



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 009

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Chair: Mr. Sven Spengemann



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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Good afternoon, colleagues. Welcome to meeting No. 9 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[English]

Pursuant to the motion adopted on January 31, 2022, the committee is meeting on the mandate letter of the Minister of International Development. To ensure an orderly meeting I would like to outline a few rules to follow, as usual.

[Translation]

Interpretation is available for this meeting by clicking on the globe icon at the bottom of your screen.

For those of you participating in person, please keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

[English]

Please note that taking screenshots or photos of your screen is not permitted. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name.

[Translation]

When you have the floor, speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, please put your microphone on mute.

I would also like to remind you that comments and observations made by members and witnesses must be directed to the chair.

[English]

Colleagues, without further ado, I would now like to welcome Minister Sajjan to the meeting along with a team of senior officials.

We have with us from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Peter MacDougall, deputy minister of international development and assistant deputy minister, global issues and development.

[Translation]

We also welcome Caroline Leclerc, assistant deputy minister, Partnerships for Development Innovation.

[English]

We also have Sandra McCardell, assistant deputy minister, Europe, Arctic, Middle East and Maghreb; and Paul Thoppil, assistant deputy minister, Asia-Pacific.

On behalf of the committee, I extend a very warm welcome to all of you.

Minister, I will now turn the floor over to you for five minutes of opening remarks. Members will then have the opportunity to ask questions.

Please go ahead, Minister Sajjan.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of International Development and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the members of this committee.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, everyone.

[English]

I'm here to speak with you today about Canada's international development portfolio. Before I begin, I want to address the current situation in Ukraine.

President Putin's invasion of Ukraine is a blatant attempt to replace the international rules-based order with a world where might makes right. This is an attack that undermines international law. This is an attack that undermines the efforts of the United Nations. I want to be clear: Ukraine is not Russia. The people of Ukraine must be free to determine their own future. We will stand alongside our Ukrainian sisters and brothers.

This pandemic has also shown us that, as a global community, we can come together during times of crisis to protect the lives of those who are threatened. Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have seen the first increase in extreme poverty in more than two decades, showing that we need to coordinate global action for long-term and sustainable solutions to overcome growing poverty and inequality. We need to improve food security and nutrition and expand education and job creation. We need solutions that focus on disadvantaged and marginalized groups, especially women and girls, who throughout the pandemic have been disproportionately affected. Women and girls have too often been responsible for caregiving duties during this pandemic, losing years of schooling and income.

As I said last week at the United Nations General Assembly, it is easy to look around at cities in the west and think that the pandemic that has ravaged our world is over, but what has been true for the west has not been true for the rest. The colour of your skin should not determine how long you must wait to receive a life-saving vaccine.

We all have a part to play to end this and to ensure equitable vaccine access. That is why Canada has been a leading donor to help end this pandemic. Canada has committed over \$2.7 billion in international assistance to provide emergency health care and support increased disease surveillance and infection prevention. Canada has supplied water, sanitation and hygiene to help keep children in school. Just about half of these funds, \$1.3 billion, has helped provide more equitable access to COVID-19 medical supports, from oxygen to personal protective equipment. Canada has made available 100 million doses through COVAX and bilateral donations.

We know that donations are not enough. Canada is supporting low- and middle-income countries to accelerate the distribution and production of COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines in-country. Providing this support helps these countries build resilience to future health crises.

I also want to take a moment to talk about the importance of our feminist international assistance policy. This policy, created back in 2017, is extremely personal to me. I have seen what it means when you give women and girls real and meaningful opportunities. It was the opportunity my sister received when she came to Canada. She eventually became a Harvard graduate because of this, but she started going to school sitting underneath a tree. Since we adopted our feminist international policy back in 2017, we have increased our investment in initiatives that target gender equality by over 600%—from \$86 million in 2017 to \$610 million in 2020-21.

I also would like to take a moment to speak to our ongoing commitment to address the record levels of humanitarian need across the world. Canada's assistance has provided meaningful, timely and life-saving assistance to those most desperately in need. In 2021 Canada provided \$43 million to meet humanitarian needs in Ethiopia. Since August 2021, Canada has allocated \$106 million in humanitarian assistance in response to the desperate conditions facing many Afghans. We continue to work with key partners to find sustainable development solutions for Afghans, while ensuring that the rights of women and girls are at the heart of everything we do.

Mr. Chair and committee members, our government remains committed to building a better world—a world that is more equal, a world that is more just and a world that we all deserve to live in. Through our work and our international assistance efforts, Canada is achieving results, building a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world for all.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

● (1540)

The Chair: Minister Sajjan, thank you very much for your opening statement.

Colleagues, we will begin with our rounds of questions. You'll recall what I've done in the past. When you're down to the last 30

seconds in your time, I will signal with this yellow card. It's a very manual, very analog mechanism, but it is proven.

I'm advised that after the first hour, the minister will have to leave us. We will then continue with officials. For that reason, I will be particularly tight on time during the first hour to make sure that everybody gets their time in with the minister.

We will now go to round one for six-minute allocations.

Mr. Genuis, you are leading us off this afternoon. Please go ahead.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here, but I want to express my disappointment that you're only here for an hour. The committee has unanimously requested twice that you make yourself available for the full meeting. This is a critical file at a critical time, and your predecessor, Minister Gould, was always available.

Are you willing to stay for an extra hour, in accordance with the unanimous request of this committee?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Regrettably, I have a very important meeting that I need to attend. However, as I've said to you personally and to many others, I will make myself available to you at other opportunities as best as I possibly can to make sure your questions and concerns are answered in other ways.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I hope the next time you come to the committee, it will be for a two-hour time slot. Maybe we could even give you more opening statement time in the process.

I want to ask about the situation in Ukraine. Canada announced a donation matching program with the Canadian Red Cross. During past crises, I heard concerns that the government's selecting certain organizations and leaving others out in matching programs had the effect of directing private donations to particular organizations and not to others. In some cases, they're directed away from Canadian diaspora-led organizations with strong connections in both Canada and the recipient country.

Could you explain why the Red Cross is the only organization selected so far? I mean no disrespect to the Red Cross for the great work they do, but would the government considering matching opportunities for additional organizations with long track records, such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The question the member poses is one that I think many people also have. If I may, I'll explain the situation in Ukraine and the analysis we're using to provide the support.

First of all, we've been monitoring this situation in Ukraine very closely, even before, when the troops were being amassed. We're working very closely with the UN. That's why we went very early to announce the \$50 million in development and humanitarian support. It was so that funds could be there and be ready to be flexible enough to provide humanitarian needs and be flexible enough if the situation changed, as it has.

When it comes to the matching program, we've worked with the Red Cross for some time and have a very good mechanism in place. Keep in mind that I have spoken with many of the other organizations, especially the UCC, about what support they provide, and we have other mechanisms to provide additional support if needed.

Because we have that one program doesn't mean that we can't use others as well. What we're trying to do is look at all the needs, address the gaps and provide the support, but do it in a way that's fast enough that it will make sure we have support on the ground. There is, for example, the \$100 million that we announced.

This is all in anticipation. We'll work with other organizations, not just with one program. We'll look at other opportunities as well.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I understand what you're saying. That match program doesn't preclude other avenues of collaboration.

It does seem to me to be a problem, though, that in any crisis—and we've seen this in other cases—the immediate instinct is to go to the big international organizations, when there are Canadian diaspora-led organizations that are already very active on the ground and strongly connected to institutions on the ground. In some cases, they are more so than international organizations.

However, the knee-jerk instinct is that these are people we've worked with in every crisis, so let's go there. It doesn't seem to me that it would be that difficult to say that we know UCC and CNEWA are actively engaged on the ground in Ukraine, so let's match donations to these organizations since they know the problems and they know the issues.

• (1545)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First of all, one thing I know is that Canadian generosity has a limit. Whether it's them working in Ukraine or other countries, we've been working very closely with the organizations that are here. I've been trying to meet as many as possible to look at how we can enhance their work and the work they're already doing, but what we're trying to do is look at the best way to move the support into the two organizations.

Like I said, I've spoken to the UCC and I've spoken to other organizations. We're looking at what the best way is to provide the quickest support. Sometimes when you do various programs, there are different mechanisms that you can go through. What we have been doing is trying to move as quickly as possible on this. In fact, we've been probably leading the way. It was us and Finland who initially were the only ones to provide donations to the UN, and we've been trying to get ahead and anticipate the problems.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister.

I want to get one more question in with the time I have. This is with respect to vaccine equity.

Your government has imposed increasingly coercive policies targeting Canadians who have chosen not to take the COVID-19 vaccine. Meanwhile, many people around the world still don't have access to vaccines. These are folks who want the vaccine and include, in some cases, frontline workers and the elderly.

In total, for the continent of Africa, less than 15% of people are fully vaccinated. It seems like it would be a win-win for your government to end vaccine mandates and increase the number of doses we're sending to other countries, so that we can get those vaccines into the arms of those who need them and want them.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'm glad you're raising the point of vaccines for people around the world. It is very important.

Just imagine the complexity of moving vaccines in a country like ours. We have to work with and listen to the countries that we're trying to help. We're looking at not just the number of vaccines or therapeutics, but we need to look at their health system and what can be absorbed. We are working with many different organizations to move this as quickly as possible with one important point, that we will do it in a way that's respectful to them and their needs.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Genuis. That's your time for this round.

