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# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi





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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)):** Welcome to meeting number 49 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

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

Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. Those participating by video conference can click on the microphone icon to activate their mike. Please mute yourselves when you are not speaking. Regarding interpretation, those on Zoom have the choice of “floor”, “English” or “French” at the bottom of their screen. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I remind you, again, that all comments from both witnesses and members should go through the chair.

In accordance with our routine motion—also known as the “Bergeron motion”—I can inform all members that witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Allow me, at this juncture, to welcome two new members who have joined us for today's purposes: Ms. Shelby Kramp-Neuman and Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné.

It is now my great pleasure to welcome, from the Embassy of the Republic of Peru, His Excellency Mr. Roberto Rodríguez, who serves as the ambassador here in Ottawa. He is accompanied by Mr. Carlos Alfredo García Palacios, deputy chief of mission, and Mr. Juan Pablo Guerrero Espinoza, political affairs officer at the Peruvian embassy here in Ottawa.

Before we start, Your Excellency, I want to thank you for accommodating us. You were willing to appear before us last week but agreed to defer to today.

Yes, go ahead, Mr. Bergeron.

[Translation]

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

I'll be brief. I'd like to introduce a notice of motion.

That the committee report to the House that it calls on the Azerbaijani authorities, in accordance with its obligations as a party to the trilateral declaration of November 9,

2020, and following the appeal made by the Government of Canada on December 14, 2022, to reopen the Lachin Corridor and guarantee freedom of movement in order to avoid any deterioration in the humanitarian situation.

We will have the opportunity to discuss this later, Mr. Chair. Having said that, I'd like to point out that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from the riding of Terrebonne.

[English]

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

We will now proceed with the ambassador's opening remarks.

Mr. Ambassador, you will be provided five minutes. Once you get very close to the five-minute mark, I will hold up this sign as an indication that we'd be grateful if you could kindly wrap it up. The same rule applies when the members are asking you questions, because each member is allotted a specific time. If you're getting very close to that mark, I will put this up, and we'd be grateful if you could try to summarize what you're saying.

On that point, Mr. Ambassador, the floor is yours.

**His Excellency Roberto Rodriguez (Ambassador, Embassy of the Republic of Peru):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am very pleased to accept your invitation to appear at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development today to discuss before this distinguished gathering the current situation in Peru.

As you know, last December 7, former president Pedro Castillo attempted to disrupt democracy and stage a *coup d'état*. If former president Castillo had achieved this goal, today we would be facing a dictatorship ruling Peru.

Due to these actions, the Peruvian Congress declared his vacancy and former vice-president Dina Boluarte assumed the presidency of Peru, following a constitutional succession process in compliance with the rules of the Peruvian constitution.

I would like to emphasize that the decision of former president Castillo was harshly criticized by his own cabinet of ministers, the legislative and judicial branches, the public ministry, the ombudsman's office, political parties, foreign governments, public opinion in general and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

President Boluarte has proposed to Congress a path to move forward and resolve the current situation by advancing the time to have general elections, so that a new president can assume office by the end of 2023 or early 2024.

It is important to point out that the transition government from its first day set as a priority the implementation of policies to address the most urgent social demands of the population. It is relevant to highlight the installation of dialogue tables in several regions of the country in order to address the most pressing demands of the population. This is a mission that was assigned to the cabinet of ministers, aimed at building a direct communication channel between citizens and local, regional and central government authorities. Despite the willingness for dialogue offered by this new government, a series of demonstrations and justified protests arose in order to meet the social demands of the population.

It is very important to distinguish between the protests being made peacefully by a large part of the protesters exercising their rights of freedom, of expression and of demonstration, versus those by a group of people who have dedicated themselves to generating violence in the streets in the last weeks—especially in the south of the country—and seeking to impose their own agenda through these violent acts.

The Peruvian government does not seek to label any person who participates in the protest. The Peruvian Minister of Foreign Affairs has emphasized that the government identifies at least three types of protesters. First are those who have a legitimate demand as part of the great social gaps that afflict us as a society. Second are the supporters of former president Pedro Castillo who, through measures of pressure, seek to promote various political agendas, ranging from the release of the former president to the holding of a constituent assembly. Finally, there are violent groups that have committed proven attacks and acts of vandalism, and should be punished according to the law and the constitutional order.

I would like to reiterate that Peru recognizes the right to peaceful protest and remains firm and determined to bring order and provide security to all Peruvians when these violent groups use force, destroying critical infrastructure and endangering the safety and living conditions of the population. The Peruvian government has been emphatic in pointing out that it has not authorized violent repression against demonstrators in the protests.

The Government of Peru deeply regrets the loss of the irreplaceable lives of 59 of our citizens in the context of these demonstrations and the acts of violence occurring in our country. The competent entities, with full freedom and constitutional autonomy, are conducting investigations to clarify the truth and establish the applicable criminal responsibilities. Likewise, the government is accompanying the families of the victims and ensuring compensation for the tragic loss of their relatives.

Furthermore, I can clearly express that the government is providing any support and documented material needed so that justice will take its course and establish responsibilities following the due process of the law in all cases. President Boluarte and the government are committed to the investigations that are being carried out by the competent authorities and their subsequent results, which will be respected accordingly.

In addition, I would like to underscore that, acting with total transparency, the current government extended an invitation to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit

Peru and become acquainted with the human rights situation in the country.

● (1110)

In response to this invitation, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights conducted a visit between January 11 and 13, preceded by a preparatory technical mission that took place last December. For its part, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the UN visited the country on January 19 and 20. For the accomplishment of these visits, the Peruvian state provided all the facilities to meet with authorities, representatives of civil society and victims of the tragic events, and provided as well its full cooperation in order for them to carry out their activities.

Each of the more than 33 million Peruvians has human rights. We have the right to protest peacefully, the right to freedom of expression and opinion, the right to freedom of movement, the right to work and the right to access health and education. To guarantee these rights, we first need to restore social peace through an open and comprehensive dialogue between all parties involved, leaving behind violence, which is not the appropriate means to achieve political objectives.

It is the duty of the Peruvian state and its population to defend democratic institutionalism and reinforce it, guaranteeing respect for the human rights of all Peruvians and ensuring a democratic constitutional transition to the next elected authorities. The Government of Peru believes that the solution to the current political situation is the advance call for new general elections. We do hope that the international community supports this constitutional and democratic process.

Finally, I wish to thank and recognize the valuable support of the Government of Canada and members of Parliament during President Boluarte's difficult transition period. It is extremely important that we protect democracy and the rule of law, united with friendly governments who share our common values and principles. The Peruvian people want peace and prosperity and to build a better future for the country and its fellow citizens.

I would greatly appreciate your continued support during this period of transition. Canada and Peru have forged a long-standing, solid and friendly relationship as strong partners. We look forward to continuing to work closely to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, not just in our countries but throughout the region.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ambassador Rodriguez.

We will now turn to the members for questions.

Mr. Hoback, you have the first slot for six minutes.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank you and your colleagues, Ambassador, for being here this morning to give us the latest update on what's going on in Peru. I do appreciate the briefings you've given us over time. This a nice chance to get it all on the record officially.

You talked about the constitutional process that was used to re-establish the interim leadership. Can you maybe describe how that functioned and how that operated?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** We have articles 90 and 112 of the political constitution that established a term of five years for the Congress and the presidency. This means that, under ordinary circumstances, the members of Congress as well as President Boluarte would finish their current term in July 2026.

