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Chair: Mr. Sven Spengemann



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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Colleagues, welcome to meeting number 39 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[English]

We're meeting today pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on May 25, 2021, to receive a briefing on the current situation in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

[Translation]

As always, to ensure the smooth running of the meeting, I encourage participants to mute their microphones when not speaking and address comments to the chair.

When you have 30 seconds of speaking time left, either during the question period or your testimony period, I will signal you with this card.

You can access the interpretation services by clicking on the globe icon at the bottom of the screen.

[English]

I would now like to welcome our witnesses from Global Affairs Canada. We have with us this afternoon Troy Lulashnyk, director general, Maghreb, Egypt, Israel and West Bank and Gaza; and Karen Garner, director, Israel, West Bank and Gaza.

Mr. Lulashnyk, the floor is yours for your opening remarks of five minutes.

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk (Director General, Maghreb, Egypt, Israel and West Bank and Gaza, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm very grateful for this opportunity to speak with you today about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This issue has persisted for decades and we've all witnessed the tragic consequences of the latest outbreak of violence. There were 253 Palestinians killed in Gaza and 27 in West Bank, along with 13 Israelis killed. As mentioned by the Prime Minister and again in our recent speech to the UN General Assembly, this included families, women and children, and should serve as a stark reminder that we each must collectively do more to prevent the violence and address the underlying causes.

We were horrified by the over 4,100 rockets fired at Israel by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, both of which are listed terrorist organizations in Canada, and we were appalled by the vio-

lence that took place in Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank, a situation that we continue to monitor very closely.

We very much welcome the ceasefire and have turned our attention to reinforcing it. We need to have a constructive dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians, supported by concrete projects, in order to get to a place where they can both live in peace and security, with dignity, without fear and with their human rights fully respected. To this end, as a part of the Prime Minister's announcement last week, there's a specific \$5-million allocation for peacebuilding.

We're also heavily engaged in addressing the emergency needs in Gaza. Prior to the conflict, we were already very concerned about the humanitarian situation in terms of food, clean water, medicine, electricity and sustainable livelihoods. Unfortunately, the situation has worsened significantly, first with COVID and the considerable strain the pandemic placed on the Gazan health care system, and then with the aftermath of the 11-day conflict.

The UN issued a consolidated appeal in this regard and, in response, the government just announced a contribution of \$25 million for humanitarian, development and peacebuilding support. Ten million dollars will respond to the UN consolidated appeal for immediate humanitarian needs, \$10 million is focused on recovery and rebuilding over the next nine months and \$5 million is for the aforementioned projects to inculcate peace, stability and greater social cohesion among Israelis and Palestinians.

These efforts, combined with those of UN agencies on the ground, dedicated NGOs and the work of other donors, will strongly support the ceasefire and address the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. We're working with partners now to get help to those who need it the most.

While critical, these measures only help to address some of the immediate problems. The underlying severe pressures still remain, and we must work towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, including through the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel. This is profoundly difficult.

We fully recognize and strongly support Israel's right to assure its own security, and this comes with a significant responsibility to act in accordance with human rights and international humanitarian law. We remain very concerned about settlements, evictions and demolitions, which are a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and are serious obstacles to peace. We're particularly worried about the current cases in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan.

Moreover, all of the final status issues—borders, Jerusalem, refugees, security and recognition—need to be addressed. We support direct negotiations between the parties so that these complex issues can be resolved through dialogue.

This is our best path forward: negotiations, supplemented by urgent, concrete support on the ground to reinforce hope and build a more peaceful future for all Israelis and Palestinians.

Thank you.

● (1535)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lulashnyk, for your opening remarks and for being with us this afternoon.

We will go to round one of our interventions. They consist of six-minute segments.

Leading us off this afternoon will be Mr. Chong.

Please go ahead. The floor is yours.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing to brief us on the situation.

I noted that the government, during the recent conflict, highlighted the rocket attacks on Israel that were coming from the Gaza Strip. I also noted that the government's statement called on foreign entities that support Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to end their material and financial support for these groups.

I'm assuming that the foreign entity that the government is referring to is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Is that correct?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Thanks very much for the question.

Obviously we have great concerns about Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism, and indeed, Iran's behaviour throughout the region—in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and in Gaza—is a serious concern for this conflict and for the broader regional peace and security.

We are quite concerned about external support that Hamas, in particular, receives as it continues to fuel this conflict.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for that answer.

As you pointed out in your opening remarks, Hamas and Islamic Jihad are terrorist entities listed under the Criminal Code of Canada.

I'm interested in finding out from you what material support they are getting. The government obviously has indicated that they're getting financial support, but what kind of material support are they getting from Iran? Is Iran supplying ready-built rockets or the raw

materials for those rockets? Is it supplying personnel? What exactly does the material support consist of?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: We know that Hamas has been controlling Gaza now for well over a decade, and it has maintained its control and been able to function because of the flow of money, the flow of material support—and that can include weapons—into Gaza. We are concerned about all of those things that you mentioned.