We'll go straight to Mr. Ehsassi for six minutes, please.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing before our committee today. I certainly recognize how incredibly busy you are on a number of different fronts so we're grateful that you made time to be with us.

Last week you were in New York at the United Nations for the appeals conference. Given what we have been witnessing over the course of the past week, as you can imagine Canadians are very much concerned about developments in Ukraine and they fully expect that we will be a large part of the coordinated response to the humanitarian disaster unfolding there.

Could you share with us what Canada is doing insofar as humanitarian assistance is concerned for Ukraine?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: What I want to state here is that, because of the tremendous relationships that we've had with the diaspora community, we have a good knowledge base of what is going on. This allows us to make sure that our humanitarian support gets to the right people. More importantly, we need to try to anticipate.

As I stated, we were one of the first nations, alongside actually only two nations, to provide humanitarian support through the United Nations early on, and other organizations, and to provide flexible funding so that if the situation changed they could adjust on the ground. That's exactly what's happening right now. We knew that the Canadian generosity was going to be there, so we have the matching funds and we have flexibility to do more.

The big appeal.... When I was at the UN I spoke with Martin Griffiths, who's in charge of OCHA, to discuss what the next steps were. We moved very quickly to announce our \$100 million Canadian for support. What we are also doing is coordinating our support with the USAID. I had long discussions with administrator Samantha Power. She has sent a team, and so have we, to help coordinate our response but also to make sure that we coordinate our response with the EU who are actually leading the coordination piece there.

We know that there's a particular focus on Poland, but we also know that other nations are seeing different needs so we're trying to get that better sense and be as flexible as possible. In times of crisis what we want to do is to move the resources and the funds to the right places so that they can have the flexibility to respond very quickly on the ground.

• (1550)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much for that.

As you have suggested, I suspect that you will remain very much focused on developments in the Ukraine. Would that be fair to say and are we, in all likelihood, to hear of more announcements to come as we attempt to address developments in Ukraine?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We are monitoring the situation extremely closely. In the briefings that I had today, one from the intelligence side but also from our humanitarian side, I was briefed on the numbers of refugees who are going to different cities and we are monitoring exactly which cities they're going to. The UN are making adjustments as well. The Putin regime is making it extremely difficult for that work, so we are asking for humanitarian access and making sure it gets to the right areas.

It's been a daily adjustment. We want to anticipate the needs so that the funds can be ready and available to the agencies that provide it. Plus we also know there's tremendous generosity from Canadians and companies as well, and we're looking at ways we can galvanize that support.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

You've been very articulate insofar as where the challenges arising from COVID are concerned and how various countries should step up their efforts. Given that you have been squarely focused on this issue and that Canada is assisting through multilateral fora, as well as on a bilateral basis, how do you think we compare as a country to other ones insofar as assistance to other countries is concerned?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Just imagine the complexity of the logistics around vaccinating the world. One thing I want to stress that we are taking very seriously from a Canadian perspective is that, rather than create a plan for a country, we want to be able to hear what their needs are. They have some tremendous abilities but we

also know they have their challenges as well, so we want to figure out what their absorption capacity is and what those needs are.

In some countries, the vaccine is not the issue. It's actually getting the vaccine into arms. In some cases, we need to get the supply. We're coordinating our efforts with Gavi, USAID and many others to look at where we have existing programs where we can provide support and leverage it. We're looking at where we have the best knowledge and, from that, we listen to them and look at how we can best provide.

For us, the best method to provide vaccines is actually through COVAX, so that it can be a coordinated response to making sure that the vaccine arrives at the time when the country needs it. That's extremely important for making sure that we provide the right resources, moving forward.

Plus, we want to look at how we can reinforce and build the health systems within those countries as we provide the support for vaccine rollouts.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: I think I'm almost out of time.

Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ehsassi.

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Bergeron, good afternoon. You have the floor for six minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here. We really appreciate it. You are so likeable that we would have preferred to benefit from your presence for longer than a single hour. I guess that will have to wait for another time. As you said, we will have many other opportunities to discuss all these issues that are of concern for both sides. So we will take all these opportunities to discuss them and to make sure that we work together for the betterment of our fellow human beings all over the world. Thank you once again for joining us.

In your mandate letter, the following is stated:

Continue to help support Afghan citizens through humanitarian assistance and to work with our allies to protect democratic and human rights, including for women, girls and minorities.

As you must know, the fear of being prosecuted under the Criminal Code is one of the difficulties currently faced by Canadian organizations operating in Afghanistan. This is because the Afghan government is considered under Canadian law to be a terrorist organization.

On February 17, my colleague, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, attempted to pass a motion in the House of Commons to remove this threat and thereby facilitate the work of our organizations on the ground. Unfortunately, this motion was defeated. It did not receive unanimous consent.

What do you think about this legitimate concern of non-governmental organizations, who need to be assured that they will not be prosecuted if they have to do business with a government that is classified as a terrorist government by Canada?

• (1555)

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the member for the question. I just want to say that I will always make myself available if members have any concerns. We can be more flexible there.

When it comes to Afghanistan, first of all, the situation is very concerning. The humanitarian crisis is real and we need to provide that support to the Afghan people themselves. This is one of the reasons we moved very quickly to move \$56 million in support. We're looking at additional humanitarian support as well, working with the United Nations and other organizations. As we do this, we want to make sure we send a very strong message, consistently, that the rights of women are protected and that there is equitable access to health. We'll work with our allies for this.

Yes, we all have to follow the current law. I'm working with my colleagues on how we can move forward to address this issue. That's why we're working as quickly as possible on this. Keep in mind that the humanitarian aspect of the support will continue. We're supporting the Afghan people even through some of the challenges that the existing law poses when it comes to working in an environment where the Taliban, as a terrorist entity, is currently running the country.

At the same time, I want to stress that we're here to support the Afghan people while we hold the Taliban to account and send a very strong message that human rights need to be protected, especially for women.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Minister, I appreciate your answer, but the fact is that in Afghanistan, as in Ukraine, we currently do not have agents on the ground to monitor the delivery of humanitarian aid. The same is true for Tigray, by the way. So we have to rely very often on non-governmental organizations, but in the case of Afghanistan, there are some particular circumstances. Canadian humanitarian organizations are afraid to do their work on Afghan territory because they fear, on their return, that they will be prosecuted under the Criminal Code for having had to deal with local authorities that are considered illegal in Canada.

So I know that you are aware of this problem, but I can't tell you just how much we need to find a solution to support these organizations in delivering humanitarian aid on the ground in Afghanistan. We know how much the Afghans need this aid and we need to find a way to deliver it.

As I briefly mentioned, we are facing the same situation in Tigray and in Ukraine, where we don't have agents on the ground to ensure delivery. How do we track the aid that is given by Canada to ensure that it actually gets into the hands of the people who really need it?

Just before this meeting, I was giving an interview, and a journalist was telling me that, as a matter of fact, Canadian aid and military support were being channelled through Poland into Ukraine, but once across the border, we had no more control.

So what should we be doing, Minister, to ensure that the aid we provide actually ends up where it is needed?

[English]

The Chair: Give a brief answer in the interest of time, Minister, please.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We are seized with this, and this is why the anticipation of the situation was very important. We worked with the United Nations very early on looking at scenarios were this to happen. This is why at the United Nations, first of all, we stockpiled three months of supplies very early on, and now they are adjusting their support within Ukraine as to where those supply depots are.

The invasion and the atrocities are creating a problem because of the safety of the people; however, the United Nations has not left and they continue to work. This is why that coordination effort is very important, and we will continue to do that.

• (1600)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Thank you very much, Minister Sajjan.

I will now turn the floor over to Ms. Idlout.

Welcome to the committee. It's great to have you. The floor is yours for six minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik.*

I am here in place of my colleague, member of Parliament Heather McPherson, who is currently in the Ukraine. I am not as familiar with this area as I'd like to be, but I think naturally we are all very interested in what's going on with the Ukraine and specifically with the women there.

I have three very quick questions, the first one being this: Can you please confirm the status of funding for the Ukrainian Women's Fund in Kyiv?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I just want to say that all the funding we provide and the work that we do always goes through our feminine assistance policy to make sure that, regardless of the situation, we look at how it impacts women. I'll let the assistant deputy minister get ready to provide the details on that.

I'll give you an example. There is a concern right now because, as you know, the majority of the men are staying to fight, and the women and children, especially the elderly and young children, are moving to the border. The department is working on how we can assist with making sure, not only that support is going to be provided, the protection of women, but also that there are organizations specialized in these types of situations.

The bigger concern is the women who are inside Ukraine. This, depending on the situation, will be far more problematic, but the United Nations is on the ground and we are working through them. Also, with local organizations, depending on the severity of the fighting, connection or disconnection can occur with them. That's why we're working through them, and the plan that we had in place is to continue to focus on this. Anything that we do always goes through our feminine international assistance lens.

Peter, do you want to provide more details on that?

Mr. Peter MacDougall (Deputy Minister of International Development and Assistant Deputy Minister, Global Issues and Development, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I'll pass to my colleague who is responsible for Europe and the Middle East, Sandra McCardell.

Ms. Sandra McCardell (Assistant Deputy Minister, Europe, Arctic, Middle East and Maghreb, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I can confirm that, for the non-governmental organizations on the ground in Ukraine, we set out weeks ago to ensure that they had the flexibility to pivot their programming, both on priorities and on geographic area, given the fluidity of what was taking place on the ground.