As I mentioned before, there was a constitutional association when former president Castillo tried to attempt a *coup d'état*. There was an immediate reaction from all the democratic institutions. Congress convened, and President Castillo was impeached with 103 votes from all the political parties, including Peru Libre, which was the party that presented the presidency of former president Castillo. After that, strictly following what the constitution says, Vice-President Boluarte was sworn in as President of Peru. This is the way the constitution proceeded.

Now the government is trying to hear the general demand of the population in advance of a new general electoral process. To do so, we need to have constitutional reform. That is why, taking into account this political crisis and the demands of the population, President Boluarte, in accordance with the provisions of article 107 of the political constitution of Peru, submitted for the urgent consideration of the Congress of the Republic a constitutional reform project that modifies the terms of her mandate. It proposes that the general election be moved forward to April 2024. That deal was approved last December in a first vote with 93 votes.

I must point out that, prior to the presentation of this bill, there was another one presented within Congress in which it was proposed to hold elections in December 2023 and assume a new government on May 1, 2024. That project was rejected.

Subsequently, in January, they led a side deal that was presented by the executive branch, and within Congress, there were two projects presented to bring forward elections to December 2023, which did not achieve the necessary consensus for approval.

For these reasons, President Boluarte presented for the second time a new project to advance elections, this time to be held in October of this year and having the new government take office on December 31 of this year. This project was referred to the constitution committee and was not approved. Currently, the Congress is still discussing the issue and the legislative session could be concluded by tomorrow, but there is some discussion between the parties and Congress to extend this legislative session until February 17 to continue talking about this. This is still being worked out right now as we are talking.

• (1120)

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Are all members of Congress to decide? It's not one individual saying this or that.

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** No, it's the institution of Congress according to the constitution, because, to call a general electoral process in advance, we need to reform the constitution. The only body that can do that is Congress.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Concerning the individuals that are elected at this point in time, if there is a new election, will they be allowed

to put their names forward again for the next term or will they have termed out?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** This is something that is being discussed within Congress, if they have the possibility of being re-elected or not, because the constitution does not recognize the possibility for congresswomen and congressmen to be re-elected. In this case, because the mandate has not finished due to it's being five years, I don't know if they are going to be discussing the possibility. This is something that pertains to the Congress.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** In the removal of the president, Congress followed the constitution in the process to have him removed. Is that fair to say?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Strictly, yes. It was a constitutional succession. There is no question about it.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** As far as the military and the judicial branch, there's an agreement the process was legitimate.

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** When former president Castillo attempted this *coup d'état* and gave his message to the nation, after the message, the armed forces and the police immediately made a communiqué saying that they were going to respect the constitution.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** It did what it was supposed to do.

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Exactly. It respected the constitution and all the democratic institutions answered to that attempt of former president Castillo. He was impeached, as I mentioned earlier. Then Vice-President Boluarte was sworn in.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** When you look now at the protests that are going on, do you see any outside influence from countries in the region that are trying to have an impact and disrupt the activities in Peru, or do you see it as just domestic?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** There are ongoing investigations. I cannot tell you whether that is the case or not.

The reality, as I mentioned, is that we, as a government, have been able to differentiate two types of protesters. There are those who are peacefully expressing their demands and what they believe is necessary to do. The second group are the supporters of former president Castillo. The only political agenda they have is to have former president Castillo liberated and have a new constitution. Then these violent groups.... I don't know.

What I can tell you is.... I have the information here regarding a statement made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in which—

**The Chair:** Mr. Ambassador, I'm sorry. We're considerably over time.

Can I ask that you conclude your remarks in about 20 seconds?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Okay. I can get back to that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We next go to MP Zuberi.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Ambassador Rodriguez, I'd like to thank you for being here. I've read your bio and I see that you've been a diplomat since 1990. I recognize your service and your contribution to this committee.

Can you please tell us what the situation of past-president Castillo is right now? Can you briefly touch upon that?

• (1125)

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Of course.

As mentioned, former president Castillo attempted a *coup d'état*. It was considered a criminal act, typified in our criminal laws as a crime of rebellion. After giving a message to the nation where he declared the constitutional closing of Congress and the intervention of the whole judiciary, he decided to rule by himself through decrees.

He was detained in flagrant delicto of his crime by the Peruvian National Police and placed at the disposal of the corresponding judicial authorities.

Given the seriousness of the act and the position Mr. Castillo held, the Peruvian Supreme Court of Justice ordered Mr. Castillo to be held in preventive detention for 18 months. This period of detention is being executed in strict respect of his fundamental rights. He is not in a common prison. He's in a special prison. The former president has a legal defence and receives daily visits. He has even been visited by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. He is not isolated and actively coordinates the management of his Twitter account, among other rights.

The situation of former president Castillo is a matter of strict competence of the public prosecutor's office and the judiciary, which are institutions that have been following his judicial case in strict compliance with the rules of due process. I have to emphasize that they work under the constitutional principle of the separation of powers and are autonomous in their responsibilities and decisions in each specific place.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you. That was a very thorough answer. You basically highlighted what I was questioning about due process and his judicial rights. I understand it's a very fluid moment in your country, but in hard times, it's critical that fundamental rights are respected.

Continuing on that theme, we know that 59 people have been killed since the new President Boluarte, your current president, has assumed office.

Can you share how your country is protecting the fundamental freedom of people to express their opinions in a pacific way? How is your country ensuring that people are not being injured or killed while expressing those fundamental freedoms?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** The government is fully committed to promoting and protecting human rights. As I mentioned in my intervention, once we had these irreplaceable losses of life, the government reacted immediately, inviting the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to pay a visit, even the office of the high commissioner of the UN. It was open to giving all the materials, all the information that was requested by the prosecutor's office and the attorney general's office, to try to figure out what happened.

To avoid the situation that happened in the past, the government has established dialogue and dissuasion as the first line of defence in all public demonstrations, avoiding the use of force at all times. When legitimate use of force must be made, the government has or-

dered that all actions be accompanied by the presence of representatives of the public prosecutor's office to safeguard the rights of all parties involved and to open all necessary investigations.

I can give you an example. Last week, we had 70 points of blockades all over the country. In one week, we now have 58, so we have been able to diminish 21 with the participation of the police and the support of the armed forces. In doing this, we didn't have any injured people or deceased people. The most important thing right now is the dialogue, so the police are convincing these people.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Is there an investigation happening with respect to the police action and how that loss of life took place—specifically around the police action and military action?

• (1130)

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Yes. As I mentioned in my intervention, the Government of Peru is committed to providing all facilities to the public prosecutor's office to conduct investigations leading to the identification and necessary prosecution and punishment of those responsible for causing damages to life and the physical integrity of public and private property as a result of the protests and acts of vandalism. Those cases of excessive, disproportionate and alleged illegitimate use of force are being investigated and will be sanctioned as appropriate. The judiciary will perform its functions with autonomy, taking into account the separation of powers and the rule of law.

We truly seek justice as it should be done. The government, as I mentioned, is providing all of the information required by the prosecutor's office and the attorney general's office.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Bergeron, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, His Excellency the Ambassador, thank you for being with us this morning.

As you can imagine, we're concerned about the situation currently unfolding in Peru, and it's of great concern to us for a number of reasons.

Canada and Peru are part of the Organization of American States. Quebec, whose official and common language is French, is part of Latin America.

Canada provided nearly \$31 million in aid to Peru in 2020–21. This support was intended, among other things, to improve accountability, transparency and efficiency in the delivery of government services.

