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# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi





# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, February 14, 2023

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)):** Welcome to meeting number 50 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, as well as remotely using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members and the witnesses before we get started.

First of all, kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. Interpretation for those on Zoom is at the bottom of your screen. You have the choice of floor, English or French.

Again, I'd just like to remind everyone to wait to be recognized by the chair before you speak.

In accordance with our routine motion—or the Bergeron motion, as I like to refer to it—I can assure all members that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 9, 2023, the committee is holding a briefing on the humanitarian crisis following a series of earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

It is now my pleasure to welcome, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Mr. Stephen Salewicz, director general, international humanitarian assistance; Mr. Jess Dutton, director general, Middle East bureau; Ms. Tara Carney, director of the international humanitarian assistance operations, who is reappearing once again—thank you for that—and Mr. Andrew Turner, director, eastern Europe and Eurasia division.

Mr. Salewicz, you will be provided with five minutes for your remarks. After that, we will proceed to rounds of questioning. I will signal to you when you are 30 seconds short of the allotted time, and I would be grateful if you could wrap it up. The same goes for questions that are put to you by the members. Once we are approaching the allotted time, I will put this card up so that you have a good sense of timing.

Now I will—

Yes, Mr. Bergeron.

[Translation]

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

With the consent of my colleagues, I move:

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.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bergeron, for that.

You're moving it.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Did you hear what he said, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, I was listening, but I was trying to—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** If he could just repeat it, that would be great.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bergeron, the members are asking that you repeat the motion you are moving.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** With pleasure, Mr. Chair. I move:

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.

• (1110)

[English]

**The Chair:** Was that clear to all of the members? Excellent.

Yes, Mr. Oliphant.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the member, Mr. Bergeron, for bringing the motion.

On our side, we are supportive of the motion. I would have some concerns that we have not had a full hearing on the topic in this committee. Nonetheless, we are supportive of the motion and to be presenting that to the House. However, I would like to make an amendment to it. We request that the government provide a response within the usual 120 days. I think that would demand that the government pay attention to it and respond to it.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Are you making an amendment, Mr. Oliphant?

We'll debate the amendment now. I'm okay with the amendment, if Mr. Bergeron is too.

**The Chair:** I believe he is.

Is everyone okay with the amendment?

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

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

**The Chair:** It's good to see there is unanimous agreement. I'm happy to hear that.

It's been adopted as well, Mr. Bergeron.

We will now resume with our witnesses. Thank you for appearing before us.

Mr. Salewicz, you will be provided five minutes for your opening remarks, after which the members will be asking questions. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz (Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you, Chair.

Good morning, committee members.

As of February 14, more than 37,000 deaths have been reported in Turkey and northwest Syria following two of the most powerful earthquakes to hit the region in more than 100 years. These earthquakes are historic in both their size and in the scale of their destruction.

I join the government and the people of Canada in extending our condolences to the people of Turkey and Syria, and to families and friends in mourning. I hope for a full recovery for the injured.

[*Translation*]

More than 6,000 buildings are reported to have been destroyed in Turkey and one million people have been forced from their homes. Across both countries, critical infrastructure, including hospitals, has been destroyed or damaged, which has only increased the needs and complicated efforts by first responders, who've been hard hit as well.

Some of the most severe damage occurred in major urban centres that serve as critical logistical hubs for the delivery of aid into northeast Syria. In northwest Syria, this disaster is only exacerbating the situation, which was already precarious due to conflicts, insecurity, an ongoing cholera epidemic, difficult winter conditions and major population displacements.

In both countries, the immediate destruction has been amplified by thousands of aftershocks causing further damage to buildings. This is forcing thousands to stay away from their homes, facing harsh winter conditions without shelter.

[*English*]

Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Joly expressed their condolences and support for Turkey immediately, as did countless numbers of Canadians.

Ankara is a long-standing partner of Canada, so when they requested our help, we responded. Last Tuesday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs held a call with her Turkish counterpart, during which she expressed Canada's readiness to assist. Canada has since been coordinating closely with Turkish officials, including the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, which leads Turkey's response efforts. In his call with the Turkish ambassador last week, Minister Sajjan underlined Canada's commitment to coordinate our response with key international partners and the Government of Turkey.