Specifically on the Ukrainian Women's Fund, they are still active, but they have moved into areas where they can work and where it is safe for them to work. Part of that is that they've given the funding to communities, but given them more flexibility to be able to use it.

What I can say is that they are there. They have needed to adjust to the changing circumstances on the ground, but they have flexibility and are still responding to needs of women.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik.*

What kinds of increases can we expect to see in Canada's aid budget to give the feminist international assistance policy the funding it needs to succeed?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: It is in the mandate letter that the Prime Minister has given me. He also included, in our government's throne speech, increasing our international development funding. I am very proud to say that the work that has started is having a significant impact. Where—

Ms. Lori Idlout: I'm sorry. Can you describe what kinds of increases we can expect?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We are creating a plan that will go out to 2030. There will be opportunities. We haven't fully developed them yet, because the mandate letter was just written and the budget is coming up. Over time, we will, but the plan is to increase it.

How we do it is going to be equally important. We want to make sure that the.... It's not just the increase in dollars, but how we spend those dollars is going to have a significant impact. We want to make sure that the sustainable development goals are met through our feminist international assistance policy. We'll have more to say on this as time goes on.

● (1605)

Ms. Lori Idlout: I'm wondering if the minister has heard from the Ukrainian Women's Fund about what their specific needs are.

How will the government be pushing for women to be included in the talks when it comes to ensuring that their needs are being met.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: As Sandra mentioned earlier, in times of crisis, rather than us trying to determine from Ottawa what exactly needs to be done, we want to provide the funding early on and give them the flexibility to be able to adjust. That's what they're doing. If more is needed, we'll figure out different ways.

We're monitoring the situation very closely. Our team is in contact. In fact, we have a team on the ground to help coordinate some of the work. "On the ground" is not inside Ukraine, but outside so that they can work with the United Nations and many other organizations to try to do what they can. Our job, when a gap is identified, is to try to fill it as quickly as possible.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik.*

We've been hearing ideas in today's debate about ways we can support Ukraine. Through the talks you have had with groups over there, can you give us a description of what's been shared with you and your offices about what the needs of Ukrainian women are at the moment?

The Chair: Give a brief answer, in the interests of time, Minister. Thank you very much.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The necessities of life are extremely important. That's everything from making sure they get food and medicine, and we have programs in place for.... Imagine the atrocities that the people are witnessing. We're making sure that they have the mental health support as well.

Our team will continually work to look at what those needs are. Keep in mind that those organizations on the ground are the ones that will get those details, and we will then move as quickly as possible to provide the support. That's why that \$100 million was very important to provide that flexibility.

The Chair: Ms. Idlout, thank you very much.

Minister, thank you.

We will now go to our second round of questions. The first allocation of five minutes goes back to Mr. Genuis.

Please go ahead.

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

I want to pick up, Minister, on the discussion about the feminist international assistance policy. From my perspective, one of the critical aspects of this needs to be addressing sexual violence and, in particular, as part of our engagement and development, confronting instances where international organizations, potential partners or recipients of assistance from Canada, haven't taken these issues seriously enough. There is the potential for significant power imbalances in those situations, not unlike what could exist in the military. We've seen some of that, sadly, here in Canada.

I'll start with a question about UNRWA. In 2019, a confidential report from the UN Ethics Office was leaked to The Associated Press. The report identified serious sexual misconduct allegations against managers at UNRWA. At the time, this UN agency promised to review these so-called "management-related matters"—their words—and report back.

There hasn't been any news since on the status of the report. It's been three years. This is a recipient of Canadian development assistance. Could you update us on the status of the review happening at UNRWA?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: First of all, to your first question regarding the challenges we face around the world, this is a challenge around the world and we have seen the challenges here in Canada.

From my own personal background, being from a very small village, I've seen it first-hand through my mom and some of the challenges she had to go through because my dad was here. She had to raise her kids and go outside to get water when you don't have water in the house. Those are things my family is particularly attuned to.

With respect to the report itself, I'm not aware of this report so I will ask Peter if he has any further information on this.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Again, I will turn to my colleague for the Middle East. Sandra I believe worked on that report, but I will let her fill in the details.

Ms. Sandra McCardell: Thanks very much.

We have been working very closely with UNRWA on a number of issues to improve and strengthen their management. That report is certainly something they are going to need to act on. At the time, there were changes that took place in the management structure and there were codes of behaviour that were put in place at the time. As you will recall, there was a change in management in UNRWA following that report.

I'm happy to provide more details on that if it would be of value to you.

• (1610)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Were individuals held accountable for their actions specifically pertaining to sexual misconduct?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: UNRWA undertook an investigation and established afterwards appropriate measures in response to that report.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: But were individuals held accountable? If you don't know, you can report back later to the committee, but if the answer is no, then I would like to hear that outright.

Were individuals held accountable for actions related to sexual misconduct?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: UNRWA undertook a review. Regarding specific individuals, I will need to get back to the committee. I know there were consequences. I can provide details at a later date.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you very much.

I want to go back to the minister with respect to the World Health Organization. Over 40 women from the DRC have come forward to speak about sexual exploitation they experienced from representatives of the World Health Organization during the Ebola crisis. This was during the 2018 to 2020 period.

What actions have you taken to hold the WHO accountable for this and to ensure the same things are not happening in the context of the COVID crisis?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: In fact, in my first meeting with Dr. Tedros I had raised this issue with him. We know this is a much wider issue as well, but I wanted to raise it particularly with him because their organization plays the very important role of building confidence in organizations. That confidence is important for the work they do.

He assured me that action has been taken. As we continue our work and the opportunities come to travel into this area, this is something I will continue to raise.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I don't doubt that he would have professed to you that action had been taken. Are you able to advise the committee what action was taken and whether individuals were held accountable for the abuses that were perpetrated? This is over 40 women coming forward, so I assume that it would have been possible to identify perpetrators and specifically hold them accountable for actions that were taken.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: In fact, it is one of the things we are going to be following up on. We talked about that. When we go to visit—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just to clarify, are you still planning on following up on that?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I had the first meeting with him by virtual. Of course, I will have to follow up on it. Rather than just having that meeting I want to take further action on what was discussed. It's difficult sometimes in a 20-minute meeting to have that follow-up. We want to—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I'm almost out of time, but I just would say could you report—

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I just want to answer your question.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes. Let me just say could you please share further information with the committee in writing on this because we would like to hear what that follow-up is.

Would you be able to provide further information to the committee in writing? I'm just out of time. It's five minutes.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Absolutely. We will follow up on this and get the information for you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Genuis. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Sarai, please, you have five minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister Sajjan.

Minister Sajjan, in Ukraine the situation's pretty dire. There are their own refugees who are fleeing, particularly women and children. There are also thousands of international students who are studying there from India, from Africa and from Latin America.

There have been reports from various news stories, Khalsa Aid and others that a lot of those students are being discriminated against when they are trying to cross to Poland.

Have you been able to talk to your counterparts either at UNHCR or with the Ukrainian officials to make sure they get some safe passage?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'm glad you raised that. In fact, we spoke with the deputy at UNHCR just yesterday. This is on the end of the Prime Minister and also Minister Joly, who have raised it. I will be sending a much stronger message once I have the opportunity to go into the region.

We have been assured that steps are being taken, but it is very concerning what is taking place. We need to treat everybody equally.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, you're a decorated soldier. You've had two missions to Afghanistan, and you've actually been directly on the ground in Afghanistan and probably discussed first-hand with Afghans who need support direly.

Can you share with us what you learned from your experience in Afghanistan on what they need humanitarian-wise and how Canada is helping provide that?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The humanitarian situation on the ground is extremely dire. Food scarcity and food security is a significant issue. I have spoken with David Beasley from the World Food Programme about this. He has actually visited on the ground. He is getting more access into areas where he wasn't able to get before. He was appreciative of Canada's quick response to provide the \$56 million.

We are looking at other avenues of earlier support that was going to Afghanistan. Obviously, we will be adjusting that towards humanitarian support. As we do this, we want to make sure that we still send a very strong message of human rights, especially for women and girls.

• (1615)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

Minister, the pandemic has shown that as a global community we must come together in a difficult time. The colour of your skin should not determine how long you must wait to receive a life-saving vaccine.

Can you tell this committee how Canada is leading the fight on COVID-19 abroad, particularly in Africa, Latin America and other places where the rate isn't as high yet as in North America?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We're currently co-chairs with Indonesia and Ethiopia on an organization that represents 92 nations, so that we can come together and listen to what those concerns are. Far too often what I see is that we want to help, but we sometimes do it in our own way.

Canada has been very different, I would say, because we have a very diverse community. We have a better understanding. It doesn't mean that we get it right. The developing world has seen vaccine inequity, and it's something that needs to be addressed.

As we now look at vaccinating the world and working with our partners, we want to look at how, if something were to happen again, this could be done equitably. It is one of the reasons we have invested in South Africa, looking at creating a hub. The World Health Organization is identifying other locations as well. Then we need to work further to look at what the needs will be and how to make sure that those hubs actually turn into a reality and that, if a pandemic were to occur again, the vaccines can roll out far more equitably.

While we also do this and as we make investments, we have an opportunity to reinforce the health systems of those nations as well. Every nation is going to be different. What I am concerned about right now are areas where there is conflict. We're very fortunate that Gavi does have experience working in those areas, whether it's Yemen, Afghanistan or even places like Ethiopia.