The focus is also on “promoting a vibrant civil society and the protection of human rights, including indigenous populations, by advancing gender equality and women's and girls' rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights”.

On January 27, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights condemned the violence used to disperse protesters at the facilities of the National University of San Marcos in Lima a week earlier.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights also noted that Peru's national police raided the university using multipurpose armoured vehicles and arrested 193 people, including a pregnant woman, several children, indigenous people, elderly people, students and four journalists, who were later released. As reported, 59 people unfortunately lost their lives in the course of these violent events.

We're concerned about what is happening in your country.

Is there anything that Peru wants from Canada to resolve the current situation in Peru?

[English]

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think today, more than ever, Peru needs the strong support of countries that promote democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, such as Canada, in order to protect democratic institutions and the rule of law in Peru.

We're aware that the actions of December 7 are the immediate cause of the political crisis we're experiencing and that they have pushed the response capacity of our institutions to the limit, without ignoring the structural problems of inequality that exist in Peru.

In this difficult context that my country's going through, the support for democracy and institutions that we have been receiving from Canada is highly appreciated. It constitutes a tangible demonstration of the profound relationship of friendship, respect and co-operation that exists between the two countries.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** I am sorry to press His Excellency, but beyond this simple expression of intent, this simple show of interest by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, are you expecting anything specific from Canada?

[English]

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Canada is closely following what's going on in my country right now, and we do value the concern that it has as a country because of the situation we're facing right now.

The transition of government... President Boluarte right now is trying to set up dialogue tables with all the parties concerned regarding this crisis we're facing. For us, the main objective is to have this dialogue. If there is a protest, we need to identify who the leaders are of these groups that are protesting and demanding that. The ministers have been travelling extensively all over the Peruvian territory, including the considered hot spots in Puno, Arequipa and Huancavelica, so the disposition of the government for having a dialogue is very important.

Obviously, for us it's very important that the international community follow this closely. This is a support that we... You say, no, this is just a statement, but those statements are very important. The words of the Government of Canada for us are very important. It's not just an expression of support made just by Canada. There are

now other countries in the region that are doing the same. We do value the participation and the follow-up that Canada is doing regarding the current situation that my country is facing. I can tell you that I have been in permanent contact with my colleagues at Global Affairs Canada.

• (1135)

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** How do you explain the fact that the decision to preserve democratic institutions in the country has resulted in the social and political situation deteriorating to this extent in the space of a few weeks?

The process was supposed to protect and reinforce democratic institutions. How do you explain that the process has nevertheless resulted in a situation of this kind?

[English]

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** We are working with total transparency. We have openness, transparency and accountability. We try to defend the full freedom of press and speech. Judicial institutions are operating with full autonomy. Citizens exercise their right to demonstrate. The government has the obligation to guarantee order and the rights of all Peruvians threatened by violent groups trying to impose their own agenda.

The government is aware of the delicate social-political situation and the complexities of reaching a solution to resolve a historic debt with regions and sectors of the population that have been marginalized for many years.

For this reason, as I mentioned, the government has been deploying its best efforts to restore internal order, safeguarding the integrity of its population and its critical infrastructure in full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Right now the government is working on it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now go to Ms. McPherson.

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Thank you very much for being here, Your Excellency.

It's of course a sad opportunity for you to be here. I have great memories of my time spent in Peru, and I know that all of us here at this table are very saddened by what's happening in your country. I'm going to ask some questions that may echo a bit of what some of my colleagues have asked, just to give you an opportunity to share more information.

In recent weeks, we know, you've met with Canadian civil society, including Amnesty International, and of course they've raised some very serious allegations about the Peruvian authorities' violent repression of protesters. In recent weeks, attacks on protesters, who are often the most vulnerable and marginalized Peruvians, have continued in Peru.

Peru, like all countries, does of course have an obligation under international law to respect the rights of citizens. That of course includes the right to safe protests. I do understand that you've identified that there are different groups of protesters. I'm wondering if you could speak a little more clearly about the plans to launch a thorough and impartial investigation into allegations of human rights violations during the protests.

● (1140)

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** I totally agree with you that there has to be an impartial investigation. This is something that we received as a message from the NGOs related to human rights. When I had the opportunity to meet with the secretary general of Amnesty International Canada, she was very vocal in conveying that message. I duly noted that, and I reported that to my capital.

I think the most direct answer that I can give you is this tangible example of the government: When all these terrible, irreplaceable losses of life happened, the government reacted immediately. When I say "immediately", it was the day after. We invited in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and not just its regional body, and also the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. That was a tangible example of how we do care about human rights.

Besides that, there's an ongoing investigation developed by the prosecutor's office and the attorney general's office, which are autonomous agencies that do not have any relationship with the executive branch or the legislative branch. They've already had meetings with former members of the cabinet, current members of the cabinet and high-ranking officers of the government. The government has provided a lot of the material requested by the attorney general's office. That's an important investigation.

In the international arena and in the national arena, we are answering and taking care regarding these requests made by the NGOs. Many people know that it is necessary to have an impartial investigation. We do believe in that.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you.

How will your government address the ongoing marginalization, discrimination and denial of rights particularly in rural and indigenous communities? That is an area that I think all people around the world are quite concerned about with regard to these protests. Can you provide some information on that, please?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Yes. Thank you for the question.

We are developing every effort to undertake a process of national dialogue with an intercultural and human rights approach in order to reach a consensual solution to the difficult situation the country is going through. The only peaceful, democratic and constitutional solution that has been seen for the political crisis in Peru is to hold early elections. As you aware, Peru is recognized as a multicultural, multilingual country, with more than 50 native ethnic groups—Andean, Amazonian—in addition to Peruvians and international migrants.

In this sense, the intercultural approach is sharing both ideas and differences with the intention of developing a deeper understanding of different perspectives and practices. When the ministers are going to the regions in the Andes, in the south, in the centre or in the Amazon region, they are doing this intercultural approach.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** When you are having these conversations with indigenous communities and indigenous leadership, do you feel that they see that as sufficient to ensuring that their rights are being protected? Do the communities themselves feel that it is a sufficient response?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** That's the idea and purpose of the approaches and conversations. I cannot tell you, right now, how the dialogues are evolving, but the objective is to have an intercultural approach with the communities and original peoples from not just the Andes but also the Amazon region.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, that's fine. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson.

We will now turn to Mr. Epp for the second round of questioning.

You have four minutes, Mr. Epp.

**Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ambassador and officials, for coming to us today.

In October, Peru hosted the Organization of American States' annual meeting. I had the opportunity to visit. I was in your Congress and met with five of your congressmen. What is to be celebrated, from my perspective—from all of ours, I think—is that your constitution held through a very difficult period.

Here in Canada, we also have regional differences. We have indigenous folks. We represent those interests through five different parties in our Parliament.

My understanding is that—please correct me if I'm wrong—there are 16 parties in your Congress. Could you clarify that? That's far more than here in Canada. My understanding is also that former president Castillo was elected with about 16% of the popular vote. That background may help us understand and appreciate how your constitution held.

Go ahead, please, sir.

● (1145)

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Thank you for the question.

Yes, within our Congress, you can count more than eight political parties, so the voting is dispersed—if we can say that.

Regarding the election of former president Castillo.... In our constitution, to get elected as president, you have to get, in the first round, 50% plus one vote of the legally admitted votes, which is a special formula we have in our country. In the first round, President Castillo roughly reached 17% to 18% of the total vote, and the second candidate had 12%, or something like that. Therefore, they went to the second round, and President Castillo won by 49,000 votes, roughly speaking.