I draw the chair's attention to the recent past, a few years ago, when a number of tunnels were discovered in Egypt along the Rafah area along the border, and we learned of material support in all manner of items being smuggled in through well-established tunnels. Goods and money going into Gaza and supporting Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad are profoundly concerning, and continue to be a significant concern for us and indeed for the Israelis. It is also one of the reasons why it is difficult to get assistance into Gaza. It has to be done in a way that does not in any way contribute to the capabilities of Hamas.

Thank you.

● (1540)

Hon. Michael Chong: Iran obviously is a big player in this conflict.

The Prime Minister indicated in 2015 that the Government of Canada intended—that he intended, as head of government—to reopen Canada's embassy in Tehran. Can you tell us if that is still the case?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: My colleagues deal with Iran and the overall relationship. I can commend them to respond, in due course.

I would say that our bilateral interaction with Iran is very limited. As you know, we expressed a whole series of concerns associated with Iran related to the human rights record. We are the annual sponsor of the resolution at the UN and have very serious concerns about their weapons programs, ballistic missile programs and, as mentioned before, significant concern about the role that Iran is playing—

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Thank you. I have one quick final question before my time runs out.

We know that the big counter to Iran in the region is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Government of Canada has indicated previously that it welcomed the Abraham Accords. What impact will the recent Gaza conflict have on the status of the Abraham Accords and their potential extension to other states in the region?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: I think these normalization agreements are indicative of changing attitudes in the region. We see growing ties between Israel and a number of countries, such as UAE and Morocco. Even with Saudi Arabia, the interactions have increased. I think this is a very positive thing, one that we have welcomed. Collectively, there is a joint concern about terrorism and about Iranian intentions in the region. I think we would welcome, and we do welcome, the normalization agreements and hope that this can build foundations for a more peaceful circumstance and a more peaceful environment. We'd like to support them where we can.

In terms of the recent conflict, of course, what we'll talk about today is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is really a core issue for a number of countries in the region. This is difficult when you're having countries build ties together, but hopefully, with the ceasefire, we can reinforce it and move to a more positive environment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Ms. Saks, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our officials for being here. Thank you for the hard work you do on behalf of Canadians and for making yourselves available to the committee today.

Let me start with this. I am an Israeli Canadian citizen. I lived in Israel during the second intifada. I have been witness to, and unfortunately present at, terrorist bombings. It's an indescribable and awful experience. It's hard for Canadians to relate to it from here.

During the recent conflict, I had family huddling in bomb shelters. I know the stress of worrying for their safety. Is everyone from Canada's mission staff in Israel all right? Is their mental health okay? Is support available to them during this time?

• (1545)

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: As it was just described, I think this is very similar to the sentiment and feelings from our hard-working embassy staff, locally engaged staff and families. With 4,100 rockets being fired towards Israel, there was not a lot of time to race to the bomb shelters.

It's very frightening. Certainly, the psychosocial component is very significant. I'd also say that the psychosocial need in Gaza and throughout the region is also very significant. What this portends and suggests to all of us is that we need to get to a better place. We need to sit down and slowly build something so that we can step away from the violence and the conflict and move to a better future.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Absolutely. Thank you.

Unfortunately, at this time, with Hamas in a leadership role in Gaza and its absolute control in the planning and coordination of military activities there, life in Gaza for Palestinians is difficult and challenging. The military wing is really not distinct from the civilian leadership on the ground. From my understanding, women and LGBTQ and religious minorities face discrimination in treatment, as do political dissidents.

In light of that persecution and other things that we've heard on the ground there, dealing with humanitarian on the ground in Gaza is challenging. How would you respond to that?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: The situation in Gaza before the 11-day conflict was almost unlivable, as the UN would say. There was a lack of water, medicine and health care. Unemployment has skyrocketed. The economy has nearly collapsed. It is a very difficult environment to live in. It has been exacerbated by COVID, and then by this conflict.

As was mentioned, Hamas is controlling the place. We have no interaction with Hamas, as a listed terrorist organization, and the real challenge for everyone, for all donors, is to get the assistance to the people who need it. There are large numbers of vulnerable people, and in a way that doesn't benefit Hamas.

It is profoundly difficult to do that. It can only be done through extensive measures, working with our trusted partners, our humanitarian organizations with experience on the ground, to get the help where it is needed most. We can do it, but it is certainly made more difficult by Hamas's control.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: On that note, since 2014, Hamas has been holding the bodies of Israeli soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul. Since 2014, Hamas has also been holding Avera Mengistu, an Israeli civilian, prisoner, as well as an Israeli Bedouin civilian, Hisham al-Sayed, since 2015.

Are there any indications, especially now with the ceasefire discussions that are going on, that, after nearly seven years, Hamas is willing to return the remains of Goldin and Shaul to their families for burial or release the additional hostages?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: I'm certainly very well aware of the issue. I have met with the Goldin family personally. I have made a number of efforts to try to encourage the Palestinian Authority to exercise influence to have the remains returned. I know that, as a part of the post-conflict environment, Israel has really pushed the issue to say that this is wholly unacceptable and it must be addressed.