That is one concern. We're trying to look at where those problem sites are and which nations have certain skill sets to operate in certain areas, but progress has been made. Now the actual concern is not just the vaccine supply, but the ability to get vaccines into people's arms. That's what we're focused on now.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Sarai, thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Minister.

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

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

It was stated in a press release that as of February 25, more than 13.8 million doses of vaccine were delivered by Canada through the COVAX mechanism. It was also said that through mechanisms that are not fully known, Canada had shared 762,080 doses under bilateral agreements with a number of Latin American and Caribbean countries.

As you know, Mr. Chair, we have expressed particular concern on a number of occasions for countries that are experiencing somewhat unique situations. I am thinking of Palestine, Taiwan and Haiti.

Like Ukraine, many of our fellow citizens are from Haiti and are experiencing a major crisis, as you know. It is one of the poorest countries in the world; it experienced an earthquake and is going through a political crisis. We have given doses to Nicaragua, Argentina, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Peru, Barbados, Ecuador, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica on three occasions, but not one dose to Haiti.

Why?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Originally, when we were vaccinating inside Canada, our plan was always to go through COVAX. There were certain times when there was an opportunity to actually deliver doses bilaterally, but the best way to do it is to go through COVAX.

The actual issue is not about supply anymore. In fact when I was at the UN, meeting many of the representatives of the countries, they said it's about understanding the ability to absorb. I believe there has been a vaccine delivery, but I have to get someone who can answer that question.

When it comes to Haiti, as we assessed the situation, they need predictability as well. This is where COVAX becomes very important. I can understand that we want to talk about getting vaccines. From our perspective, we just get it there, but we have missed probably the most important thing, which is the nation's ability to provide it and whether we have a consistent plan to be able to deliver it.

Haiti has said they need far more predictability. Some nations are saying to hold off because they need to set things up. That's where it becomes very important. I actually have spoken directly with the permanent representative from Haiti about this. They were happy with how we were working together on that.

Do we have more time, Mr. Chair?

• (1620)

The Chair: You have just a few seconds, Minister.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Peter, can you answer that question directly?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: For the 762,000 you mentioned, that was AstraZeneca. There was a certain shelf life left. We needed to move it bilaterally, quickly. We went to all those countries including Haiti and asked them if they were willing and able to take those doses. The list you read out was the list of countries that were able and willing to take them at that time.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Thank you very much to the minister and witnesses.

Ms. Idlout is next, for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik.*

I'll be asking about Tigray, especially given the siege that was in force against Tigray since June 2021.

The Canadian government has allocated millions in aid money to Ethiopia since the war against Tigray began. What are the instruments or methods that the federal government will be using to ensure that some of the money is going to Tigray?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The situation there is very concerning. We have expressed our serious concern. The Prime Minister has been personally involved. In fact, I met with David Miliband from the International Rescue Committee. They actually lost some of their members who were killed there. We very strongly expressed our concern with that.

We will always continue to provide the humanitarian support. We need to provide that support. We have stopped on the development aid side, but we need to continue humanitarian support. In fact, we are pushing for making sure that humanitarian aid does continue, especially into the conflict-affected areas.

Did you want to add anything to that?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: We're placing special attention on ensuring humanitarian access, particularly in the Tigray region, through advocacy, working with both the Ethiopian government and the Tigrayan side.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Are there any instruments or methods by which you will be doing it?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: We're working through our embassy in Addis Ababa, primarily.

Ms. Lori Idlout: How are the agencies that Canada relies on to distribute these funds accounting for their direct use for the people of Tigray?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: In Ethiopia, as in many countries, we rely most heavily on the UN system of agencies, which includes the World Food Programme, OCHA and the International Committee of the Red Cross. We have long-standing relationships. They're credible, trusted partners, and they report back to us and all donors on the use of our funds.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you. That's it.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Idlout, and thank you to our witnesses.

Mr. Morantz, please. You have five minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here. It's been a very interesting discussion.

I want to talk to you about the broader role that charities can play in assisting your efforts in international development and assistance. Obviously, government has a major role to play, but charities also can play a major role in this regard.

Right now, there are three pieces of legislation at various stages in our system. Two of them are Senator Omidvar's. Bill S-216 is the effective and accountable charities act, and Bill S-217 is the frozen assets repurposing act. There is my own private member's bill, Bill C-240, which is the supporting Canadian charities act.

There's really no home in government for charities. In fact, my colleague, Mr. Genuis, asked a question about Bill S-216 a few days ago in question period and no one seemed to be able to answer the question. It was about what's happening with the idea of reforming the concept around direction control for charitable purposes. Senator Omidvar's bill would loosen that restriction by making it so that the charity would have to take reasonable steps in this regard.

How open are you to these types of bills in order to assist charities across the country in helping you do your job in international assistance and development?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: You raise a very important question. I have always said, not only in my previous portfolio but even beforehand, that I've seen on the ground the tremendous work that charities can do because they have unique access. Even some that are small can have a massive impact, which I personally have seen.

I have made it a personal goal to work with a lot of Canadian charities and NGOs. I've been trying to speak with many of them so that our department can be more efficient. Putting the bill proposal aside, we will continue in our department to create and work toward greater efficiency. That's something we will definitely do.

When it comes to this particular bill, it doesn't impact us for us to continue, because it's more how the CRA functions. We are looking at how we can be more efficient. I think all our colleagues who are responsible for this would be open to looking at opportunities to allow charities to be more effective on the ground. At the same time, as the ministers responsible for our respective portfolios and taxpayer dollars, the control and accountability mechanisms also need to be in place. We need to figure out the right method and the balance for it.

• (1625)

Mr. Marty Morantz: I appreciate your answer, but it leads to really the broader question as to the home in government for charities. For example when Mr. Genuis asked the question about Senator Omidvar's bill, no one was able to answer. The Minister of National Revenue twice gave an answer that was not at all related to the question. You alluded to the fact that really this is a national revenue issue, but the Minister of National Revenue couldn't answer the question. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Finance couldn't answer this question.

There needs to be a place in government where thought can be had around bringing these issues together as to how charities can be leveraged for all kinds of reasons, including international development and assistance. Wouldn't you agree with that premise?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: In fact, I actually want to figure out new ways in terms of how we can work with charities, provide for greater efficiencies and look at the mechanisms we use in the department—I've already spoken with our leadership about this—to look at how we can be more efficient.

Even without the bill we're going to try to find efficiencies. I'll let you know that, after that question, our teams have been working on and discussing this topic with departments. We will provide our input into it.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I'm glad you mentioned that, because when Minister Gould, your predecessor, was here last April, which is almost a year ago, she said that. She said she was engaging with civil society partners here in Canada to better understand their concerns and was liaising with the Department of Finance on the issue.

Are you doing the same thing? It's a year since that statement was made. These bills, particularly Bill S-216, would provide a valuable reform to charitable purposes that would make it much easier for charities to provide international assistance.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: This is one of the reasons.... Actually, when I took over this portfolio, I spoke to Minister Gould about this. In fact, I still stay in touch with her on certain topics that obviously I may not have the detailed knowledge on. This is one thing that we did look at and that we will continue to look at. I'm always open to looking at opportunities. We'll work with the other departments on this.

I completely agree with you that we do need to find these. If there are opportunities where we can have our charities be more effective, we should take those. However, we also need to be mindful of making sure that the accountability is also there and that we have the proper impact on the ground.

I'll close with this, if you don't mind. I've always said that our civil society charities are a powerhouse for making change and preventing conflict. Sometimes it requires us to coordinate some of that work. I can assure you that the department is actually seized with this. When I came in, they were the ones who already had these relationships built.

We need to figure out how we can work better together. Sometimes one organization has a skill set doing one thing and another organization has a skill set doing something else. It's about how they can work together in a certain area and be even more effective.

The Chair: Mr. Morantz, thank you very much.

Minister, thank you.

[Translation]

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

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you, Minister, for being with us today at committee. I understand the importance of your next meeting. Whatever time you need to leave, please feel free to do so. I can continue with your officials.

It is my understanding that a few days ago, UNICEF indicated that there were access issues on the ground making it difficult to deliver critical supplies and services to Ukrainians. Earlier today, I believe, there were talks in Belarus between Ukrainian and Russian officials. During those discussions today there was a preliminary understanding on creating safe corridors for the provision of humanitarian aid.

I'm wondering what you can tell our committee about those discussions that happened only hours ago.

• (1630)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I was just informed about those discussions. It is hopeful, with strong optimism, that it stays true. This will really depend on the Putin regime and their military leadership allowing this to happen. We are very concerned with humanitarian access. Organizations have had to make some significant changes. The local organizations have also had some significant impact themselves.

What we will do is to make sure that the appropriate supplies across the border can get to the appropriate agencies that can then feed into the United Nations. One thing I have taken away is that I will be discussing with the various United Nations leads how they will provide, not directly themselves but with some of the local organizations who have direct access, to those communities.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you, Minister.

There are also indications that Russia may resort to siege tactics, given the limited progress over the last number of days in their illegal invasion.

I wonder what impact you think this will have on our ability to get humanitarian assistance to Ukrainians.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The impact will all depend on Putin's regime. International law clearly states that providing humanitarian support for civilians is something that needs to continue. We expect President Putin to abide by the international law. Otherwise, we will continue to hold him to account as we are looking at some of the other international crimes that have allegedly been committed.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you.

