can you tell us where you are—

The Chair: No, Dr. Fry. I'm sorry. I was just trying to get a sense of where member are—

Hon. Hedy Fry: Oh, I'm sorry.

The Chair: —with respect to continuing.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It sounds like she has questions to ask, though, so that's great.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Sorry. I jumped the gun there.

The Chair: Maybe, for those of you who would like to ask additional questions, if we can agree to three-minute slots and let the clerk know, then she can feed me a list, and we can continue. If we can finish short of 5:30, that's great. If we have to go to 5:30, we will and then hopefully with a very short extension finish our committee business.

That's my proposal, but I'm in your hands.

We have Ms. McPherson and then Mr. Genuis.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm just putting my name forward because I do have a lot more questions.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Heather McPherson: When we do do a round.... If you'd like me to start, I can ask that question now, but I'm also happy to wait my turn as the member of the fourth party.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have some additional questions that I want to ask. Maybe if I could have the five-minute round, as I think I'm the only Conservative with additional questions. Correct me if I'm wrong, colleagues, but I think one more five-minute round for the four of us would be sufficient.

The Chair: Okay, why don't we lead off with you? In the meantime, colleagues can indicate to the clerk that they also wish to speak. We may not do a full round if there's no interest in doing another full round.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you may not agree with this characterization, but all of us are hearing from stakeholders who are concerned and have a perception that the government is recently doing much less with Canadian charities and Canadian-based organizations and instead funnelling more dollars through UN-affiliated organizations. My perspective, and I think the perspective of many other parliamentarians, is that it is very important to be working with Canadian organizations, consulting Canadian stakeholders and being in constant dialogue with them and drawing on their expertise.

However, there's one Canadian organization that has done relatively well under your government, and I note the record of significant spending through WE Charity on international development assistance during the tenure of your government, so I wonder if you can tell us how much the Government of Canada has given to WE Charity for international development since taking office?

● (1715)

Hon. Karina Gould: Just getting to your first question, Garnett, I also share your passion for working with Canadian organizations. This is a top priority for me. I would note that we've been increasing, on a year-over-year basis, the percentage of our ODA that's spent on Canadian partners. In 2017-18, it was 22%; in 2019-20, it was 25%. I aim to continue with the 25% spent on Canadian partners as a minimum.

On WE, the answer is zero.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, Minister, the records will show, I believe, that the government has spent at least \$2 million on WE Charity activities in Kenya. You've said it's zero, and I would invite you to just review your departmental records and submit a follow-up answer in writing, because the subsequent questions presume that there was spending through WE. The NGO board in Kenya had in 2017 raised significant concerns about regulatory mischief involving WE Charity, and yet the records I was able to find through the Library of Parliament show that there was \$2 million worth of spending in the 2017-19 period.

I'm just curious to know if you or your department were aware of the allegations from the NGO board in Kenya of regulatory mischief, and if that awareness impacted decisions to spend money through WE either internationally or domestically?

Hon. Karina Gould: My understanding, Garnett, is that we have not spent any money on WE from an international development point of view. I will certainly follow up with the department, but that is the information I have, and we'll look into this further. I have asked on numerous occasions, and there's nothing in our records to indicate that we have, but certainly I will follow up on this.

Thank you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just following up on some questions from Ms. McPherson, this is more of a comment, but I would share with you that Conservatives had the same concerns about the direction and control issue, and we believe that action is needed in response to the concerns of stakeholders on that.

Now to follow-up questions about getting dollars, specifically in Syria, to the most vulnerable people, various articles have been written such as in The Guardian, for example, about how money spent through UN-affiliated organizations has unfortunately led to

the patronizing of close Assad allies. Money from UN agencies was spent, for instance, through a charity that is directed by President Assad's wife, and on UN staff running up a \$9.5-million bill at the Four Seasons Hotel in Damascus that is co-owned by the Syrian Ministry of Tourism. Now, some of these organizations that are benefiting from co-operation with UN entities in the delivery of aid are on sanctions lists, but they don't apply to the activities of UN organizations.

Do you have a concern about Canadian dollars funding UN organizations that are then patronizing Syrian government-affiliated entities while delivering aid in Syria?