Canada's diplomatic missions on the ground are actively engaged, as are our officials here in Ottawa. We're engaging regularly with the Turkish embassy to get the most recent requests for assistance and to facilitate the deployment of Canadian experts.

Our support has been swift and meaningful. Canada has invested in a responsive international humanitarian system. This support has contributed to the UN's standing capacity to rapidly respond to national disasters. It has facilitated the immediate deployment of two UN disaster assessment and coordination teams to the region to help with critical coordination efforts, and the release of \$75 million in allocations from a variety of UN emergency funds to rapidly scale up operations.

Canada is already one of the largest contributors to the humanitarian response in Syria, having provided nearly \$50 million in 2023 alone to the UN, Red Cross and NGO partners to respond to needs. This support has enabled partners on the ground to rapidly pivot their operations to respond to needs resulting from the earthquakes.

Since 2016, Canada has provided over \$660 million in humanitarian assistance to Syria. In the the immediate aftermath of the disaster, Minister Sajjan announced \$10 million in additional humanitarian assistance. This funding will be used to support emergency medical services and provide shelter, food and other essential items to crisis-affected populations across the region.

On February 8, it was further announced that Canada will match donations to the Canadian Red Cross earthquake appeal. Every donation made by individuals to the Canadian Red Cross between February 6 and February 22 will be matched, up to a maximum of \$10 million. These funds will support the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in its response to the humanitarian needs caused by the earthquakes. Canada is also working with the Canadian Red Cross to deploy critical relief supplies that we have pre-positioned in warehouses in Dubai.

These initial allocations reflect a critical lesson learned from past disasters. Working with local actors and those already on the ground allows us to provide relief to those most in need as quickly and as effectively as possible.

• (1115)

In addition, we've also deployed a joint Global Affairs and Canadian Armed Forces assessment team to the field to identify additional opportunities for Canadian engagement.

Canada will continue to work closely with partners on the ground to assess needs and coordinate further support to ensure a needs-based humanitarian response to the crisis.

Thank you, Chair.

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

We will now turn to the members.

The first member is MP Redekopp.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Thank you very much.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Of course, all of us are horrified by this disaster. I'm sure all of us would agree we want to do what we can and really want to help people there.

My question is about the matching donations.

As you just said, you're matching the donations to the Red Cross up until the 22nd for relief efforts in Turkey and Syria. The Red Cross is a great organization, doing great things. The reality, though, is that many Canadians donate to organizations they're familiar with. For example, many newcomers donate to Islamic Relief and may not be as comfortable with the Red Cross. Others donate to World Vision, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Oxfam, etc.

Will the government expand the matching program to include organizations like Oxfam, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, World Vision, Islamic Relief and others?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** As indicated, yes, we have partnered with the Canadian Red Cross and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The rationale behind that decision was that there is significant capacity on the ground already with the Red Cross. The Turkish Red Crescent, for instance, has 5,000 volunteers already responding to the crisis. We wanted to ensure that Canadian funds were injected immediately into the response of local actors to support their efforts.

I agree totally that there are very good Canadian partners that exist. We're partnering with them already. We have partnered with them for many years in Syria and will continue to do so. The lack of a match does not stop Canadians from contributing to those organizations. Indeed, the Canadian government will continue to partner with those organizations.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Partnering is one thing, but having the matching donations is a great incentive. There's another solution to this that's even simpler than that, and that is the Humanitarian Coalition, because, as you likely know, they bring together organizations like the Foodgrains Bank, World Vision, Islamic Relief, Lutheran World Relief, Save the Children and others. It's a great cross-section of our multicultural nation.

Would the government at least allow the Humanitarian Coalition to have matching donations?

• (1120)

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Thank you, Chair.

Indeed, the Humanitarian Coalition is a great organization. We've partnered with them on matched funds in the past and their membership is critical to our response around the world. In this instance, we decided to go with the Canadian Red Cross, just as in the past we've decided just to go with the Humanitarian Coalition. Given the context, that was our approach. That's the approach we've taken.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Chair, I'll pass my time over to Dave Epp.

**Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC):** I'm going to pick up on your last point. Is this a bit of trading back and forth? I'm aware that the Humanitarian Coalition, also through their members, has boots on the ground and has been pre-vetted as an organization that's worthy of matching. To the point in your opening statement, you talked about how Canada was already partnering with numerous other agreements with the Red Cross. The matching component is to leverage Canadian support. Again, as my colleague has stated, that support exists across a wider variety of organizations. I can get into Charity Intelligence's evaluations of them.