Right now, this is a very live issue, and it's something that the Israelis are hoping to resolve quickly.

• (1550)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: It certainly would be in the efforts of moving toward peacebuilding.

On that note, I am personally very pleased about the peacebuilding funding, the \$25 million that the Canadian government has allocated. I worked on people-to-people initiatives, including some CI-DA-funded ones in the early 1990s as part of the Oslo accords. They're essential for building the foundations for peace, for both Israelis and Palestinians in the region.

Could you possibly provide more information on why this funding is so important, and what kinds of initiatives Canada will be supporting, perhaps a bit more than what you mentioned in your opening remarks?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: I absolutely agree that peacebuilding is fundamental to getting to a different place. What was so alarming about the crisis... There were many things, but one of them was that you had violence in Jerusalem and you had violence throughout the West Bank, and really the issues of social cohesion and getting to a place where you can even envisage two peoples living together side by side in peace and security were a long way from that.

We really need to build within communities a feeling of harmony and acceptance. That's what we endeavour to do with our partners and with this approach. As was mentioned, we have been doing a bit of peacebuilding and working with NGOs, bringing disparate groups together to try to make a difference. We will continue that practice and, I think, amplify it in a number of key ways, having groups come together and discuss openly the issues, the frictions, the challenges and finding a way forward for that harmony.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Saks.

Thank you very much, Mr. Lulashnyk.

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

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

I thank Mr. Lulashnyk and Ms. Garner for being with us today.

I want to emphasize that, if not a lasting peace in the region, the conclusion of the peace agreement with a number of Arab countries is certainly most positive. However, to state things plainly, the agreement is essentially an acknowledgement of the normalization of the relations that have been established over the years.

The latest clashes have made it clear that as long as there is no peace agreement between Israel and Palestine, these countries will live in a permanent state of war. To use an oft-cited formulation, peace in Israel and Palestine, under the circumstances, is merely an absence of war pending new confrontations.

We feel each new confrontation with great pain. So I can hardly imagine how painful it must be for the Israelis and Palestinians who experience the clashes on the ground.

I therefore call for a lasting peace agreement between the two peoples as soon as possible to end the ongoing state of war in these countries.

In this regard, is it reasonable to believe that the political instability on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides is detrimental to the resumption of negotiations between the parties?

[*English*]

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Thanks very much.

I very much agree that we can only have this “just and lasting peace”.... This is a nice phrase, but in practice, what does it mean and how do you get there? As was mentioned, this is the latest exacerbation and conflict, but this has been persisting for many years and decades, and it is painful for everyone. We obviously need to deal with the most urgent humanitarian needs—medicine, lifesaving interventions—instantly, but then we need to rebuild the foundations to get to that place where we do not have these conflicts take place at all. The only way you do that is to deal with the underlying causes and frustrations that happen.

I agree as well that the challenges.... If you look at the most recent conflict, you see we had some immediate causes like marches and violence in and around Al-Aqsa, but underlying that you had the Palestinian Authority cancel elections. They haven't had elections in the territories for 15 years. Everyone was registering to

vote and excited. It's a young generation. They wanted to exercise their democratic rights, and the elections were cancelled. There was already considerable frustration on the ground there in situ.

Also, I'd say, on the Israeli side, they are still in the process of coalition formation after four elections in the last couple of years. It is a very difficult political environment in the region, and it's hard to build a framework, a foundation, without that more politically stable environment.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Lulashnyk. You answered my question very well.

I want to come back to the issue of the elections in Palestine. I was surprised to see the Government of Canada speak out publicly and in some respects admonish the Palestinian Authority for suspending the elections. I have two concerns in this regard.

The first is the situation in East Jerusalem. As you know, Israel prohibits the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem from participating in elections on the Palestinian side. Nor are they allowed to participate in elections on the Israeli side. This was one of the reasons given by the Palestinian Authority for suspending the elections.

My second concern is about the vaccination situation on the Palestinian side, which is not very advanced, which means the pandemic is still virulent on the Palestinian side.

Can we not understand the motives that led the Palestinian Authority to suspend the electoral process?

[*English*]

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Thank you very much.

Indeed, the Palestinians indicated that the reason for cancellation was that they didn't think it would be possible to have voting take place in East Jerusalem, although I don't think that, at the end of the day, that was ultimately decided.

There are also the other factors. Within the negotiations between Fatah and Hamas in the lead-up to the elections, they tried to reach an agreement and have a unified Palestinian government, and those negotiations were ultimately unsuccessful. Furthermore, within Fatah, there were a lot of different political ambitions and machinations, which made it very difficult to have an outcome that would bring the stability that I think the PA and president wanted. Very much, it was difficult for a variety of reasons.

On COVID, I agree. I think this is another challenge. The combatting of COVID and vaccinations remain slow in West Bank and Gaza.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Thank you very much, Mr. Lulashnyk.