Hon. Karina Gould: I would just note that, from the Canadian government's perspective, we work with trusted partners, and we audit all of the projects that we fund. We—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: But you do work with UN-affiliated organizations running aid into Syria. It is the UN you're funding to deliver those programs when it comes to Syria.

Hon. Karina Gould: We work with a number of humanitarian organizations and we follow the international humanitarian law of neutrality to make sure that we are delivering to people in need. That is a top priority and principle for the Canadian government. We will continue to do that. We audit our projects as needed—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we will have to leave it there.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: These stories are in The Guardian.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, we have agreed to a five-minute round.

The floor is going to Dr. Fry now for five minutes, please.

● (1720)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you very much, Chair.

Canada actually led, and created much of the data way back in the late 1990s, on the issue of paid and unpaid work. Even within Canada, paid and unpaid work are not really recognized.

I know that one of the things in your mandate is to look at the issue of that work. What is the plan of action? How far have you gone in moving this agenda forward?

Thanks.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you so much for that question, Hedy. It's an issue that I am particularly excited and passionate about when it comes to paid and unpaid care work.

It's one issue that is incredibly important to advance gender equality. We see it here at home. We know how important it is for women's participation in the labour force, and also for their empowerment and autonomy, so integrating this into our international development work is currently under way.

We're going to have some projects to announce very soon in this area. We are looking at how we integrate this into existing projects when it comes to women's economic empowerment, and we're also having some stand-alone projects and working with some of our international partners to be more targeted and specific when it comes to care work.

There is some really exciting work going on right now within the department and within IDRC, as well as with some of our partner organizations in this space. I'm really excited about the leadership role that Canada is taking on to bring this more broadly into development work.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Actually, payment for unpaid work, which is mostly done by women, as we know, around the world, can not only help younger women and women who are at home looking after kids, etc., but also senior women as they retire. If they were able to be paid for all of the caregiving work they do within the house, which they have never been paid for, and which in wealthier countries we pay others to do, it would really make a difference to the poverty of seniors.

Hon. Karina Gould: Absolutely. Also, in terms of productivity and the ability to have more autonomy in general, women at all ages face a heavy burden of care work, whether caring for children or family members. It is something that we recognize needs to be integrated across our development programming.

I'm very excited about this work.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Do I have any more time, Chair?

The Chair: Dr. Fry, you have two minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Quickly then, I know that Canada is interested in this and has done a lot of work on it, but how are you working with countries that do not see the value of that work, or don't wish to see the value of the unpaid work that women do in caregiving?

Hon. Karina Gould: Canada uses its voice in different fora. It raises these issues in multilateral fora at the United Nations. They could be also be raised in bilateral conversations that I have with partner governments around the world, and also with local civil society organizations. One of the best things we can do, as Canada, is to support the local civil societies around the world that are advocating for these issues to make the changes necessary within their own countries.

We try to raise our voice at every opportunity to make sure that we're supporting the people on the ground who are doing this important advocacy.

The Chair: Dr. Fry, thank you very much.

Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to go back to the committee's upcoming study on the effects of COVID-19 on more vulnerable populations.

The mandate letter states that international assistance for global education would be increased to 10% of our bilateral international development assistance envelope, with a special campaign for displaced and refugee children.

As we speak today, where do we stand on this objective? Are we working with displaced or refugee children? Has Canada increased this component of its international assistance to date?

I'm going back to the question I asked earlier. What is the schedule for the coming months and years?

• (1725)

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you for the question.

Currently, 9% of our international assistance budget is spent on education, and we are on track to reach 10% in the next fiscal year. This is in line with the Charlevoix Declaration on quality education for girls at primary school level. Canada has made a significant contribution to education as a member of the G7.

With respect to refugee and displaced children, we are working with the United Nations Refugee Agency and Education Cannot Wait to ensure success for our campaign.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: In that case, I will not insult the minister by asking her to give me an answer in five seconds.

Thank you so much for your patience and for agreeing to stay with us all this time. I am very grateful to you.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you.

[*English*]

I should note that I learned that the last time the Government of Canada funded WE in Kenya was in 2008. I believe that was under Prime Minister Harper.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

The final set of questions, taking us to the end of our scheduled time with the minister, goes to Ms. McPherson for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You have two and a half minutes left, Minister, and then you're free.