That's the process we have for electing our president.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you.



There are ongoing protests. You've elaborated on how they've been peacefully dealt with, in the interim—since the transition. It's not unsurprising, with that many divergent voices.

Can you characterize the protests, particularly as they relate to the push for constitutional changes? Are the protests being held at present generally of one voice? Is there one predominant message or a wide variety of messages?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** If I may, let me go back, as this is something that, in some way, addresses your question.

Our Minister of Foreign Affairs recently made statements to local media. She was clearly stating that the ongoing investigation into what happened in Peru will uncover the source of the funds of those financing the violent groups. Recently, the judiciary detained two people allegedly linked to the financing. We are closely following the outcome of these investigations.

Unfortunately, we witnessed violent groups taking advantage of these demonstrations—as was mentioned earlier—in order to commit serious attacks against law enforcement, public and private property and critical infrastructure. This is very important to take into account.

Since the protests began, the airports of Arequipa, Cuzco, Juliaca, Andahuaylas and Ayacucho—five airports—have been attacked 18 times, some of them simultaneously. Likewise, more than 40 offices of public institutions have been attacked, including six superior courts, 14 offices of the judiciary, 13 police stations and several offices of the public prosecutor. In addition, there have been attacks on private property, such as the houses of congressmen in the provinces, as well as the looting of companies and businesses.

A total of 4,084 judicial files were burned during acts of vandalism against judicial offices of the superior courts of Arequipa, Apurimac, Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Puno. According to the judicial powers, the joint political motivation of possibly burning judicial files—in order to obstruct judicial processes in areas highly affected by illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, illegal mining or smuggling—has not been discarded.

These acts of violence must be categorically rejected by all citizens who seek a democratic country. Again, I say that violence is an unacceptable way to address social demands.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We go now to MP Sarai.

You have four minutes, Mr. Sarai.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Your Excellency, for joining us here today and shedding light on the situation in your country.

Your Excellency, can you please share with this committee what the Peruvian constitution defines as “moral incapacity”? How was it used in the Peruvian vote on December 7, 2022?

• (1150)

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Thank you.

There is no definition. It says that you can be vacated because of “moral incapacity”. It explicitly says it that way in the constitution.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** You're saying that the constitution doesn't actually have a definition of it, but the Congress felt that there was no capacity in the president to sustain and therefore he was asked to be removed?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Former president Castillo attempted a *coup d'état*. That situation fuelled an immediate reaction from all of the democratic institutions, including the Congress. They immediately considered that it was right to vacate former president Castillo because of the attempted *coup d'état* and they used that article.

That's the answer I can give you. It was something that was within the power of Congress.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Okay. Thank you.

Next, can you tell us the steps that your government is taking towards reconciliation and working in partnership with indigenous peoples across Peru, especially during this current crisis and for the future?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Yes. Thank you.

As I was saying, the priority of the government right now is to establish dialogue with all the parties. Second, it's to attend to the urgent social and economic demands. Those are the most important priorities for the government.

The current situation, which we've been facing for more than a month, is affecting my country economically. It's affecting the most vulnerable people. I mentioned the blockades. We had 78 blockades last week, and now we have 52. These blockades affect the most vulnerable people, because there's no possibility to do trade. The Peruvian economy, unfortunately, is 75% informal, and it is mostly encompassed by entrepreneurs. These are small microenterprises that live on a day-to-day basis. The effect of these blockades has been very hard.

Besides that, those blockades affect the right to education and health. It affects the current vaccination program that we are implementing. We have just received the bivalent vaccines. It is not possible to get vaccinations to the remote places where the most vulnerable people are, because the roads are closed. The right to education is also affected, because the school year begins in March. The education ministry needs to send new materials to the public schools, check on all the infrastructure and do renovations.

What I'm trying to tell you is that as a government, we're doing our best to attend to the urgent demands. President Boluarte has been very clear in saying that she considers her government a transitional one. The other political objective and priority is to try to hold an electoral process as soon as possible. At the same time, as a state, we have to function. We have to attend to the urgent demands of the people. I've given you two clear examples, which are health and education.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Thank you.

Your Excellency, as a like-minded ally—

**The Chair:** Mr. Sarai, I'm afraid you're out of time.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** We now go to MP Sinclair-Desgagné for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My family name is Sinclair-Desgagné, but it's also Villarlan Calderon. My mother always called me Natalia Ines del Carmen Villarlan Calderon.

I am Peruvian myself, and I must say the situation concerns me a lot. In fact, I had to cancel my trip to Peru, which was supposed to happen two weeks from now—I was taking my son there for the first time.

I just want to share my concerns with the committee.

As we speak, violent protests are blocking the country. Trade union associations and groups, such as the General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (GCTP) and the Unitary Union of Education Workers of Peru (SUTEP), which together represent approximately 800,000 workers, have called for a general strike.

The different cities and regions of Peru are uniting for the strike. At this very moment, some cities are completely blocked. Violent clashes are also currently happening in Arequipa, where the police and army are trying to keep protesters from blocking roads. I remind you that Arequipa is one of the richest regions of Peru for its minerals and agriculture, and it provides a huge amount of resources to all of Latin America.

Mr. Ambassador, I want to emphasize that I very much enjoyed your speech. In my opinion, your speech was nuanced, and nuance is much needed in such a heated context.

One thing stood out to me overwhelmingly. As a result of the coup, which you obviously called unconstitutional, President Castillo was removed through a constitutional process. I'd like to point out that countries like Bolivia, Mexico and Colombia expressed their support for President Castillo despite the coup.

• (1155)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I apologize for interrupting, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, but you're out of time.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** How much speaking time was I entitled to?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You're out of time. You're over two minutes for your questioning.

We will provide the opportunity for a brief response, Mr. Ambassador.

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs for Peru, Ana Cecilia Gervasi, stated at the 7th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of CELAC—the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States—that:

It is regrettable, therefore, that some governments, of particularly close countries, have not accompanied Peru in this difficult institutional situation and, rather, have prioritised ideological affinity over unequivocal support for the rule of law and constitutional succession, seeking to establish a distorted narrative that does not correspond to the facts.

It is surprising that in 2023, there is no unanimous rejection of an attempt to illegally close the Congress, a democratic institution, and to try to rule by himself by emitting decrees. The countries of the Americas have a deep vocation for peace and solidarity, and are committed to strengthening democracy. We ask the region to support Peru in channelling its destiny through free, open and transparent elections. Peruvians will decide the country's destiny in democracy, dialogue and peace.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

We now go to Ms. McPherson.

You have two minutes.

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

Again, thank you, all, very much for being here, gentlemen. Thank you for sharing this information with us.

We have heard there has been excessive force used by the police and the military, that there has been tear gas fired indiscriminately and that there have been people being fired upon in their upper body region. One of the questions I want to ask a little more specifically is.... We've also heard that local journalists have been targeted. They've been assaulted. They've been stripped of their equipment by police, and they are not being respected. Of course, for Canadians and for parliamentarians, as we try to find out the information about what is happening on the ground, a press that can do its job is fundamental.

What can you tell us about that, please, Ambassador?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** What I can tell you is if you see Peruvian TV and you hear Peruvian radio—not just in Lima but in the regions—you will be able to tell that there is full freedom of speech and opinion. If you see what happened in the last days, there was coverage but the whole press....

What I'm telling you is that the government is not vocal just in promoting and protecting human rights, but also in protecting the freedoms of speech and opinion and the liberty of the press. There is no question about it. I can assure you of that.