I would like to also ask about the announcement that our government made on Monday regarding the \$100 million in aid. How quickly do you anticipate that we can deliver assistance through this funding to Ukrainians on the ground in need?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: In fact, the team is already working on it. I spoke with the deputy head of the UNHCR just yesterday. The team is already working out a plan. We need to make sure that the funds go to the right place, where the needs are, for example, whether it's going to be outside the border or inside. Our department will take all that balance into account.

What I also want to say is that the \$100 million is what we provided, but we also anticipated it early on with the earlier funding to make sure that funding would always be there and continue. As we announce one and they get set up to flow, there was already something flowing. The goal is to make sure the support continues to flow and that we continue to fill the gaps as they're identified.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you very much, Minister.

I'm happy to let you go to your meeting.

Mr. Chair, how much longer do I have?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you very much.

I would like to ask if it's possible to get a little bit more information regarding the work of organizations on the ground in the Ukraine at the moment. I understand that we are working through partners at the United Nations, but I feel it would be interesting for this committee to get a better understanding of the NGO network in Ukraine. I'm happy to take that answer now, or, if you prefer, officials could follow up in writing.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'll follow up with you as soon as we get the information.

I've spoken to and have been in close contact with UCC, who have access to the different organizations looking at what those needs are. We already have the early funding that we provided to those organizations so they could be as flexible as possible. As our assistant deputy minister has already stated, we are still in communication and we need to make sure that continues. That's why the humanitarian corridor is going to be very important for this.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: The UCC has indicated its deep thanks to Canada on a number of occasions, as have, of course, Ukrainian parliamentarians on a number of different occasions, as has the President of Ukraine to our Prime Minister. I wonder, Minister, what you're hearing from your counterpart in Ukraine.

• (1635)

The Chair: Please just give a brief answer, Minister, in the interest of time. Thank you.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I had the opportunity to go to President Zelensky's inauguration. In my previous portfolio, I had the opportunity to go many times, and he talked about his kids. I was told that, when the Prime Minister called him, he actually asked about the Prime Minister's kids. Our hearts are going out to all the children who are affected by this. They can't go to their classrooms, and their playgrounds have turned into battlefields. We're going to stay focused.

I was speaking at an event with the UNHCR representative, so we're going to work very hard to make sure that Canada is going to be there to provide the right support. I look forward to getting into the region to look first-hand and coordinate that support as well.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Minister Sajjan.

Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I wish to raise a point of order.

Very briefly, first of all, I would like to acknowledge the presence of the parliamentary secretary who is here with us. The minister has invited us to continue the discussion. I probably would have had another question for him, but unfortunately I won't have the time.

Can the minister suggest a way that would allow us to continue this discussion more informally?

The Chair: It is always possible to request a written response, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

There will always be future occasions to continue the discussion. I understand that Minister Sajjan has to leave after this second round.

We will now go to our third round, which is a continuation—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I understood that, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I've been very flexible, and I take opportunities informally to be able to talk to people. This is about members of Parliament working together to provide the right information. I'll always do that. Yes, we have an opportunity to come to committee. You know, and many other members know that I will make—

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'll send you a text.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Send me a text message. You have my number. That's how accessible I will be for you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Minister.

In the interest of time we will go straight to our third round of questions. This is a five-minute allocation that goes to Mr. Aboultaif.

Please, go ahead.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thanks to the witnesses we have from the department with us.

The question was on the corridor that was sort of an agreement under the talks right now in Belarus between Ukraine and Russia. That corridor could mean two things. One is more refugees, people leaving the country. The other is access to aid and humanitarian assistance to areas—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, our colleague didn't have his microphone in front of his mouth, so there was no interpretation.

The Chair: All right.

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Mr. Aboultaif, could you lower the boom microphone?

[*Translation*]

Perfect.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you. I'll start over.

The corridor that was agreed upon—I hope that will continue to be the case—means that more people are fleeing the country of Ukraine. Right now we know there are five countries that are receiving refugees. There is some talk out there that there will be some new refugees from Ukraine who will be replacing Syrian refugees in parts of Europe and Turkey.

Do you have any information on that? Can you give us any idea if this is true? What's going to happen if this is the case? Where will the other people go?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Perhaps, Mr. Chair, I'll start and then ask my colleague for Europe if she has anything to add.

The early reports are that there are now over a million people who have left Ukraine—probably more. They are mostly in the five bordering countries. We have not seen any onward movement yet. The UNHCR, along with the recipient states, is working hard every day to put infrastructure in place to receive them. We're not seeing a lot of onward movement, so I don't at this point see any direct implications for Syrian refugees in Turkey—I think you said—or elsewhere in Europe. So far, I don't see anything.

• (1640)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you for this answer. I want to clear up this point.

This may be a long game, which we hope it is not. We pray that this will end soon and that things will get back to normal. In light of that, how prepared are we, and what do we have out there to assist us in giving the proper support to the people fleeing their countries as far as housing, school, food, medical aid and everything else? Are we prepared?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: That's an excellent question, Mr. Chair.

I would say that, at this point, the humanitarian and refugee support system is well prepared. The flash appeal that the UN held on Monday was seeking to raise \$1.7 billion, and it raised \$1.5 billion. This almost never happens. Most humanitarian appeals raise 25%, 30% or sometimes 40%. This was well above that. The system is well funded to respond to the refugee flows. Of course, if it goes on and on and gets into five million to 10 million, then there will be a need for additional funding.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Was there any direct ask for financial allocation from Canada or was it just on a voluntary basis, where you come forward and you pledge your support, your financial support?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Yes, that's where we pledged. We've pledged \$125 million in assistance since January, but in that particular conference we pledged \$100 million in additional funding.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: The \$100 million is over and above the \$125 million; is that correct?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: No, it's part of the \$125 million. We announced \$15 million at the end of January in anticipation of the crisis. Just at the end of February we launched the matching fund in which we committed to provide \$10 million to the Canadian Red Cross, and then just on Monday we committed the additional \$100 million to the UN appeal.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Since I have you there, I would really appreciate a brief on what's happening in Yemen right now, if you could give us an idea.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I will say a couple of words on Yemen and then ask my colleague Sandra, who's responsible for the Middle East, to comment.

Yemen, from a humanitarian perspective, continues to be one of the worst crises in the world. I will have to check my data, but I think last year it was the second-highest funded humanitarian crisis after Syria. This year I expect it will be in the top three or four. The situation there, from a humanitarian perspective, does not seem to have improved at all.

Sandra, do you have anything in the last 30 seconds?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: I'll just confirm we are still engaged in Yemen. This year we've provided \$72 million to respond to the humanitarian needs. As my colleague has said, this situation remains disastrous. There's hardly a plague that country isn't suffering from, exacerbated further by COVID and ongoing conflict. In the end, until we're able to resolve their role as a flashpoint between Iran and Saudi Arabia, we'll continue to have difficulties resolving their humanitarian needs.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Aboultaif.

Thank you to Mr. MacDougall and Ms. McCardell for your answers.

We will now go to Mr. Ehsassi, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start with Mr. MacDougall.

Mr. MacDougall, we heard from the minister regarding Canada's leadership on COVID. As you can appreciate, this is an issue that is of tremendous importance to Canadians. I have heard members of Parliament repeatedly talk about how important it is that we be there for other countries.

I know we're going through multilateral channels as well as assisting on a bilateral basis. Could you perhaps share with us whether we are playing a leadership role and whether we are one of the most generous countries insofar as assisting other countries as concerns COVID?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Yes, I think I can say quite categorically that Canada has been an extremely generous international assistance donor on COVID. Since the start of the pandemic we've committed \$2.7 billion in assistance, the vast majority of that through what we call the ACT-A platform, which is for vaccines, therapeutics and testing.

In looking at the issue of vaccine equity, the government committed to provide 200 million vaccines via COVAX by the end of 2022 as part of the G20's overall commitment to vaccinate 70% of the world by the end of 2022. We have so far made available 137 million doses to COVAX. The remainder will come either through a cash commitment by the Government of Canada or through surplus Canadian doses.

Yes, it's safe to say that we have had a very strong leadership role. Thank you.

• (1645)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much for that comprehensive response.

If I could once again ask Ms. McCardell a question, as you will recall, the last time you were before our committee I shared with you my concern that there are going to be numerous reverberations throughout the world from the situation in Ukraine, given the reality that Ukraine was a breadbasket in Europe and was sending agricultural exports to very many countries, amongst them some that are going through a very difficult time, such as Lebanon. Once again I just want to know whether we are following developments closely and how that will impact our international assistance and our humanitarian assistance, not only to Ukraine itself—which is obviously critical—but to other countries that are going to be hit very hard.

Ms. Sandra McCardell: Clearly the situation in much of the Middle East remains precarious as a result of political instability, COVID and other economic measures. Clearly these countries are going to be vulnerable to increased food costs, as are other parts of the world that depend particularly on wheat as their main source of calories in their diets.

We are following this closely. You will know that we are a very generous donor to Lebanon and have development and humanitarian funds there. We're sensitive to the economic collapse in that country and are using those funds to address that.

My colleague Peter MacDougall leads on the humanitarian side. We are in contact about the need to have recourse to agencies like the World Food Programme or FAO to address food security. We are watching this very closely and, quite frankly, with a great deal of concern, particularly when combined with rising energy prices.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacDougall, since Ms. McCardell referenced you, is there anything you want to add to that?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I'll just say that we are in ongoing dialogue and discussion. It's an issue that we follow very closely. The consequences obviously could be quite dire in the other regions you and Sandra have mentioned.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much.