Can you talk to me about the vetting process or the decision-making process? Why is it only the Red Cross?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** As I mentioned earlier, the rationale behind the decision was to focus on local partners who have local access and can scale up quickly. That was the rationale behind the decision.

I draw members' attention, through the chair, to the World Humanitarian Summit that was held in 2016, where Canada pledged with other nations to support local efforts and local actors. Indeed, through lessons learned after previous earthquakes, many evaluations over the years have demonstrated that local capacity is often bypassed in the face of these emergencies. What we decided to do was to support the local capacity that exists and is already in place, and that has Turkish nationals responding to the crisis. That's the decision we took. That doesn't suggest we don't support the Humanitarian Coalition. Indeed, we've supported them in many other contexts, and in other contexts we've matched their funding. We've made a different decision this time.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Were the Humanitarian Coalition's ground resources in the area considered at all?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Indeed. We have partnerships there already in northwest Syria. I won't go into specific partnerships for security reasons, but we do have partners, Canadian NGO partners, that are part of the Humanitarian Coalition on the ground. We give them significant resources, and we will continue to give them significant resources.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now turn to Mr. Zuberi for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Salewicz and your colleagues, for being here today.

I'd also like to thank you and recognize that we as a country stood up to really be there for the Turkish and Syrian people in this moment of dire need. That is critically important, not only for humanitarian purposes but also to create stability within the region so that we do not have internal or global refugee migration problems and crises.

I was happy to hear about the matching funds. I won't pick up on the same questions that my colleagues from the party opposite mentioned, but with regard to those concerns around matching funds and extending that beyond the Red Cross, I've been hearing that from stakeholders in Canada and I'm just passing it to you also. That was also an issue that was noted during the Pakistan flood relief. Many organizations, NGOs and relief organizations were also asking why they weren't included in the Humanitarian Coalition's matching funds. You could be mindful of that into the future to find a way around that.

I've also been hearing from stakeholders around this question. Are any funds we are giving from Canada going to the Syrian government or affiliates of the government? Do you have any knowledge about that? Can you shed light on that particular concern?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Of course.

I can assure you that our assistance is directed through NGOs, Red Cross and UN organizations that aren't affiliated with the government. Our funds go into the hands of humanitarian partners. None of it goes to the government.

• (1125)

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Given that the area in Turkey is predominantly populated by Kurds, are the funds and resources that are be-

ing delivered to Turkey being properly distributed to those in need within Turkey, including the Kurdish population?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** The situation is very fluid on the ground, of course. There's a lot of information and a lot of movement at this point in time.

What we know is that there are also a lot of Syrian refugees who are in this area as well. Our understanding from early reports is that aid is being distributed to all those in need without recourse to ethnicity.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** We know that both Syria and Turkey have a lot of displaced people, people who are undocumented. Are they getting equal amounts of relief to those who are documented within Turkey and Syria?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Looking at Turkey, we've seen over the years that they've welcomed a large number of Syrians and others displaced. In the reporting that we've received so far, and of course it's still early days, what we hear is that assistance is being distributed evenly according to need, not according to ethnicity.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Within Turkey, we know that it has a large migrant population who are undocumented. Are efforts being done to ensure that those who are undocumented are also getting equal treatment?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I could speak for the partners we work with and within the international humanitarian system, and the work they do is guided by humanitarian principles. Primary to that is that anyone in need receives assistance, no matter their background or whether they have documentation or not. It's an allocation of resources based on needs.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** We know about the number of deaths reaching approximately 30,000, if I'm correct. In terms of those who are impacted, we know that cities have been levelled. They will not be rebuilt. Some cities within Turkey will not be rebuilt.

Can you tell us how many people have been impacted by these earthquakes beyond the deaths? How many have been impacted?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** The current count I have, the most recent count, is that 21 million people have been affected across both countries. It's an enormous number, and many of them are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** How long will it take for them to restore their full lives? How many resources will be needed?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** That is a question I can't answer.

To be honest, there will be studies, as there have been after other events of this nature. The World Bank and others will have to do assessments, working with the governments, to determine how best to reconstruct and what that total value will be. It will be enormous, I imagine.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Again, thank you for the work you are doing and for stepping up.