We'll now go to the final questioning in this round, with Mr. Harris for six minutes.

• (1600)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you, sir, for joining us, and thank you to all of the witnesses.

First of all, let me say at the outset that we all abhor the deaths that have taken place in recent days, the 293 deaths on both sides, 280 of whom were Palestinians and 13 of whom were Israeli citizens. That's to be condemned. This type of violence and death is to be abhorred.

I want to move to some of the structural issues and problems that gave rise to this circumstance, and also talk about Canada's role in all of this, in the sense of our own foreign policy.

I want to start by raising the concern that has been raised by Canada's failing to continue to support the United Nations resolutions that have been condemnatory of illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories for some decades now. I want to suggest that Canada ought to change this policy, but also underscore the fact that Canada stands ready, as the minister said recently, to assist when negotiations have been achieved. This is in fact providing an incentive to the status quo.

If I may, I want to quote from an individual by the name of Daniel Levy, a former negotiator with the Israeli government in the peace talks, who suggests that other roads should be taken. He was talking to the UN Security Council about a year ago after the annexation proposals were dropped, or at least stalled. He says that this was not a cause for self-congratulation. There's no reward for the avoidance of criminality, he said.

He talked about the peace process, as currently framed, as being a deeper structural problem. As it was currently framed and pursued, he says it is “a place of refuge from hard choices”, a comfort zone with a law of diminishing returns, that it has a lock-hold and has brought us to the brink of annexation and the precipice of the Palestinian Authority's financial collapse. He said it's not a question of resuming negotiations, of more of the same guarantees, further deterioration...a failure of learning, politics and imagination.

Daniel Levy further says that there's been some talk about “creating the conditions, the building blocks for future progress that can deliver equality, dignity and security for Palestinians and Israelis”, and I think that's what we all want. He also suggests that there needs to be accountability for human rights and international law. In the case, of course, that we're dealing with, the allegations against Israel, he says, “If the unlawful and peace negating policies [of Israel] continue to be met with impunity, then there should be no expectation of positive change. It's that simple. Israel pursues policies in violation of international law and...UN resolutions be-

cause it can.” He suggests that human rights and international legality should be “our guiding star”, no longer subordinated to maintaining a peace process that has so palpably failed to deliver.

I'd like you to comment on that, sir, in respect of Canada's position, which used to be strongly supportive of UN resolutions seeking to ensure that it was recognized that the occupations were illegal and looking for some change.

Why did Canada stop supporting those resolutions? Doesn't he agree that the impunity of Israel with respect to this occupation is in fact incentivizing a lack of progress in the peace talks?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Thanks very much for the comments and questions.

On the UN resolutions, we have been voting pretty much in the same way for a number of years. That is predicated on the view that there are far too many one-sided resolutions that unfairly single out Israel. Each year at the United Nations you will have 19 to 23 resolutions—depending upon the year—all of which make all kinds of commentary on Israeli behaviour, but there's no discussion of other players in those resolutions, for the most part. I think that's one of the reasons we have voted fairly consistently.

I would note that we did have a vote change on the self-determination resolution that took place in 2018, to send a message that we very strongly support the two-state solution and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. That's on voting.

On the negotiations of a broader Middle East peace, Canada has been very active for many years on this and very active in the past several years, as well. The former U.S. administration put a lot of effort into it, with U.S. President Trump's so-called “deal of the century”. We went to the economic part of their plan to see where it was headed. One of the key problems with that plan was that it fell far below the international consensus. All the red lines related to the final status issues. There have been efforts for encouraging Middle East peace. They've just been fairly unsuccessful and unrealistic.

Moving forward, I think we really need to work together collectively to prevent these kinds of conflicts from occurring. We will do our part. We are very significant in supporting the diplomatic part of that peace and the humanitarian and development part of that peace. We very regularly work with our colleagues in the new U.S. administration, with the U.K., the EU and our partners in the region to try to get it on track.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thanks very much. We'll have to leave it there.

We'll now go to round two. Leading us off is Mr. Morantz for five minutes.

Please, go ahead.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Thank you very much for the information you've given so far. I also want to thank you for pointing out that when it comes to UN resolutions, Israel is unfairly singled out compared to human rights issues with many other nations. I appreciate that you're making that point.

It's kind of a complicated situation when it comes to the aid that we're providing. I know the government's announced \$25 million. We're providing aid into a region.... We all know we need to help Palestinian citizens in the aftermath of this latest conflict, but we're dealing with a region that is controlled, as you said, by a terrorist organization that has not had an election for 17 years.

How does Canada make sure that the aid that goes into the region isn't falling into the hands of the wrong people and isn't winding up somehow with Hamas to build more rockets, rather than getting to the Palestinian people who so desperately need this assistance?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Thanks very much.

Indeed, this is a significant concern for us and for all partners who do work in this area. The answer is that we put in place very significant controls on all of our projects that go into the region—particularly in Gaza but in West Bank as well. We apply what is called an “enhanced due diligence” system to our funding. That has a whole series of measures. There are anti-terrorism lists and based on our funding agreements, we use those lists. We work with our partners.