This is my last question, given the time that remains. We certainly appreciate the significance of developments in Ukraine. We are attempting, as a country, to be there, to punch above our weight.

Given the financial assistance we've provided, has any of that gone to any of the neighbouring countries that have been very generous in terms of letting in people who are fleeing from Ukraine? I just want you to pinpoint whether some of that funding has gone to neighbouring countries to assist refugees.

The Chair: Give just a brief answer, please, in the interest of time.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: The appeal that I mentioned, the UN appeal.... I forget the exact numbers, but I will say that about \$1.3 billion of that was for Ukraine, and the remainder was for the surrounding four or five immediate border countries. A portion of Canadian funding will be going to support the UNHCR and other UN actors to support refugees in those countries to take some of the pressure off Poland, Moldova, etc.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ehsassi.

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

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

Mr. MacDougall, I'm very sorry, but I'm not sure I understood your answer regarding Haiti, which I was very interested in.

You mentioned AstraZeneca, then came back to mRNA vaccines, and you said that Haiti was included, but what was Haiti included in?

• (1650)

Mr. Peter MacDougall: In September this year, there was a surplus of AstraZeneca vaccine in Canada with an expiry date around December. So it was important to offer these 760 or so doses. We asked countries fairly close to Canada, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, if they needed vaccine and they seemed interested.

In these circumstances, these countries—I have forgotten the exact list—accepted these doses. However, for a capacity reason, as I recall, Haiti was not in a position at that time to accept these surpluses.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: That was for the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Yes.

Since then, I think, Haiti did receive those doses through COV-AX, which Canada is supporting with nearly \$700 million. I don't know the numbers, but I could provide them to you.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: That's kind. I would really appreciate it.

I also raised a specific concern for Palestine, which has had problems accessing vaccines for very obvious reasons, as well as Taiwan, which is in a situation that is somewhat analogous because of pressure from the People's Republic of China.

Has something been done for Palestine and Taiwan?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I will check, but yes, I believe that Palestine and Taiwan are also entitled to receive doses through COV-AX.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Do you know if they received any?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I'm sure of it.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Could you confirm that for me as well?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Yes, and I will provide you with the numbers.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I would be very grateful to you for that.

Thank you, Mr. MacDougall.

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, your time is up. You will very likely be able to follow up during the next turn.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Has it already been six minutes?

The Chair: No. For the third turn, speaking times are two and a half minutes. For the second, third and fourth turns, these rounds are always two and half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes, but we have a new group of witnesses.

The Chair: No, they are the same witnesses.

If we change groups of witnesses, we do indeed come back to a first round with six-minute turns, but if the witnesses do not change, it's a succession of identical turns of two and a half minutes each. This was negotiated by the whips, so I am bound by this rule.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I thought that we had changed the dynamic.

The Chair: No, these are the same witnesses and it is the same subject.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: For us to consider that there is a new panel of witnesses, we would have to add witnesses and not have one leave, is that right?

The Chair: Exactly.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: So, when a witness leaves the group, it's the same group of witnesses, but when a witness joins in, it's a new group of witnesses.

The Chair: Yes. This was all negotiated by the whips.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I see.

The Chair: You will have the opportunity to continue during your next two-and-a-half-minute turn.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes, but I'll tell you right now, Mr. Chair, that we will argue in favour of having two different groups of witnesses for the two hours.

The Chair: With the exception of the minister, it is the same group of witnesses, but it does happen that we have different witnesses.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Idlout, go ahead, please, for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik*. Thank you.

Since the enactment of the siege, access to medical aid has stopped in Tigray. According to Doctors Without Borders, 87% of Tigray's health care facilities have been destroyed by Ethiopian, Amhara and Eritrean forces. These medical centres were built over the last 30 years as a result of the previous government's development agenda and support from the international community. How will Canada contribute to rebuilding these facilities and ensuring that people from Tigray are receiving access to medical aid?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I would just reiterate our ongoing concern regarding the conflict in Ethiopia. We have urged all parties to undertake a ceasefire and to negotiate for a political solution. We have made numerous statements and taken advocacy opportunities for humanitarian access. On this specific issue, the destruction of hospitals and health centres, I expect we would continue to contribute to those, perhaps indirectly or perhaps directly through our development programs, but I'd have to get you more detail on that in writing.

• (1655)

Ms. Lori Idlout: Okay. I'd appreciate that for sure, for Heather McPherson. I'll pivot to a topic that I asked about earlier about women. What steps will the Minister of Foreign Affairs' office take to prioritize Canada's feminist foreign policy?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I can speak briefly about that, but that's really more the responsibility of the Minister of Foreign Affairs rather than the Minister of International Development. Certainly, I can say—and I think my colleagues will agree with me—that in all of our missions abroad and in all of our contacts apply a feminist foreign policy in all aspects of our diplomacy, and of course, as has been mentioned earlier, in our international assistance programming we apply a very rigorous approach to ensuring that gender equality is well integrated into all of our projects, development funding and humanitarian assistance.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Okay. I have a completely different question. Will the government be formally replying to Amnesty International's recent report on the Israeli-Palestine situation? Have you met or communicated with Amnesty regarding the report?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. MacDougall, but could you give us just a brief answer, please?

Ms. Idlout, you'll have a chance to follow up in the next round as well.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I will turn to Sandra McCardell on that, please.

Ms. Sandra McCardell: We don't intend to provide a reply to that report.

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

We will now go to Mr. Chong for five minutes.

Go ahead, please.

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

I don't know if this information has been made public or available, so I apologize if it has. As you know, UN Resolution 1988 was passed by the United Nations in 2011, and it effectively banned dealing with the Taliban. More recently, late last year in December,

UN Resolution 2615 was adopted in order to give an exemption to Resolution 1988. It will allow member states to figure out a way to get humanitarian aid to the Afghan people.

Can you tell us how you have implemented that here in Canada? What have you done to provide a pathway for Canadian humanitarian assistance to be provided to the people of Afghanistan, while at the same time ensuring that the money doesn't fall into the hands of the Taliban government?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I'll start with a couple of responses and then I'll turn to my colleague, who is responsible for Asia-Pacific.

With respect to humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, the resolution now permits it. Our greater challenge has been the Criminal Code issue. As a result, on the humanitarian assistance side, we are really working with only a very limited number of partners, predominantly in the UN system. The usual organizations that you would know are the World Food Programme, OCHA, the UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

They are able to give us a couple of things. Number one, they're able to give us assurances that our funding does not directly or indirectly benefit the Taliban. In some circumstances, they will do that by spending Canadian money outside the country.

I'll give you an example. Supplies—food and transport, for example, to buy UNICEF ready-to-eat kits and those kinds of things—can be procured outside of Afghanistan, so there would be no benefit occurring to the Taliban. Those are some of the kinds of workarounds that they do. They have also committed to us in writing in our agreements that they can accomplish this within the confines of the Criminal Code.

I'll ask Paul Thoppil if he'd like to add anything.

• (1700)

Hon. Michael Chong: I have one quick question on Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left here?

The Chair: You have about two minutes, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

Perhaps the officials could quickly finish answering the Afghanistan question, and then I have a very quick question about Ukraine.

Mr. Paul Thoppil (Assistant Deputy Minister, Asia Pacific, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): To add to that, as the minister noted, we are looking, together with other ministries, to update the Criminal Code regime down the road so that in the context of Afghanistan-like situations, Canada has a robust framework to use all its tools in order to deal with humanitarian assistance issues without impacting the issue of dealing with a de facto authority that is a listed terrorist entity.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I have a quick question on the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. One I'm particularly interested in is that there are some 900,000 Ukrainians who have fled into the European Union.

What is the mechanism by which the western alliance is going to figure out how we're going to share the burden of and share the resources for these 900,000 refugees? Is it a quadrilateral dialogue among Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union? Is it some other mechanism?

I know it's not directly related to the portfolio, but surely there is some discussion in the department about how that coordination is going to happen. I'd like your thoughts about that.

The Chair: Could we have just a brief answer, please?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: Fundamentally, this was first and foremost an issue dealt with by the European Union—many countries, very wealthy, big refugee-recipient countries in their own right. At this point they have not reached out to us for assistance, but we've been very unified, as you know. This conversation is happening constantly. If they raise it with us, we'll be ready to respond.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We'll now go to Mr. Oliphant for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for your work today, and your work always.

I want to focus on two areas. First, you probably think I know this, but I don't. It's just a moot question that I'm asking. It's about the Canada fund for local initiatives, the CFLI, and how it works. How much of it is directed by the local heads of mission, and how much of it is directed centrally, based on mission?

I looked at the minister's mandate letter, and it says to increase the annual investment in the CFLI to help with our work with the feminist agenda, the LBGTQ2 activists and human rights defenders. Can you explain a little bit about that for me, and what we as parliamentarians can do? I think it's a good fund. Is there something we can do to help you get more money?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Thank you for that question.

I'll start by saying that the overall amount of funding to the Canada fund for local initiatives is \$26.9 million this year. To answer your question, it is allocated at headquarters per mission, but heads of mission or ambassadors control how it is spent locally. There are 71 missions around the world, credited to 135 countries, that receive assistance. The projects range in size. They are generally small. They're generally one year long. The average contribution is about \$30,000. They're really meant for an ambassador, an embassy, a head of mission, to try to respond to local needs and to issues that are perhaps not given sufficient attention. They are often issues with respect to human rights, women's rights, LBGTQI, gender equality, democracy, peace and security.