**The Chair:** We will now go to MP Bergeron.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank all of the witnesses for being here this morning and for all of the work that they do in support of those who are suffering on the ground in Turkey and Syria. Although our comments may sometimes seem critical, please know that we acknowledge the work you do in the interest of those who are suffering, and for that, we are eternally grateful to you.

I'd like to quickly address the issue of matching donations. I think my colleagues have already adequately communicated to you the concerns we keep hearing about the organizations that can benefit from these matching donations, so I won't get into that again.

What I get from your presentation is that, in addition to the matching fund, there are also funds going to various NGOs helping the victims on the ground, in Turkey as well as in Syria. I'd appreciate it if you could confirm that for me.

Furthermore, the matching program is capped at \$10 million. How were the ceiling and contribution deadline determined? Personally, I feel like the deadline might be a little tight, but I suppose there's a reason for that. Would you be able to shed some light on that?

• (1130)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Salewicz, before you do respond, could I just ask that you lean into your microphone? The technicians have advised that the interpreters are having a hard time hearing you. If you could do that, it would be much appreciated.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for the series of questions.

Just to confirm, we already have been funding a series of partners in Syria beyond the Red Cross movement for an extended period of time. They are delivering assistance and are members of the Humanitarian Coalition. We have strong partnerships already in place.

Why is it \$10 million? It's a question we have faced in the past. We used to work through something we called a relief fund. This relief fund was open-ended. There was no limit to the amount of funding that would be provided. It was up to the generosity of Canadians.

The challenge with that kind of open-ended approach is that we don't have the fiscal resources within our own budget to manage that, so it takes a long time. We need to secure the resources. It's open-ended and the final requirements are uncertain. It was also open to a large membership of actors that could apply for the funding. As a result, it would take us a tremendous amount of time—much longer than we thought was useful and, more importantly, responsible—to respond in a rapid manner to these emergencies. By putting it at a level of \$10 million, I can fund it through the budget that I have for humanitarian assistance.

The date limit is something we've learned from our partners. Indeed through their own interactions with us, they have indicated a shorter limit because the money usually comes in early or right at the end. In between, not a lot happens, so they feel like the shorter period actually gives a focused target to the giving. It allows us to effectively respond quickly, so we can release the monies to our partners.

Maybe just to give you some example of the timing for previous relief funds, we had one in Pakistan for previous flooding. It took 200 days to get the money out. With this last flood in Pakistan, it took 30 days. We have an extremely fast tool at our disposal that allows us to respond.

I'd just like to remind, Chair, that it's one tool among many. We have a broad group of tools. We're releasing relief supplies tomorrow. They are flying out from Dubai. It includes 10,000 blankets, enough hygiene kits for 2,000 families or 10,000 individuals, and other items as well. We have a broad range of tools. The matching fund is one that we think is important for public engagement, but again, it's just one of those tools.

**The Chair:** We are almost out of time, Mr. Bergeron. Thank you.

We now go to MP McPherson.

You have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to thank all the officials for being here today and sharing this information with us.

I do have one quick thing that I'd like to read into the record, a notice of motion that was sent out to all members yesterday, I believe. I move:

That the committee report the following to the House: The committee calls on the Government of Canada, without delay, to amend sections of the Criminal Code currently preventing Canadian humanitarian organizations from delivering aid in Afghanistan and similar contexts without fear of prosecution.

I just want to make sure that I have moved that into the record. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to start with the Humanitarian Coalition. I think it's very clear. We've heard from members from all parties now that they all support the Humanitarian Coalition receiving these funds and being part of the matching fund.

I understand what the witnesses have told us with regard to the decision being made, but now knowing that there is cross-party support, knowing that there is very clear proof that the Humanitarian Coalition has members on the ground who are able to do this work.... Of course the matching fund is vitally important for their efforts to fundraise for Turkey and Syria.

Will the Government of Canada be considering changing the matching fund to include the Humanitarian Coalition?

• (1135)

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Thank you.

As always when I approach these committees, I welcome the advice and guidance from members of the committee. As discussed, we always take these issues and these ideas back with us, and that's what we'll do.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** When I asked the minister in the House of Commons during question period whether or not he would be considering adding the Humanitarian Coalition to this matching fund, he did say that all things were being reviewed and that this was the start not the finish. Certainly, I would hope that you would take the information you've received from all members of this committee and seriously consider adding the Humanitarian Coalition. I think it's a missed opportunity when we don't have organizations with such expertise that are already on the ground able to increase the impacts that generous Canadians have asked for.