• (1200)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Are you now saying that's not true, that there have not been attacks on local media and journalists?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** I do not....

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Attacks...that there have not been attacks against journalists in Peru.

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** I know nothing about that.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

We now go to Mr. Chong.

You have four minutes, Mr. Chong.

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

Your Excellency, thank you for coming to our meeting today. It's good to see you again. I have two quick questions for you.

My first concerns the election. One of the main demands of the protesters is for an immediate election. As you mentioned in your previous remarks, currently, there's an election that was moved up to 2024.

What's the likelihood of an election taking place sometime this year and, even more to the point, much more quickly, in the next several months?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** I have to recognize that's a tough question to answer.

What I can tell you is that the Congress right now is discussing this matter. They have the opportunity of tackling the issue and resolving this. What I'll tell you is that for the government, in the political area, the main objective is to uphold an early general election. Of all these political and social crises that my country is facing, one of the main demands by the population is to have, as soon as possible, an electoral process.

It's the Congress right now that is working on that. As I mentioned, there are more than seven or eight political parties involved, so the discussions in some way, I presume, are complex. It will take a lot of time and conversation to exhaust all the coordination and work. It is being done right now.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Ambassador, many Peruvians are clearly upset with the state of their democracy.

In a trusted poll done by Vanderbilt University, just 21% of Peruvians are satisfied in their democracy. That's down from 52% a decade ago. A trusted poll shows that the majority of Peruvians support the protests. Clearly, there are challenges with popular support in Peru for democratic institutions. There have been six presidents and three congresses over the last five years. Freedom House has highlighted a pattern of institutional classes between the executive branch and the legislative branch.

My question is very simple. What can the Government of Canada do to assist your government, your country, in helping to stabilize your democratic institutions and helping to restore Peruvians' faith in their democracy? What can the Government of Canada do in terms of support, aid, democratic assistance, those sorts of things?

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** First, I would like to underscore something. What you say is true. We've had five presidents in six years, but the important thing here is that democracy works in my country, because this recurring crisis was resolved through the constitutional order. That's something that is very important to take into account.

Regarding what Canada can do to support us, I think that one of our weaknesses is our capacity to manage resources at the regional and local level. That's why there is great frustration within the whole Peruvian population, because what they want is to receive

and to be attending to their own demands. Concerning regional governments, local governments and even the central government, when you see public investment and how the investment is working, at the end of the year, instead of 100% of resources, they just use 15% or 20%, so there is no capacity for management.

Enhancing the capacity of the regional governments, the local governments, with the help of other countries that have a lot of experience in doing so would be appreciated.

Also, I believe there's the challenge of communication between political parties. With, let's say, political parties from Canada, like-minded political parties can exchange ideas and criteria. This is a way of giving support, by establishing these positive exchanges of ideas.

I believe in co-operation. In the political area, there is a lot of possibility for co-operation there. In terms of political parties, you have ParlAmericas, which is a very important institution where there is a connectivity between all the parliaments of the region. There's a way in which everyone can work, and the other is the friendship group between Peru and Canada. They can have these close relationships and try to work it out through some exchange of repeating experiences in the political arena. I believe that those are two ways in which Canada could support us.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We go to the final question for four minutes with Madam Bendant.

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

*[Member spoke in Spanish]*

*[English]*

I would also like to hear you gentlemen on next steps, how you feel Peru will move forward given the current political context and how you feel Peru might work with international organizations in order to contribute to greater stability in the country.

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Regarding international organizations, as I mentioned, and the current crisis that we're facing, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights visited Peru twice. There's going to be a report, and there's going to be a recommendation that is going to be taken into account by the government. It's the same for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The OAS has been following the situation in my country as well, and Peru has been very open and transparent in participating in that process. Obviously in the bilateral arena, we have been in contact, through our Minister of Foreign Affairs, the deputy minister, with many governments of the region to talk about the current situation.

How is my country going to move forward regarding this? As I mentioned, first of all, this current government prioritizes dialogue and trying to attend to the urgent needs in the many areas of health, education and reactivation of the economy. Second, it will try to have these new electoral processes, which is the only solution that the government sees as a way out of the crisis we're facing right now.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** Allow me, if you will, Mr. Ambassador, to pick up on one of the questions of my colleague Mr. Chong with respect to the resignation of multiple presidents in the last few years. From an outsider's perspective—and I appreciate that you have a much better understanding of this situation—it certainly appears as though the power of the executive has been diminished, although the powers of the parliament are quite extensive. I wonder how, politically, you see being able to work through this challenge with respect particularly to the executive branch.

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** There is a discussion within Congress to do a reform of the constitution. One of the areas they are thinking about reforming is the political one. It has to do with the situation that you exposed, because there is this possibility to vacate the position of president, but at the same time there is a possibility for the executive to close Congress. There are some articles of the constitution that elaborate on that.

There is an intention by the political parties to make political reforms. It has been said extensively in interviews by different members of Congress, and they are working on that. Because of the crisis we're facing, obviously the main objective right now is to try to figure out how Congress is going to decide whether or not it is possible to have an early electoral process. This is the main discussion they are having right now.

• (1210)

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** Mr. Chair, do I have a few moments left?

**The Chair:** No, you do not.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

*Muchas gracias et bienvenido.*

**The Chair:** Thank you.

On that note, your Excellency, allow me to thank you.

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** *Gracias.*

**The Chair:** We all certainly appreciate that your country is going through a challenging period, but we certainly hope that your government and the institutions in Peru will exercise restraint and remain committed to the highest constitutional ideals and will live long.

Thank you.

**Mr. Roberto Rodriguez:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will suspend for four minutes.

• (1210)

(Pause)

• (1215)

**The Chair:** Welcome back, everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 2, 2023, the committee is now holding a briefing on the current situation in Peru.

It is my pleasure to welcome, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Mr. Michael Grant, the assistant deputy minister for the Americas. We also have with us, Mr. Jason

Tolland, the director general for South America. Finally, we have Ms. Marie-Christine Dubé the deputy director of the department.

We're very grateful that you made yourselves available for opening remarks. As I'm sure you know full well, you have five minutes.

• (1220)

**Mr. Michael Grant (Assistant Deputy Minister, Americas, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. I very much welcome this opportunity to discuss Peru and Canada's perspectives on the current situation.

For a number of years, Peru has witnessed what can be best described as dynamic politics, at times even volatile. Six presidents in six years is a clear example of that.

[*Translation*]

However, throughout these challenges, Peru has relied on strong institutions and its constitutional processes have been respected.

The current political crisis was triggered on December 7, 2022, when the president, Pedro Castillo, facing impeachment proceedings, attempted to dissolve Peru's Congress and rule by decree.

In accordance with its constitution, Congress responded by impeaching the president, and executive power was transferred to the vice-president, Dina Boluarte, who became acting president.

[*English*]

From the outset, Canada's position has been clear on two key points.

First, as with the vast majority of the international community, we recognize that the constitutional process had been followed and we deemed the transfer of power to President Boluarte to be legitimate. While a small number of countries have a nuanced position on that, our key like-minded partners and the majority of countries in the hemisphere have also recognized the constitutional legitimacy of President Boluarte.

Second, Canada has repeatedly emphasized the right to peaceful protest, the need to respect both the rule of law and human rights and for security forces to exercise restraint.

[*Translation*]

On December 17, Minister Joly spoke to Peru's foreign minister Ana Gervasi to advocate for a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

Canadian officials continue to convey this message to all parties as well as in regional and multilateral forums.