The ministers are working on a proposal with respect to the mandate letter commitment, and I would say that all of us on this call have managed such funds. They're an excellent tool. They not only provide support to issues and organizations that are sometimes

struggling, but they also bring a lot of credit to Canada. Anything that parliamentarians could do would be helpful.

• (1705)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you. We just might flag that for some future “look at” so that we could add a voice to that.

The second area I want to raise, and it's also not well known, is the International Development Research Centre, the IDRC, which the Government of Canada funds. I assume that comes from the development fund, but I'm not exactly sure. I see the reports regularly, particularly on education. They work on a number of broad issues. I'm wondering if that is within the mandate of the minister. Is there support we should be providing to it as well? I think that getting research before we do things is always a good thing, to have evidence-based decision-making.

Can anybody talk about the IDRC?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I will start, and perhaps ask any colleague who may want to add something.

The IDRC's total budget is \$203 million. About \$145 million or \$150 million is allocated through Parliament. It does report through the Minister of International Development. It's a very impressive and innovative organization. It has pioneered research around the world and led to lots of impressive development gains, and has also, over the last number of years, increased its funding base and its research impact well beyond its parliamentary allocations. It's present throughout the world and has lots of interesting and really impressive partnerships.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

I might flag for our committee that I would like to get a little bit more on it at some point. It's a sizable amount of money, but it's also one of the most innovative organizations I've seen doing development work around the world in terms of research.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Oliphant, and thank you to our officials.

We will now go Mrs. Wagantall.

Welcome to the committee. The floor is yours for five minutes. Please go ahead.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, sir.

Actually, I believe Mr. Genuis is back and he will be resuming his role.

The Chair: Perfect.

Mr. Genuis, we go over to you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you very much. I apologize if there's some background noise.

Could I start by asking specifically about the government's position on Bill S-216, which is the direction and control file? What work is being done at the public service level to review issues around direction and control?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: This is primarily the remit of the Minister of Finance, but I'll ask my colleague Caroline Leclerc to make a couple of remarks.

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Leclerc (Assistant Deputy Minister, Partnerships for Development Innovation, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Our Canadian partners working in the field of international development have indeed told us of problems with the requirements of the Income Tax Act. These are well expressed in the context of the Advisory Committee on the Charitable Sector that has been set up by the Canada Revenue Agency. There is a specific working group on direction and control.

The Department of Finance has contacted us to convey the concerns raised by our partners. We also discussed with them the importance of local ownership and accountability. That said, it is the Department of Finance that is reviewing the bill, and it is the Department of Finance that will recommend the approach that the government should take.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: My understanding is that the advisory group has already recommended reforms to the direction and control process along the lines of Senator Omidvar's Bill S-216, but that there has yet to be action on that.

Is it correct that recommendations have already been given? Could you clarify for me which minister is responsible for this?

• (1710)

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Leclerc: Yes, the provisions that cause difficulties for charities fall under the Income Tax Act and are interpreted by the Canada Revenue Agency. The department responsible for this is the Department of Finance, the Minister of Finance. If changes were made to the Income Tax Act, the Canada Revenue Agency would interpret them and issue guidelines for this sector.

The member is correct that the Purposes and Activities Working Group made recommendations. Last year, the Canada Revenue Agency made changes to these guidelines to lessen the impact of the requirements on charities. Charities are positive about these changes. However, they want the government to go further and they continue to seek changes to the Income Tax Act, as expressed in the senator's bill.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, I'm sorry. I'm going to pause your time allocation for a second.

From the perspective of the interpreters, could we ask you to unplug your headset and plug it back in to get a better quality of sound? We'll resume once you've done that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I just unplugged and replugged. How are we doing?

The Chair: We're getting a thumbs up. You're good to go. I'm going to resume your time.

Thanks, Mr. Genuis.

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

Maybe this is as much a comment as a question. I think you can appreciate my frustration as a member of Parliament really trying to speak to the government about the concerns I'm hearing on direction and control, and then getting told at a previous committee that the Minister of International Development was in dialogue with ministers about it. Then, when I raised a question in question period, the Minister of National Revenue stands up when I guess it should have been the Minister of Finance who stood up, and the Minister of National Revenue wasn't plugged in on the issue.

This is an issue that clearly is top of mind for international development stakeholders, which is why you are aware of it and why it's something that I brought up as the shadow minister for international development. It speaks to this broader issue of who's in charge. If charities are going to get a solution here, then they need to know, and I need to know as a member of Parliament, who we should be talking to. It just seems like passing the buck when it's a simple fix that has the support of the sector and the unanimous support of the Senate.

In the 30 seconds I have left, what are additional measures in the context specifically of Ukraine that are being contemplated? Can we expect further announcements of additional assistance in the next week to 10 days?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Very quickly on the humanitarian assistance side, we just announced \$100 million on Monday, so I do not expect anything on that front in the immediate future.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, thank you very much.

Thank you to the officials.

We'll now go to Mr. Sarai, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you, Chair.

Canada has committed over \$5.3 billion over five years for international climate finance. The minister's mandate letter instructs the minister to work with the Honourable Steven Guilbeault to mobilize and provide climate financing in order to support developing countries' adaptation, mitigation and resilience, including support for small island states at particular risk of climate-related emergencies.

What impact is climate change having on international development goals and international peace and security?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: As was noted, the government has committed a \$5.3-billion climate finance package over five years, but I'll just review the results that were achieved over the previous five years. Briefly, over 222 megatonnes of greenhouse gas emissions were reduced or avoided, and 5.9 million people have increased resilience to the effects of climate change.

Over the next five years, with twice as much money as we had in the previous five years, we will be supporting developing countries. About 40% of the portfolio will be for adaptation, and the remainder for mitigation. There are four thematic areas that we're going to focus on: clean energy transition and coal phase-out; climate-smart agriculture and food systems; nature-based solutions and biodiversity; and climate governance.

Within that, we have some targets that get at some of the issues that you just raised. As I said, 40% goes towards adaptation, 80% of our projects will integrate gender equality, and 20% will be focused on nature-based solutions that have co-benefits for biodiversity outcomes. Our funding is 40% from grants, so a lot of that will go to support the adaptation work, and the remaining money will be unconditionally repayable contributions or concessional loans.

This is all to say that we expect to continue to avoid greenhouse gases. Adaptation projects will not only help people affected by climate change to adapt, but it will have a real impact on peace and security by reducing some of the climate-induced contributions to conflict prevention.

• (1715)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: You touched on it a bit. How does Canada's climate finance commitment align with the feminist international assistance policy?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Certainly, consistent with the international assistance policy that puts gender equality at its heart, climate finance is no exception, and 80% of our projects will integrate gender equality in them.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

What funding envelopes and mechanisms are being used to deliver this commitment? Who is eligible to receive and implement funding?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: We have worked with and we will work with a range of partners. Some of the big ones that you would recognize are the development banks—the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Green Climate Fund and the World Bank. We also work with smaller organizations, particularly intermediary organizations.

I would say that on mitigation, in trying to mitigate climate change, we tend to work with larger organizations. On adaptations we tend to work with smaller, more local organizations. That's where we're headed over the next five years.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: When it comes to international aid year over year, how has Canada funded international aid in the last five to seven years?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: The government has a commitment, of course, as the minister said earlier, to increase international assistance every year until 2030. Since 2018, at least from memory, the

government has increased its international assistance every year, budget after budget. The government's commitment is to continue to do that until 2030.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Along with Global Affairs, what tools does Canada have to support countries experiencing democratic crises and transitions?

The Chair: Just give a brief answer, please.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Last year we spent about \$156 million to support countries and organizations working toward democratic transition and change. Both Minister Sajjan and Minister Joly are tasked to set up a Canadian centre for democracy and good governance support.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sarai.

Thank you to the officials.

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

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

I would like to come back to the situation in Afghanistan and the situation in Ukraine. We know full well that part of the aid that Canada can give is humanitarian aid. There are all kinds of difficulties in getting that aid on the ground, which I mentioned earlier, specifically the fear that community organizations, Canadian humanitarian aid organizations, have about Afghanistan. We welcome people from Afghanistan as much as we do from Ukraine to our land.

How does your department work with the Department of Immigration to coordinate its actions on these two aspects of the help that Canada can give in difficult situations like those in Afghanistan and Ukraine?

• (1720)

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Your question is on the situation in both countries, correct?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: First, I will give the floor to Mr. Thoppil on the subject of Afghanistan, and then to Ms. McCardell on Ukraine.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Thank you, Mr. MacDougall.

[English]

We work very closely with IRCC on trying to uphold the government's commitment with regard to ensuring that 40,000 vulnerable Afghans are coming to Canada. At this point, since August 18, over 8,000 Afghans have come to Canada. There is already domestically, under the IRCC's mandate, a robust resettlement program in order to support these individuals. There are challenges in-country in Afghanistan in order to move on the remaining portion of this electoral commitment. One of them is the Criminal Code, as we discussed earlier, as well as the security situation in order to support these people.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thoppil.

Your time is up, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Mr. MacDougall, if one of your other colleagues would like to put in a quick addition, we'll give you time to do that.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Madam McCardell, perhaps on Ukraine...?

[Translation]

Ms. Sandra McCardell: Mr. Chair, I would simply say that we are obviously working closely with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. In terms of refugee programs, we are, of course, less advanced for some countries than others, where the conflict has been going on for a longer period of time.