In a previous capacity, I was our representative on the Global Counterterrorism Forum, so I know a little bit about this part.

We supplement these lists and assessments with practical program implementation measures like screening, oversight, partners, site visits and verifications. We have teams in Ramallah that will go into Gaza and make sure the money goes to where it is needed. We also rely on trusted UN partners.

• (1610)

Mr. Marty Morantz: I really appreciate the answer, but I have limited time, of course.

Would you be able to table that list of aid recipients with the committee?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Sure, Mr. Chair, I'm happy to provide in writing a list of the recipients for our first tranche of addressing the emergency field in the Gaza, the \$10 million—

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you. I appreciate it.

That's for the \$25 million. Is that correct?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: I would say for the first \$10 million, this is an emergency intervention in response to the appeals, and those recipients are known. The other portions are still being worked out.

Mr. Marty Morantz: All right. Please provide it to the extent that you know them.

Now, I want to ask a question.

It came to light last fall that anti-Semitic materials were being distributed through UNRWA to Palestinian students in Palestinian schools. At the time, I was encouraged when Minister Gould issued a statement saying that she instructed Canadian officials to investigate the references in school materials, in the West Bank and Gaza, that violate UN values of human rights.

I did an OPQ question and the response I got didn't mention anything about an investigation. I asked what the status of the investigation was and who the Canadian officials were who were involved

in this investigation, and there was no information with respect to that. I'm wondering if maybe they left it out and that you could enlighten us as to what the nature and status of the investigation is.

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Thanks very much.

Indeed, we were very concerned about the problematic educational materials that were sent out. We expect UNRWA to uphold UN values and principles.

Minister Gould immediately called the commissioner-general of UNRWA and has subsequently spoken with a large number of her counterparts to discuss this issue. She indeed asked officials to investigate what happened, what measures were being taken to rectify and remedy the situation, and what will be done going forward.

I'm pleased to indicate that we have very diligently been working with UNRWA, with the C-G, with—

Mr. Marty Morantz: Will a report be issued on the investigation?

The Chair: Mr. Morantz, I'm sorry. We'll have to leave it there. You'll have a chance to perhaps follow up in a second round.

We'll give the floor now to Ms. Sahota, please, for five minutes.

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

I appreciate both of the witnesses being here today and their experience and depth of knowledge. I have a few questions to get through.

Canadians have been watching this unfold very closely, and many have been horrified at the human rights violations they have seen. As people have been digging into it and more and more of my constituents have been asking me questions about Canada's role in this, I want to understand it better but also understand Canada's view as to the viability of the two-state solution.

You look at the map currently, and it's like a whole bunch of puzzle pieces. There have been more and more expansions of settlements and forced evictions happening into the Palestinian territory.

What effect does that have on the fact that Canada believes in a two-state solution? Do we then believe, if we do not recognize the annexation of East Jerusalem and other territories in Gaza, that Israel would have to cede that area? What are our thoughts on that?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Thank you very much.

That's a very good question. There are those who will say that the two-state solution is a dream that wasn't realized and a number of Palestinians have lost faith in the prospect of it. Certainly what has been happening on the ground with settlements, with evictions and with demolitions, has made it much more difficult to come to ground and to work towards a two-state solution.

However, if you take a step back and consider it, if the ultimate goal is that Israelis and Palestinians can live together in a secure environment, this is the path. The only way we're going to get there is if we sit down and investigate.

In terms of the land, the borders, those are issues that need to be worked out in the ultimate negotiation, so that we can get to a place where you have a viable Palestinian state. They both want to be secure. Neither side is going anywhere, so we need to work towards a two-state solution.

• (1615)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: If we are acknowledging the inherent illegality of the current land ownership, what do you think Canada's role can be in helping make sure that each have clear...? If we're working toward a two-state solution with clear borders that are defined, what can we do to help that happen?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: On settlements and changing of geography on the ground, we have been very strong and vocal that settlement, evictions and demolitions are illegal, are contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention and must stop. We have articulated this to our partners and to our Israeli friends publicly many times, as have other partners as well. What I think we need to do collectively is that partners need to talk about getting the right conditions in place to move us closer to that two-state solution, and that includes stopping evictions in settlements, which are happening now.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Can you help me better understand why 138 countries that are a part of the UN have recognized Palestine as a state, but we have not yet? Can you explain to me a little bit more as to why Canada has taken that stand?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: What I would say is that we believe in the creation of a Palestinian state, but you can't just announce it. We need to collectively work together and get the circumstances so that there is a contiguous, viable, sovereign Palestinian state that works and functions. Unilateral declarations or actions that try to prejudge those negotiations, which are the only way forward, are problematic and obstacles to getting to where we need to be.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Can I quickly try to squeeze this in? Maybe you can even answer it later on if I run out of time. The normalization of diplomatic relations with Arab states and Israel, as we've seen over the years.... I mean, Egypt was always there, but now we've seen increased relations with other states like the UAE. Has that had an impact in the current Israeli-Palestinian relations?