Canada has also encouraged efforts for a prompt and transparent investigation of alleged human rights violations.

[English]

On January 25, Canada affirmed this message in our recommendations to Peru during their universal periodic review at the UN Human Rights Council.

On January 30, Canada played a key role in achieving regional consensus on an Organization of American States declaration expressing concerns about the use of force by authorities and calling for accountability for human rights violations, a declaration that was supported by all member states of the OAS, including Peru.

Canada also supports and encourages continued collaboration between Peru and international human rights mechanisms, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, to document and investigate alleged human rights abuses that are linked to the crisis.

[Translation]

The Peruvian government is currently trying to move up the date of the upcoming presidential election and establish a dialogue with the protesters.

As part of its ongoing engagement with Peruvian authorities and civil society, the Government of Canada continues to emphasize the importance of inclusive dialogue, due process and respect for human rights.

[English]

This committee's interest today underscores Canada's concerns as well as the importance of a key hemispheric relationship.

For many years, Canada and Peru have worked together closely in international fora, in advancing the rule of law and support for democracy and human rights. Our relationship has prospered since our bilateral trade agreement entered into force in 2009. Canadian investments in Peru stand at over \$12 billion, and our merchandise exports reached \$1 billion, which is a new high.

• (1225)

Our economic partnership has been complemented by investment in people, through our comprehensive development assistance. Since 2012, Canada has provided over \$330 million in programming, focusing on empowering women and girls, indigenous communities and, more broadly, capacity building across civil society initiatives.

[Translation]

Our bilateral engagement through the Canada-Peru Parliamentary Friendship Group contributes to this relationship.

In addition, a regional project of ParlAmericas supports a range of issues, such as parliamentary transparency.

[English]

The situation in Peru is complex and has been difficult for Peruvians and for the extended Peruvian Canadian community here.

We remain vigilant, connected to our partners in the hemisphere, to the Government of Peru and to Peruvian civil society, and we will continue to work to be a part of the solution.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Grant.

We now go to the members.

First up is MP Hoback. You have four minutes.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for being here this afternoon. With four minutes I don't have a lot of time, so I'll be fast.

First of all, are there any concerns for the safety of our staff, our people on the ground in Peru?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Our staff in Peru and in other places where there are crises are always of uppermost importance.

Today, no, we haven't had too many concerns. There have been some days when staff had to remain in their residences rather than travel to the embassy, as the location around the embassy has seen protests. We take the utmost caution when it comes to our staff.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Do you feel the requests we're making to the Peruvian government to show restraint in how they handle protesters is being listened to and respected?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** As I mentioned in my remarks, from the outset with our engagement with the Government of Peru, we have been clear on the importance of police and other security authorities exercising restraint. We believe that the Government of Peru has heard this and has listened, and we believe they are moving in the right direction.

The protests have been chaotic. They've taken place in many different locations. They have unfolded differently. In some instances, it would appear, based on some of the allegations, there may have been some police acting on their own recourse, perhaps not receiving command and control, but we will continue to emphasize that it's the responsibility of the Government of Peru to ensure that excessive force is not used.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** The upcoming election remains to be called. Will Canada have observer status in regard to that? How do you see maintaining peace during the election period?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** We have a good tradition in Peru and in the hemisphere of supporting elections. There's an organization in the OAS that coordinates hemisphere contributions. We have provided funding in the past.

In my recollection of the last few elections in Peru, I haven't seen international observers. It could very well be the case this time, and I think Canada has a strong tradition of participating when that does happen.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** You talked about institution building, and you talked about the areas that you've been working on, which I agree with.

In the whole region, we're starting to see the institutions being undermined by lots of governments. It's not just what's happened in Peru, but we're seeing it in other areas.

Do you think Canada needs to spend more money building up the actual institutions of government and maybe a little less around NGOs and civil society?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** I would agree that we've seen, in recent years, strains on democratic governance in many places in the hemisphere. I think Canada's engagement, first and foremost, with citizens, with civil society, to ensure they understand their rights, that they have capacity to engage, is primordial.

In terms of direct assistance to governments in building their institutions, I think that could be explored in terms of additional assistance.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Have we set aside funding for that in the last six years? Has there been a priority towards building institutions within the region, compared to other priorities?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Yes. Global Affairs Canada does have a program of technical assistance, and some of that has been used in the hemisphere in terms of supporting—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** What would its budget be?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** I don't have that figure in front of me.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Would you bring that to the table?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I'm just curious. When you look at the countries that are not on our side, those are also countries that have institutions that are starting to be undermined. Is that fair to say?

• (1230)

**Mr. Michael Grant:** I don't know if I would characterize countries as being on our side or not on our side. We have—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I mean countries that don't share our opinion. How about if I put it that way?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** From a Canadian perspective, I think we lead with our values and our principles. First among those, I would say, is a deep belief in democracy and democratic institutions.

From the perspective of Global Affairs in the hemisphere, we are engaging with a range of actors, whether they are elected officials, public servants or civil society. If there are opportunities for us to share Canadian experiences with all of those, we'll take advantage of it. Sometimes it comes through programming and sometimes it comes through people-to-people exchanges, including with parliamentarians, which we think is a very key aspect of that.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I assume I'm out of time.

**The Chair:** Yes, you're out of time.

We now go to Mr. Sidhu for four minutes.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madam Dubé, Mr. Grant and Mr. Tolland, for joining us here today.

I know Canadians are deeply concerned by the events and the situation currently unfolding in Peru, so today's testimony is greatly appreciated.

I want to know more from you, Mr. Grant, or any of the witnesses here, in terms of the situation on the ground.

What were you hearing from the mission yesterday, this week and last week about more recent events? Can you go into some more details there?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** As you can imagine, we receive daily reports from the mission on the security situation. As I said earlier, our first priority is really the safety and security of Canadians—those at the mission and any Canadians who may be in the country.

The situation has evolved quite a bit since December. Yes, there have been days when the protests have been quite robust and other days when it's been quite quiet. It's almost on a daily basis that the mission, under the authority of the ambassador, needs to take a decision about whether they are going into the embassy. If protests are planned around the embassy, we will be very cautious and keep people at home.

I think in recent days it's been relatively quieter, but there is a significant amount of vigilance to be ready in case there are protests that may disrupt their daily activities.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you for that.

Can you speak to the committee in terms of the steps that Canada is taking to ensure or assist in a free and fair transparent election whenever that happens?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** As I mentioned earlier, Canada has a strong tradition of supporting elections and democratic processes. The Organization of American States has within it the unit that is specifically mandated to support not just the elections themselves but electoral institutions. Canada is a key funder of that organization.

We have had a history of supporting that agency financially. When elections are called, I am sure there will be a program and there will be a request for assistance that we'll look at, at that time.

Also, as I mentioned earlier, I would not be surprised if, in the next elections, there is a request for international observers. Canada has had a strong tradition of doing that in the region as well. It is something we would look at positively.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you for that.

I know I have only about a minute left.

Can anybody here explain what you foresee coming up with the current situation?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** It's very difficult to predict. I think you heard from the ambassador that efforts are under way by the government to advance elections a bit further. I believe they see it as a key way to address some of the concerns of the protesters, and they are trying to engage the protesters themselves. We applaud those efforts. We think it's important for dialogue.

In terms of the next steps, far be it for me to predict which way it's going to go within the constitution. We will continue to insist that all efforts need to be made for dialogue, from both the government and those who are protesting. At the same time, we'll continue to work with our partners in the region, including through the OAS, to call for that level of dialogue.