The next question I have is a little bit around the funding that will be required by Turkey and Syria in the long term. We know, of course, that there is the emergency response after a horrific event like this. We know there's the humanitarian aid, but there will be a need for much more and on a much longer term commitment. We do know that the UN just this morning launched a \$400-million appeal for earthquake victims in Syria.

I'm just wondering what Canada's stance is. Will we be committing our fair share to that?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Thank you for the question.

Indeed, we've been looking forward to the release of that UN appeal for Syria. We're anticipating more information in the coming days regarding what more can be done for Turkey as well in that regard. Indeed, we're putting in place...and I think the ministers have already indicated all options are on the table. We are looking closely at how we can increase that support in the coming days to do our fair share, as you suggest.

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

Obviously this is something that Canada needs to do. We have an obligation to do our fair share, but it is something of course that is worrying for the sector when we don't get a clear indication from Global Affairs Canada and from the minister that this would be in fact new money.

Can we expect this to be new money, not money that is taken away from other extremely important development projects, extremely important humanitarian contexts?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I can't say whether that's the case or not, but that's our intention. We'll have to see.

The budget right now is going to come from the humanitarian budget.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** You can't tell us whether or not, in the upcoming budget, we can expect to see an increase to obviously respond to what's happening in Turkey and Syria in a context where we clearly will have to respond to crises around the world as well, crises that have been exacerbated because of COVID-19, because of the conflict in Ukraine, because of the food insecurity that is happening across the globe.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I won't go into budget deliberations. What I would say is that we're identifying what resources are avail-

able currently, because the importance right now is timeliness of funding. We're looking at how we can access resources that are available through a crisis pool, for instance, or other types of tools like that.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I have one last question. If you could talk to me a little bit about—

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

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

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to the second round. The first member is MP Genuis. For this round, each member will be provided four minutes.

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

I'm going to take about 20 seconds and then hand it over to Mr. Epp.

I just want to say, with respect to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, that Conservatives are similarly concerned. I want to mention, following Ms. McPherson's notice of motion, that this committee adopted its sixth report, which calls on the Government of Canada to fix the barriers that are preventing vital humanitarian aid from getting into Afghanistan.

We see no harm in the committee's reiterating itself, but I do want to flag that previous motion.

Thank you for the work you're doing on Turkey and Syria.

I will now hand it over to Mr. Epp.

● (1140)

**Mr. Dave Epp:** I'm going to go back to Ms. McPherson's comments, specifically on the anticipated UN appeal. I didn't get a clear understanding that you're going to look at it. Are you considering supporting it?

Let me stop there for the moment.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Sure.

Just to be clear here, there is a UN appeal that has been issued today for close to \$400 million U.S. As we have done in every other case where there has been an appeal issued, Canada has responded and—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** The audio isn't working, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** You can't hear me.

**The Chair:** Yes, we're trying to fix this problem, so I certainly hope we can get it up and running.

Again, Mr. Salewicz, could we ask that you move the mike much closer? It has been a recurring problem, but we would be grateful if you could do so.

Thank you.



**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I'm too soft-spoken, I guess. I'm sorry about that. I will speak up.

Yes, a UN appeal has been issued for Syria, close to \$400 million U.S. As we do for all appeals, we look at them—that was my suggestion—and we will finance a response through this appeal. It's something that we have been anticipating for a while and looking forward to receiving, to having a document we can refer to.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I stopped my clock in that interruption, so I hope you did too.

You referenced earlier that we had existing relationships in Syria. I'm not going to ask you any of the specifics of it, but I assume that's under some sort of programming requirements from those partners.

Is there flexibility built in? Given the disaster now, can resources be shifted quickly to address this within the existing programs?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** That's a very helpful question because it is exactly what's happening. As I have mentioned, we have close to \$50 million already invested in Syria. At the start of the year, those monies were allocated to our partners. They consist of NGO, UN and Red Cross partners. Indeed, we're hearing from the field that they are pivoting already, using those funds to respond to the crisis-affected population.