The Chair: Give a very brief answer, please, Mr. Lulashnyk.

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: I would say that I think it's been a positive regional relationship. The Palestinians are concerned that.... This was a negotiation coin, where there wouldn't be normalization until more work was done on the Palestinian issues, so they are worried about it, but ultimately, it's a positive thing. It brings stability.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll have to leave it there.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

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

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

I want to come back very quickly to the fact that Canada still has not recognized the Palestinian state, because it is supposedly not viable.

I should point out, however, that for many years, Israel seems to have been doing everything possible to ensure that the Palestinian state is not viable. When I had the opportunity to visit the country after another confrontation between the two peoples, I found that Israel was essentially surgically targeting the infrastructure of the Palestinian state, such as the police stations, the port and the airport. Since everything is done to destructure the Palestinian state, I wonder if we are not part of the problem by refusing to recognize Palestine.

Be that as it may, I want to come back to the issue of the Palestinian elections and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering that Israel has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world and Palestine has one of the lowest rates on the planet, don't you think that as an occupying power, Israel has a responsibility to the populations under its occupation and that Israel should contribute to the vaccination of the Palestinian population?

• (1620)

[English]

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Certainly, on the vaccination question, we are quite concerned about the current state of affairs in the West Bank and Gaza. We have been discussing, with our partners, with donors and with the Palestinians, the plan for vaccination in both those areas. I've been told by the Palestinians that they are receiving doses from COVAX, and they have received and are receiving more vaccinations from other countries, partners and donors.

Getting Palestinians vaccinated is a key priority for all the donor community. It's part and parcel to the work we're doing, collectively, to help Gazans and Palestinians. You can provide medicine and food, but if COVID is still rampant, you're fighting a losing battle.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I totally agree. However, since I am running out of time, I will ask you again.

Given the fact that vaccination is, in practice, finished on Israeli territory, do you believe that Israel has a responsibility as an occupying power to provide vaccines to the populations under its occupation?

[English]

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: I know Israel was asked that very question, and it indicated that it did not feel it had a responsibility to vaccinate the Palestinians. Other measures were taken for the Palestinians, but Israel did, indeed, facilitate the movement of vaccines through Israel and into the Palestinian territory.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

I will now give the floor to Mr. Harris, for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, again, to the witness.

You referenced the Canadian government condemning settlements, evictions and demolitions as illegal, but you didn't mention the occupation, as such. We have a situation where, as long as this goes on or the longer this goes on, we see the permanent denial of the freedoms, rights and equality of the Palestinians on a longer basis. Clearly, something has to be done to stop that.

While you might vote against the resolution because you don't like the preamble, could Canada not be stating that it regards this occupation as illegal and look for an end to it?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Canada's policy is long-standing. We do not recognize permanent Israeli control over the territories from the 1967 conflict, which includes east Jerusalem, Gaza, the Golan Heights and the West Bank. This is what makes the settlements the Israelis are building in those territories illegal and contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

I very much agree that we need to work on the two-state solution, step by step, so that we can improve the lives of all in the region.

Mr. Jack Harris: Why then, where there are allegations of human rights violations against both Hamas and Israeli soldiers, does the Government of Canada prevent serious investigations into these human rights, including at the ICC?

• (1625)

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: With respect to the International Criminal Court, our position is very clear and has been stated many times in 2015, 2018 and 2020. As soon as the Palestinians sought to accede to the Rome Statute of the ICC, Canada indicated that it did not support Palestinian accession to the Rome Statute as a state, and that is—

Mr. Jack Harris: But Canada didn't argue that case before the ICC when it had an opportunity to do so.

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: The same rationale for not supporting unilateral actions that prejudice the outcome...like accessions, and the Palestinians have sought to accede to dozens. In fact, they mention probably 300 instruments, treaties and—

Mr. Jack Harris: Isn't that preventing Palestine from becoming a state, the element of international co-operation and acceding to international norms? We urge that on all sorts of states or entities we aren't happy with. Surely, acceding to statehood expects responses from them as individuals and as a government as well, so this is something that is positive in nature, is it not, instead of exclusive? Should it not be a force for positive instead of exclusion...?

The Chair: Mr. Harris, that's your time.

If we can get a very quick answer from Mr. Lulashnyk, that would be great. Then we'll go on to the next speaker, please.

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Thanks very much.

I appreciate the comment. I'd just say that a number of these efforts for accession are driven to send a message. It's not really about the Palestinians wanting to participate in the chemical weapons convention, for example. It's to make a political point.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next up is Mr. Genuis, please, for five minutes.

Go ahead. The floor is yours.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to start by making a comment that has been brought up about the issue of Palestinian elections. I believe very much that Palestinian self-determination involves Palestinians choosing their own representatives. The implication of what some have been saying is that you can't have elections unless there are ideal conditions in terms of voting in all parts of the claimed territory, but if that were the practice in general, there would be no elections happening in Ireland, in Cyprus and in many other places.