There have been differences of opinion from different countries within the hemisphere, but I think the resolution that was passed on January 30 was a very important sign. It showed that there was unity that the situation needed to be resolved peacefully, calling on the government to investigate any human rights abuses and indeed calling for a peaceful way forward.

• (1235)

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

We will now go to Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné. You'll be happy to know you have four minutes this time.

Good luck.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are pretty specific.

Apart from Minister Joly's call with President Boluarte, has the Government of Canada taken any other action?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Yes, there has been some.

Canada's Ambassador to Peru Louis Marcotte, who is on the ground, speaks regularly with Peruvian leaders and the foreign minister. My colleague and I also have direct discussions with our counterparts in Lima.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Regarding Canada's role in the Organization of American States, do you think Canada plays a significant enough role and could have a positive effect on Peru, given that Canada stands out as an example of democratic institutions?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** I believe so, yes.

The resolution adopted on January 30 is a good example. There was a need for common text, and Canada played a key role in Peru and with some countries to help reach an agreement.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Do you know of any other instances when Canada has sent a diplomatic mission, for example, to help strengthen discussions between various political or union entities and protesters?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Do you mean in Peru?

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** No, elsewhere.

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Off the top of my head, I can't think of any other instances.

We feel it's important to have a dialogue, not only with the government, but also with society. That's exactly what the ambassador and his colleagues are doing.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Of course.

La paix des braves, a 2002 agreement between the Government of Quebec and an indigenous nation, is a fine example. Moreover, that example is being followed in many countries and it shows it is possible to have nation-to-nation relationships. An agreement of this kind could be useful in the discussions taking place in Peru, as racial tensions are running high.

Do you feel a diplomatic mission with people who can help establish a constructive dialogue could be helpful in this situation?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** In terms of discussions, I believe that the Canadian experience has served as an example several times.

You asked me a hypothetical question, but I do think it's possible. However, it's hard to answer it if we don't know all the details. In any event, sharing the Canadian experience is always helpful.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** If you don't mind, I must insist, Mr. Grant.

Aside from the work done by Ambassador Marcotte, do you feel that an official diplomatic mission would be helpful, especially in the next few days, which will be crucial?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** The ambassador, the minister and I are already in contact with the Peruvian government. We're not only in contact with Peru, but also with its neighbours and our neighbours in this hemisphere. We're moving to resolve this crisis diplomatically.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we come to Ms. McPherson.

You have four minutes.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank you all for being here today to share your expertise with us.

One thing I wanted to flag in some of the previous testimony we've heard today from you.... Of course, governance is one of the pillars within the feminist international assistance policy. I do want to say, from my perspective, civil society organizations are amongst the best at providing outcomes that provide for better governance. I do want to flag that I think it is important we continue to fund civil society groups that do this very important work. It is, of course, one of the key six pillars of our feminist international assistance policy.

I've been speaking to folks from Amnesty International, the Americas Policy Group and many different civil society organizations. They, of course, are raising serious concerns about the violence that is happening in Peru. I know that they've written to the department and they have not heard back from the department, which I would like to flag. It appears to often be a concern that civil society groups are not responded to, so I would just like to flag that for you.

Their partners in Peru have described serious and violent repression by Peruvian authorities, including indiscriminate attacks on protesters, journalists and human rights defenders. Of course, I'm deeply concerned. I think we all are deeply concerned about how that is impacting vulnerable Peruvians like miners, like indigenous people, like rural communities.

We do know that in the past few years Canada has issued no less than six export permits for arms to Peru, including automatic weapons, chemical or biological toxic agents and riot control armoured or protective equipment. Given the clearly violent repression of protesters by Peruvian authorities, will the minister refuse to sign any further permits for Peru and cancel any existing permits? Can you tell me how many of these permits are ongoing?

• (1240)

**Mr. Michael Grant:** What I can say is that Canada and Peru over the last years and decades have had a robust relationship, including defence-to-defence relations.

In terms of the specific export permits that you referenced, I don't have that information with me right here. I would just note that I'm not the official responsible for export permits. Although, of course, my branch would be consulted on any export permits, we don't know of any processes currently under way where we're being asked for our views on export permits.

I can simply say that I do know that, any time there is an export permit, the current situation on the ground, relations with countries, will be taken on board. In terms of the specifics, I don't have that at my fingertips.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** You could ask your colleagues within Global Affairs Canada to provide some information on how we are adhering to the Arms Trade Treaty and whether or not those are being evaluated considering the deteriorating human rights conditions in Peru right now.

You did speak about the conversation that Minister Joly had on January 17. In the letter the Americas Policy Group has written, they asked Canada to urge Peruvian authorities to “deploy all available resources to resolve the conflict through dialogue, listening to all voices, without discrimination”. How is Canada responding to this call?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Since the onset of the crisis that Peru is currently facing—and certainly when there have been events where violence has occurred—we've made it absolutely clear to Peru that they have a responsibility to ensure that their security forces are not using excessive force and that any allegations that have been made need to be investigated.

We were pleased that the Government of Peru has welcomed the involvement of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

as well as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. We believe that the work of those two organizations needs to proceed. Any allegations that have been made need to see a result, they need to see a conclusion.

We have repeatedly said this to Peruvian authorities, not only during Minister Joly's call with her counterpart but also through our ambassador to the minister, to the president and repeatedly to other senior officials.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I would urge you to also provide that information—

**The Chair:** I'm afraid you're out of time, Ms. McPherson.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** —and that support to the civil society communities in Canada that are raising these concerns with you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now move to the second round. First up is Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Genuis, you have three minutes.

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

Just briefly, I want to read a notice of motion. It reads:

That the committee undertake a study of the conduct of McKinsey & Company internationally and of the implications of the Government of Canada's contracts with McKinsey for our foreign policy.

I want to signal to the committee that, given the extent to which the house has been seized with this issue, I do intend to move this motion as soon as possible.

I'll turn the balance of my time over to Mr. Epp.

• (1245)

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've heard many calls for support for Peruvian institutions, institutions of democracy.

As this happens to be International Development Week, we've met with numerous organizations. Their concerns are that, while many multilateral organizations do good work, sometimes our Canadian institutions are not given the proper amount of attention. Similarly, right here in Ottawa, we have the parliamentary democracy organization, which seems to be an excellent vehicle to respond to the calls that we're hearing both from the testimony today and from the Peruvian....

Can you talk about the level of funding? As I understand it, there's a danger of its being closed. Could other funding be redirected for multilateral organizations to fund our very own?



**Mr. Michael Grant:** Mr. Chair, can I get a clarification?

Are you speaking of funding to...?

**Mr. Dave Epp:** It's support for the parliamentary democracy organization based here in Ottawa.

**Mr. Michael Grant:** I see.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** It's the Parliamentary Centre.

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Thank you.

The funding of that organization that Global Affairs would manage is not part of my portfolio.

In terms of support to Peruvian institutions, it is something that has been included in our assistance over the years. I mentioned earlier there's a regional project that ParlAmericas has undertaken that includes Peru, which we think is vitally important.

When it comes to our development program in Peru, it is something we constantly look at in terms of planning for future years. As the situation on the ground changes, we need to adjust our funding. I think that's something we're doing right now to see if we need to move more funding into that institutional capacity-building space.

Our commitment to Peru has been very strong and will continue to be, including facilitating the exchange of civil society from Canada with civil society from Peru and parliamentarians.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** I have one more quick question.