I do want to clarify something. I know that the WE Charity and Free the Children are not considered good development partners, so I wanted to clarify that was for Free the Children and WE. I could see that we likely wouldn't be funding them much, but thank you for that clarification.

The question I actually have for you is on climate change. At this moment in time, at the forefront of the government's mind will be a response to and a recovery from COVID-19, of course. The benefits of building resilience to shocks has been made clear during this pandemic, as so many other things have been made very clear.

As governments work to protect their citizens and recover, it is essential that climate change be addressed at the same time. This fiscal year marks the end of Canada's current climate finance package. How will the upcoming climate finance package continue Canada's leadership on gender and climate change, and support women and girls as they undertake climate action, and recognize that Canada has an important role to play and a fair share to contribute?

Hon. Karina Gould: Absolutely, thank you for that question, Heather.

I think if there's one thing that COVID-19 has taught us, it's how interconnected the world is, and that applies to climate change as well. What we're seeing is a lot of people recognizing that the impacts we're feeling because of COVID-19 are just a microcosm of the impact that climate change will have. Absolutely, Canada will continue in its leadership role with climate change moving forward.

As you probably noted, in my mandate letter from the Prime Minister I'm tasked with working on the intersection of women's rights and climate change. We've already undertaken a couple of initiatives, particularly with IFAD, which works primarily with small-scale agriculturalists—primarily women in sub-Saharan Africa—on building climate resilience and adaptation.

We have been consulting with partners here in Canada and around the world over the past eight months who are helping to feed into and build into our next climate financing initiative.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I would encourage the minister to ensure that a significant chunk of that investment is channelled through Canadian civil society organizations.

As the minister will know, the share of Canadian civil society organizations in Canada's ODA has shrunk over the last several years. While we may be on an upward trend, it is still not back to where I feel it should be. I wonder if the minister could comment on what she feels would be an appropriate division between multilateral and civil society investment.

The Chair: Could you respond very briefly for a closing comment, Minister.

Hon. Karina Gould: Okay.

I'll just say that I agree with you, Heather. I think it's very important for us to continue working with CSOs and to continue to be on an upward trajectory in terms of growth. My colleagues in the department will know that I am pushing them every day on this, and very much advocating and working with our Canadian CSO partners, because they are important and integral to Canada's ability to deliver effective assistance.

Thank you for your advocacy on their behalf, as well.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

Minister Gould, on behalf of the committee, thank you so much, and your entire team, for being with us today, for your testimony, your time and your service. It has been a very productive and fulsome conversation.

We will let you depart.

I wonder if I can keep colleagues back for a couple of minutes, just to explore some options we have with respect to committee business.

Thank you very much. We'll let you and your team disconnect.

Hon. Karina Gould: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Colleagues, we have a couple of options.

We have about 15 minutes. We have a hard stop at 5:45 p.m. because of other committees that need to do their work.

We have a full slate on Thursday. We have three items of business, including some questions of approvals. We can do a couple of things. We can do this in public, if you agree; we can transition out quickly and come back in camera, as originally scheduled; or we can punt it.

I don't think we should punt it—that is my view; it's not your view, but you may share it—simply because of the COVID study on the slate that requires some approvals from us.

What is the sense of the committee? Should we take committee business and keep it in a public setting, or should we go in camera quickly and then see if we can get it done in the next 15 minutes?

Ms. Sahota, first.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Let's go in camera.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Oh, in camera. I was going to say to stay in public because it takes very long to transfer to an in camera meeting.

The Chair: Okay, I think we need a pretty unanimous view. I don't want to vote on on going in camera or not. If colleagues feel strongly that we should be in camera, we can be. I think we were faster last time. We went in camera within about five minutes, and that gives us about 10 minutes of discussion time.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I said, "stay in public," right? That's what I said.

The Chair: Yes, but I think there are views to the contrary. I just want to make sure that people are comfortable with their decision.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I was confused that maybe I had misspoken as well.

The Chair: Okay, so let's duck out, come back and focus on what we can get done in the next 10 minutes.

Does that work?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, has an in camera link been sent around already?

The Chair: Yes. I believe it has been distributed.

Madam Clerk, could you just verify? I think we have it.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): Yes, Mr. Chair, it's in the same email.

The Chair: Okay, so let's reconnect in a few minutes in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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