In fact, the Central Tibetan Administration just held elections, even though Tibet remains fully under CCP occupation and the CTA doesn't have any official access to Tibet whatsoever. I would just submit that if the CTA can hold elections, the Palestinian Authority could hold elections. Nations of people seeking independence should begin the process of nation building without delay, and effective nation building requires democratic elections.

To our witnesses, I'm very concerned about the political human rights and humanitarian situation in Gaza, so I want to ask a few questions that relate to that.

During the conflict, Al Jazeera reported that an important humanitarian corridor, the Kerem Shalom border crossing, was subject to a mortar attack by Hamas and was shut down for a period of time. This obviously had significant negative impacts in terms of the ability to get humanitarian supplies into Gaza.

Can you confirm whether this humanitarian corridor was indeed attacked by Hamas? Do you have any sense of why Hamas would have attacked a humanitarian corridor like this?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: I hesitate to be a confirmation, but what I can say is that I heard from our partners that incidents, including this one, have occurred, and that humanitarian actors and supplies were either targeted or prevented from entering.

In terms of the reason, again, it's hard for me to speculate, but obviously the intention and the pressure on all parties Hamas may not have wanted alleviated instantly, to keep the pressure on and keep sending the message. One of the reasons specified for their frustration was the cancellation of elections, where they hoped to do well. They were very frustrated with the overall situation with the Palestinian Authority, and the result was the significant conflict.

Hamas, at least in this time frame, became more popular among some Palestinians for being a defender.

• (1630)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's just horrifying that Hamas would attack a vital humanitarian crossing like that. I think it's testimony that's important for people to hear.

I maybe just want to clarify that the importance of having democratic elections take place, where they can take place in the West Bank, involves a system whereby whoever wins that election isn't able to take complete control through an armed takeover. That's essentially what happened in Gaza previously. Hamas, after winning one election, made sure there were no subsequent elections taking place.

According to the Israeli military, of the 4,340 rockets fired by Hamas, close to 700 of them landed in the Gaza Strip, destroying infrastructure, injuring hundreds and killing dozens. Does Canada have estimates about how many Hamas rockets landed in Gaza and the impact of these rockets on Palestinian civilians?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: I don't want to give precise statistics, Mr. Chair, but I can say that the numbers we have heard are very similar to those just quoted.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Matthias Schmale, UNRWA's director in Gaza, described Israel's attacks as "precise" and "sophisticated". After making these comments, he was recalled from his post. Hamas effectively demanded that he be fired. What does this say about UNRWA's ability to operate in any way independently?

To follow up on Mr. Morantz's comments, will there be any public reporting on this alleged investigation being done by the Minister of International Development with respect to UNRWA?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: We are learning about the issue related to the UNRWA director in Gaza. We're looking into that. To me, it indicates the extreme tension that takes place in Gaza. You have an organization trying to represent the UN and support the people, and their values and interests are often extremely different from those of Hamas, a listed terrorist organization, and other groups in Gaza. The tension is always there. This is certainly another indication of that taking place.

On the issue of the educational materials, as mentioned, we have had a series of meetings and discussions. A number of measures have put in place, including the launch of a digital learning platform. That has a vetting procedure of three steps. Educational materials, before they're posted online, are evaluated in terms of neutrality and appropriateness. That is in place now. Those neutrality discussions, which Canada funds through its programming, are ongoing. We're having meetings every couple of weeks.

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there.

Thanks very much, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Oliphant, please go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Lulashnyk, for your time with us again.

Going back to the elections issue, I'm wondering if it's fair to say that Canada has done two things: called upon the Palestinian Authority to have elections as soon as possible, and called upon Israel to ensure that all who voted the last time could vote this time. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Yes. That's absolutely correct. We very much think that the Palestinians are long overdue. The Palestinian people deserve to exercise their democratic rights. We have raised it with the Israelis on numerous occasions to help make this happen.

• (1635)

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I bring that up as an example of one of the ways in which Canada is attempting to be helpful and also strong on both sides. It was raised by a number of members of the committee, so I wanted to stress that as an example.

Getting off elections for a moment, I know that you bring particular expertise, having been our ambassador in Egypt, so I want to talk a little bit about the role of Egypt in the negotiation of the ceasefire as well as in this ongoing peacebuilding moment that we are in, and Canada's potential or possible support for Egypt and how we could play a role—or if we should play a role, in your opinion.

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Thanks very much.

Yes, I would say Egypt played a critical role in helping bring about the ceasefire with extensive conversations and negotiations with the Israelis and with Hamas and others. I think they really carried the weight of this burden in this latest conflict.

We had a team that went into Gaza just a couple of days ago. They could see Egyptian flags and pictures of President Sisi in a number of places. I think the Gazans really appreciated President Sisi's direct intervention.