Peru was very late to condemn Russia's aggression into Ukraine, partly because of their reliance on Russian support for their armed forces. There were recent reports of a landslide where Peru does not have the capability, other than with Russian equipment, to reach some of the remote areas.

Is that some place that Canada could support?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** I'll turn to my colleague, Mr. Tolland, to respond.

**Mr. Jason Tolland (Director General, South America, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you, Mr. Epp.

We don't have any specific information about that or any requests related to that. Usually we respond directly to formal requests that are made to us for assistance. We'd be happy to consider this in the context of any additional information that we can receive on the issue.

We understand, first of all, the nature of the challenge that would be presented and the particular issue raised with the use of equipment from Russia in that context.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Zuberi.

Mr. Zuberi, you have three minutes.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you for being here, Mr. Grant and your colleagues, and for taking the time.

You already touched upon this, but can you speak with some specificity about how, in your view, the government and security forces conducted themselves in the difficult moments at that point in time when 59 people were killed? How did the government and security forces conduct themselves at that point in time?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** The loss of life has been tragic in this crisis and it's something that we have spoken directly to the Government of Peru about.

It's clear there are investigations needed to identify exactly what transpired. There have been many media reports that it was the security forces who were using excessive force and of course claims by Peruvians themselves. This needs to be investigated. We're very happy that the Government of Peru has agreed and they've launched their own investigations. It's important for us that they have welcomed the role of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In terms of the specifics, it's very difficult not having been in those particular settings to roll one way or the other at this point in time, but it's absolutely critical that those investigations take place and that there be a conclusion to them.

• (1250)

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** I would assume you would be looking for a thorough, robust and transparent investigation into what happened.

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** In terms of how the government and security forces are currently conducting themselves—hindsight is always 20/20—do you feel that the standard is within norms in the region and where we would want to see them going?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** I think the commitment by the government, including President Boluarte, is very important. It's the commitment to ensure that all security forces are not using excessive force. At the same time, protesters have a right to peacefully protest. That has been another key message from Canada.

At the same time, the security forces have an obligation to protect Peruvians, and if violence is used by protesters, they have an obligation to address it. However, if violence is used or excessive force has been used, it should be investigated. There's a commitment that's been made by government, and we will continue to hold them to account on that.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Are you monitoring the situation?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** Our team on the ground is doing its best to report on events. As I mentioned earlier, one of our top priorities is the safety and security of Canadians, both our staff and anyone who is visiting. We would not put our staff in harm's way, but they do their best to report, based on what they are hearing and seeing in the media and, of course, directly from Peruvians.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron. You have a minute and a half, sir.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Grant, I'm going to ask you the same question I asked the ambassador.

How is it that a process meant to protect democratic institutions could cause the social and political situation to deteriorate so much?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** That's a good question.

The political environment is clearly changing in Peru.

Of the 16, I believe, political parties that make up Congress, 12 have a little over 100 seats in the chamber. So it's always hard to reach consensus. It's also always difficult for the president, that is, the government or the executive branch, to come to an agreement with Congress.

In the past, a few presidents have been impeached. We weren't surprised that after the president attempted to dissolve Congress, they decided to impeach him. They acted in accordance with the Constitution. What surprised us were the protests and the government's response.

Our position is clear: The people have a right to hold peaceful demonstrations. The Peruvian government must respect this and not use excessive force.

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Why has the situation deteriorated?

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm afraid we're out of time. Thank you.

For the last question, we go to Ms. McPherson for a minute and a half, please.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The violence against indigenous people and against protesters is not something new. Unfortunately, Canadian mining companies are often implicated in Peru in the violence against indigenous people, yet following Castillo's departure and the outbreak of the protests, His Excellency Ambassador Marcotte visited with Peru's mining minister first and did not give the same level of interaction or support to civil society or to protesters.

Can you explain that decision?

**Mr. Michael Grant:** First and foremost, Ambassador Marcotte and his team are in constant contact with all aspects of Peruvian society, whether they be civil society organizations or the government.

• (1255)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** They chose to meet with the mining minister as one of the very first meetings that—

**Mr. Michael Grant:** No, I believe when the crisis unfolded that our engagement with the Government of Peru was very specific to what we felt were their obligations to ensure there wasn't use of excessive force. I'm not sure of the exact date that you're mentioning in terms of their meeting with the mining minister.

When it comes to Canadian companies operating in Peru, or operating anywhere, there's an understanding between them and the Government of Canada that to receive the services of the trade commissioner service in our department, they must uphold their obligations.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** With all due respect, I would say the CORE and the national contact point are relatively useless at doing the role that needs to be done. I've called them out for their inaction quite frequently. Of course, most of the companies that are bad actors don't receive support from the Canadian government, so that's not really a very good stick in that circumstance, but thank you.

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

On that note, allow me to thank Mr. Grant, Madam Dubé and Mr. Tolland. We're very grateful for your time and your expertise.

Now if members could remain for a few minutes, there are a few things that you have to approve, a few housekeeping items.

The first one, of course, is a number of budgets. There is the budget for the briefing on Peru, and I understand that everyone has received a copy of this. Is it unanimously approved by all the members?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Excellent.

There's a new budget proposal in relation to the current trip of the committee. I take it that everyone has seen that, as well. Is it adopted?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Excellent. Thank you.

Now, with respect to the news release in relation to the scheduled presentation of the report entitled “The 2022 extreme flooding in Pakistan: Saving lives and supporting a climate-resilient recovery”, is it the will of the committee to adopt and publish the news release? That is something we didn't previously touch on.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have a news release in relation to the scheduled presentation of the report entitled “The Russian State's Illegal War of Aggression Against Ukraine”. Is it the will of the committee to adopt and publish this news release?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Lastly, is it the will of the committee to adopt the following motion:

That the clerk of the committee make the necessary hospitality arrangements to purchase appropriate gifts in relation to the reception invitations scheduled on Monday, February 13, 2023, and Wednesday, February 15, 2023, with the Ambassador of Sweden to Canada, H.E. Urban Ahlin, the Ambassador of Finland to Canada, H.E. Roy Eriksson and the Ambassador of Poland to Canada, H.E. Witold Dzielski.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** What is the cost?

**The Chair:** It's a maximum of \$50, but probably hovering closer to \$20.

**Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.):** As the MP who has spent the highest amount on promotional gifts, I suggest keeping it to less than \$28.25.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Allow me to remind all the members that we are in public.

That's that.

Then, last, as you know, the subcommittee did meet, but we have yet to agree on a schedule, so would all the members unanimously agree that we do a study on the situation in Turkey and Syria with respect to the latest earthquake?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Mr. Chair, can I just point out that I think it is important that we have a.... If we could get witness suggestions to you by today, would that be helpful? I do think it is important that we have civil society at the table for these, and we didn't in today's conversations. I think it is important that those voices be heard.

**The Chair:** Absolutely. I would just remind members that, for today's purposes, for sure, that would provide the clerk with sufficient time to reach out to them. However, I should say that, with respect to today's discussion, no one did raise it previously, and by the time it was raised, it was essentially late in the day yesterday, so we cannot permit that.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Is noon tomorrow enough time to get witnesses in to schedule...?

**The Chair:** No.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** No, it's end of day today.

**The Chair:** It's end of day today, yes.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** All right. We'll do our best. Thank you.

**The Chair:** It's end of day today. If you have any suggestions as to NGOs that could speak to the issue of Turkey and Syria and the devastating earthquakes, please submit them by five o'clock today.

Thank you, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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