However, we can assure you that several departments, including our own, are coordinating to respond to the situation in Ukraine, to support Ukrainians both inside and outside the country. We are coordinating our efforts with the Department of Finance, among others, on sanctions.

Let's say we see that everything is interrelated, and we are taking up this challenge.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron, as well as the officials.

[English]

I will now give the floor to Ms. Idlout for two and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik.*

I want to ask further about what my colleague started asking about regarding democratic crises and transitions. I understand that \$156 million or so has already been contributed. You very briefly started to talk about the committee. I wonder if you could elaborate more on that committee and what it's done so far.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Canada has supported democratic development around the world for decades through its international assistance. In this mandate letter, the government has committed to establishing a centre dedicated to promoting peace, human rights, democracy and inclusive governance.

Minister Joly is leading the work. Minister Sajjan will assist her. My colleagues in the department who lead on this file are working closely with civil society to consult and to understand better the

role that civil society can play and what the needs are on the ground.

I will stop there.

Ms. Lori Idlout: How does Canada ensure a whole-of-government response to such situations with respect to its diplomatic development, trade and finance, and security policies?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: One of the benefits of having an integrated department.... Some years ago, in 2013, the department was amalgamated with the former CIDA. The development agency was integrated into foreign affairs and trade. That has enabled us to reflect that now in our departmental structures.

My colleagues here run geographic branches. For example, they have responsibility for development, trade and diplomacy all in one area. That allows them to develop strategic plans, both for countries and for regions, to ensure that all those aspects are brought together to have the most impact on the ground and also to better advance Canada's interests.

• (1725)

Ms. Lori Idlout: I have just one final quick question.

What lessons have been learned from past cases, such as the 2011 Arab Spring?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I'm sure we all have some views on that, but I'll perhaps start with Sandra, who is the assistant deputy minister for the Middle East.

The Chair: If we can do a condensed answer, that would be appreciated, just in the interest of time.

Thank you. It's a very interesting question.

Ms. Sandra McCardell: A wide range of issues were learned from the Arab Spring. You could pick any number of them, but I think what you're getting at is that, when there is a region in crisis, we need to bring our full tool kit to bear to respond to it and, in line with our feminist international assistance and feminist foreign policies, we need to put women at the centre of it.

That is certainly among the many things we learned from the Arab Spring.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Idlout, and thank you to the officials.

We'll now go to Mr. Morantz, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to return to the issues facing charities that I was discussing earlier with the minister and that my colleague Mr. Genuis was speaking of.

In my discussions with charitable organizations—for example, Imagine Canada—one of their chief complaints is that there is no home in government for charities, so when charities come to the government to lobby for changes, they often get the runaround. They don't know where to go. The department that deals with international assistance, for example, doesn't deal with changes to the Income Tax Act. The Minister of National Revenue doesn't necessarily understand the needs and problems that charities face.

The suggestion of having a home in government—for example, having charities embedded within a ministerial portfolio—has been raised with me directly by charities. I'm wondering if there have been any thoughts within government about a concept like that. There would be a ministry where charities can go to say, “These are our issues, these are our concerns, and these are our problems. What can we do to solve them?” instead of getting the runaround.

It's not just them. As Mr. Genuis said, it's us. When we in Parliament ask the Minister of National Revenue about Bill S-216, from all appearances, she doesn't know about the issue. You can see where the frustration lies.

I would really like to see this problem solved so that charities can work with the government to improve the services they provide. At the end of the day, when charities are suffering, real people in Canada and around the world are suffering.

I'd like your view on that position.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I could give a brief answer, Mr. Chair. It will probably be overly bureaucratic.

Our responsibility is really to the partners and recipient organizations we work with, whether they are Canadian or international. With respect to Canadian organizations, we pass on any concerns that they have on such issues, but as to where the responsibility lies or should lie, that's really outside my bailiwick.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I raised the question more to make the point.

I'm going to ask a question about the mandate letter. Just to get it on the record, what is Canada's total aid budget in dollars, as a percentage of gross national income?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I'm flipping to the exact number, because I want to make sure I give you the exact number, but as I'm looking for it, I believe our expenditure in international assistance this year will be about \$7.5 billion.

I'm having trouble locating it, but I believe it's about 0.31%.

Mr. Marty Morantz: That is 0.31% of \$7.5 billion.

By how much will Canada be increasing its development assistance budget each year between now and 2030?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: That's a decision that the government makes each year in the budget.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Will the increase be reflected in absolute terms, or is it a percentage of Canada's economy?

• (1730)

Mr. Peter MacDougall: It has typically been an absolute number.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Which UN sustainable development goals are on track and off track, and how does Canada's funding reflect an assessment of those needs and gaps?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Prior to COVID most—I would say perhaps all—SDGs were on track. Since the pandemic, many of them—again, possibly all of them—are off track, so they will require a renewed focus and investment from both Canada and others.

Mr. Marty Morantz: To turn to vaccines for a second, it appears that Canada is giving vaccines out through the COVAX facility, as well as through bilateral arrangements.

Why is it happening through both of those streams? Why is it not just through COVAX?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: It's really only happened in the instance that was raised earlier where we did it directly bilaterally. That was primarily because we had doses on the soil that had an expiration date that was very soon, so it was really the only alternative we had at that point. The rest go through COVAX.

Mr. Marty Morantz: How much more time do I have?

The Chair: That's spot on, Mr. Morantz. Thanks very much.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Great. Thank you for your answers.

The Chair: Thank you to the officials.

Ms. Vandenbeld, please, go ahead for five minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be, at least for today, back on this committee. When I was on this committee in 2019 we did a study on democracy and Canada's promotion of democracy around the world. There was a consensus report of all parties, at that time, that spoke about the need for Canada to really have a clearinghouse for all of the expertise that we have on democracy. We know that Canadians are all over the world, in intergovernmental institutions and NGOs, doing incredible work. They are trusted to do work on pluralistic and inclusive democratic governance, work on federalism and work on parliamentary strengthening.

To have an institute, which you've referred to and some of my colleagues have asked about, that would provide that kind of ecosystem, that kind of clearinghouse for expertise, perhaps even being able to support the NGOs and the ecosystem of NGOs in this field, could I just ask where that is at, where that stands? How do you see that moving ahead?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Unfortunately, none of our colleagues who work on that are here today, but I can say that I know that consultations have been undertaken. It's well advanced in planning.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you. I appreciate that.

The other piece of that is that we know that Canadian civil society and Canadian NGOs do exceptional work and have real relationships on the ground. They are the ones who are working with local partners. They understand very well what the needs are in various different regions around the world.

What are we doing in order to create and support those Canadian civil society organizations that are on the ground and that are doing the work, again to make sure that we're allowing for knowledge creation and sharing among organizations but also that we're supporting those civil society organizations so we do have a full, broad ecosystem of Canadian NGOs doing this work?

Mr. Peter MacDougall: I'll just make a brief comment and then perhaps ask Caroline if she wants to add about Canadian organizations.

Certainly, you're absolutely right that we work with many Canadian organizations on the ground in missions all around the world, because of their expertise. They've made significant contributions. In going forward with the centre I expect there will be some opportunity for further work with those organizations.

Perhaps I'll ask Caroline to add anything she has.

Ms. Caroline Leclerc: Thank you. That's absolutely true. We have a very vibrant set of networks of Canadian NGOs that have expertise, knowledge and resources that we work hard to bring to bear in international development.

The best way for us to help support them is through their networks. I believe the member knows very well Cooperation Canada. There is also a set of regional and provincial networks that bring NGOs together and that do a lot of knowledge exchange and capacity building. We contribute to these networks and work through them to support Canadian NGOs and ensure there is knowledge exchange, not only amongst them but, frankly, between them and us.

This work also happens in the field. Our missions will often bring their partners who are on the ground together to exchange on what they're hearing, what they're seeing and what the needs are, and to extract lessons learned from that. It's an ongoing process of knowledge exchange.

• (1735)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Canada has really looked at different innovative ways in which to fund local organizations in the global

south. I'm thinking about the equality fund and some of the work that's being done under FIAP—the feminist international assistance policy—to make sure it is not just our going into another country and saying, this is how to do it, but really building on the local knowledge and supporting those local, smaller NGOs in the global south to empower them.

Can you talk a little bit about those innovations, and particularly the equality fund?

The Chair: Just a brief answer, please, in the interest of time.

Mr. Peter MacDougall: Caroline was a key architect, so I'll ask her.

Ms. Caroline Leclerc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I hear you. It's hard for me to be brief when talking about the equality fund, but certainly it's an important and innovative platform in and of itself that brings together different sources of finance from the private sector, government and NGOs, to create a sustainable source of funds for women's organizations on the ground. The equality fund has supported to date, I think, 100 small women's organizations with untied money, like direct grants, to help advance their issues. We have a range of other programs that are similar, the women's voice and leadership program, for example, and a project with Equitas on LGBTQ2I rights.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vandenberg. I also thank the officials.

[*English*]

Colleagues, that takes us to the end of our scheduled session today. Collectively we thank Minister Sajjan and his team of senior officials for being with us this afternoon.

[*Translation*]

We are always happy to welcome you to the committee. I am grateful to you for taking part in this afternoon's session and for sharing your testimony with us.

[*English*]

Colleagues, with that, I wish you safe travels. Have productive constituency weeks.

We stand adjourned until our next meeting.

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