The Egyptians have done this a number of times over the past few years as the conflicts have increased. They're certainly an important player for how we can engage to build peace in that relationship. Jordan's another key player. They're the two that have had peace treaties with Israel for some time.

We are talking with the Egyptians and our foreign minister has had recent discussions with his Egyptian counterpart. Egypt is absolutely one key partner in the region and one that we'll continue to engage.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I'll go back to the topic of elections. In the briefings you've had from our missions, what is your sense of what will happen with the election and with the coalition building that's happening in Israel now? Do you think we're into a period of instability or stability? How might this affect the possibility of the ceasefire holding?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: I try not to be overly optimistic, but I would say that as long as we can reinforce the ceasefire with emergency intervention, it will hopefully hold and we'll continue on this path. I think, at the end of the day, none of them wants to see more of the tragic consequences that we experienced. I think that's positive.

The domestic political situation in Israel has been chaotic and very difficult for a number of years with four elections. I think Prime Minister Netanyahu has been successful up to this point in maintaining his role, but just recently we have what they call an anti-Netanyahu coalition, which has indicated to President Rivlin that they can form a government. We'll see what happens with the voting in a couple of weeks whether there is a different coalition in place.

There are those who would say any kind of actual coalition is a stabilizing factor, and they just want to get on with it. There are those who express concerns about the direction of the coalition.

In Israeli society, we see a very strong support of Israel, settlements and settlers. In building that space between Palestinians and Israelis, there's concern about how successful we're going to be in the near term, but we continue to work very closely with our Israeli friends. We continue to work with our allies and partners and with the Palestinians. There is only the path of prosperity and stability because that's what everyone wants.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant. That's your time.

If you have a very brief question, you might be able to slide it in.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: The brief question would be with respect to the ICC. Canada was strong in saying that under the statute of Rome, we didn't believe that Palestinians had a recourse there. However, I believe we've also said we respect the independence of the prosecutor and the court itself and will watch that unfold.

Is that fair as well?

Mr. Troy Lulashnyk: Yes, we're reviewing and watching the investigation carefully and very strongly supporting the ICC. This is the cornerstone of the rules-based international order that we need.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

Colleagues, that will take us to the end of our scheduled time with our witnesses this afternoon.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of committee members, I would like to thank the witnesses for their testimony, expertise, and, especially, for their participation.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for your testimony this afternoon. It was very beneficial to the committee. Thank you, Mr. Lulashnyk and Ms. Garner.

Colleagues, with that, I have brief points of business. We will let our witnesses disconnect at their discretion.

We have coming to us tonight or tomorrow the draft report on arms exports. We will begin consideration of that report on Tuesday. Would members agree to revert to our previous practice of having suggested amendments distributed in writing beforehand?

I think it worked quite well last time. If that's agreeable, I would suggest Monday to the clerk, if it's in one language only, or Tues-

day by noon, if you have bilingual amendments. It's not a hard requirement in the sense that colleagues should be free to introduce amendments or suggestions from the floor. It just made our work easier in the COVID report, and with respect to the sessions we have on arms exports, it may be efficient to do it that way.

Is there agreement, if you have amendments, to circulate them Monday in one language and Tuesday by noon, if you have them in both? Is there any opposition to that?

Mr. Jack Harris: That doesn't take away from the opportunity to bring them—

The Chair: No, not at all. It's simply an efficiency mechanism. If you have substantial amendments, it might make it a little easier for colleagues to be able to respond to them and make our work a bit more efficient in the coming sessions.

Colleagues, thank you very much. I know we're not at the full two hours today because of the hard work we did in the previous session. That bought us some extra time, but we can turn our thoughts to arms exports during that hour. I thank you for your cooperation and excellent testimony this afternoon on a very complex issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I would like a clarification.

I understand that we are about to end our meeting. Would it not have been possible to continue our exchange with officials on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

[*English*]

The Chair: As for the notice of meeting and their availability, we had them for an hour and we chose to respect that.

We did have a witness who was tentatively slated for the second hour, and that witness was unavailable. As a result, that hour opened up, but we had already confirmed with officials that they would make themselves available only for the one-hour briefing.

Just to be respectful of the timeline and the notice of meeting as circulated, with your agreement, we will leave it there. The committee, of course, is free to revisit the issue as it chooses going forward. I think all members will have an interest in remaining seized of the substance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I just want to express my disappointment. No one, obviously, is responsible for the situation, but we had the opportunity to see among ourselves how we had so few meetings left before the summer break. So it is unfortunate that we are losing an hour out of the few hours we have left.

The Chair: I agree, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

It's not an ideal outcome, but I'm sure members can put that extra hour to good use with respect to thinking ahead to our work on arms exports, on which I'm sure there will be some discussion.

It's not perfect, but I think, in light of the circumstances, it's the best outcome we could achieve collectively on this with the will of the committee as was expressed in the subcommittee report.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

With that, I thank you. Stay healthy.

Thank you very much for your co-operation.

[*English*]

We will see you on Tuesday.

This meeting is adjourned.

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