Now, unfortunately, the crisis in Syria is tremendous, and it pre-dates, of course, the earthquake, but those partners are using our resources. For instance, one of our partners has transported \$300,000 in medical supplies, distributing them to hospitals and health clinics in northwest Syria. Food is being distributed. Other partners are all pivoting. This is exactly what's happening.

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

I want to give time to my colleague, Mr. Hoback. I'm done.

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

I have a question. You said that eight days later you were doing your first flight out of Dubai into the area. Why did it take eight days to respond?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** It's not that it took eight days to respond. It took eight days for us to get clearance for that flight into Syria. Within hours of the earthquake's happening, we were on the phone with our partners at the Canadian Red Cross to release those supplies.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I'm sorry. I don't have a lot of time.

It's Syria that delayed the—

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** No, I'm sorry. It was Turkey.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** It was Turkey that delayed the response.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** It's not delay. There was infrastructure damage. Airports were damaged. We're flying these supplies in. We have to get clearance and approval from the Turkish Red Crescent that they will receive and distribute those items.

It's part of a long logistics chain, because it's not just Canadian goods that are being received. There's a call-out across the world for these supplies and they're going into a logistics chain into the country.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** That's fair enough.

I apologize. I don't mean to interrupt. I just have such little time—

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

We go to Mr. Sarai.

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

My concern is the same as many of the other members with regard to aid to Syria. We were hearing about the aid going to Turkey. A lot of my constituents are also concerned about aid improperly going to the Assad regime. I'm wondering how you're making sure we prevent that.

On the other side, are you seeing the openings that were announced in the last couple of days about routes to allow for aid into Syria? Are they in fact valid routes and are they getting to the places that are in need?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Thank you for the question.

Indeed, we have a long history of working in northwest Syria. Those concerns of your constituents are the same ones we share. Our concern is that our assistance goes directly to individuals impacted by the long-running humanitarian crisis. That's why we work with experienced partners that have the systems in place to vet and track all the assistance that's provided. They're Canadian partners, international NGOs, the Red Cross and the UN. That's top of mind for us.

In terms of routes from Turkey into Syria, that's indeed been a big challenge over the last number of years, where the number of routes has been reduced over time to one. We've heard already today that the Assad regime has agreed to two additional routes being opened up. One of them is already being used by the UN today.

We have some confirmation now that goods are starting to flow through these new routes.

• (1145)

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** My next question may not particularly be addressed to you, but you may be familiar with it.

Our Minister of Immigration has announced that they'll expedite immigration processing for visas and others for people from Turkey and the region who have already applied—people who want to bring their loved ones or spouses here. A lot of the concern has been that they left their passports in their homes. They've escaped the home, but they can't get back to their home because either it's collapsed or there's fear it will collapse.

Are you working with the Turkish government to help those who might be able to get documentation or reproduce their documentation, so that they can facilitate their travel to Canada where they are able to?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I'll pass the floor to Jess Dutton, please.

**Mr. Jess Dutton (Director general, Middle East, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Mr. Chair, I don't actually have an answer to that question, but we will follow up with our colleagues at IRCC to ensure you get a written response.

I can assure you, however, that our resources at our missions in Ankara, Istanbul and of course Beirut, which covers Syria, are doing everything they can to facilitate the individuals you mentioned.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** There have been questionable media reports that the Turkish government is not providing aid to certain areas because of the ethnic makeup of that area.

Are you finding, on the ground, that the aid is going to the places that are in need based on need and not based on the ethnic orientation of the groups there?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I don't have evidence one way or another. I do know, through reports and through our team that has been in the field, that the distributions they've seen are based on need, not on ethnicity.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Is the UN's coordinated response based on need and not based on where Turkey is telling them to go?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Indeed, that's the nature of the humanitarian imperative and the principles that they follow. It's fundamental that it's based on need, not on ethnicity.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have two minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to be brief.

I'd like to return to the plane that was chartered to deliver blankets and other items to Turkey.

As you're no doubt aware, a Saudi plane landed in Aleppo, Syria, carrying some 35 tonnes of food and other supplies. According to SANA, the official news agency, it's the first time in 10 years, the first since Saudi Arabia severed ties with the Syrian regime in 2012, that a Saudi plane has landed in Syria.

Are you considering doing the same, given that the infrastructure needed to come to people's aid is much more developed in Turkey than it is in Syria, especially with the ongoing civil war and so on? Are we planning on doing the same for Syria?

[*English*]

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Thank you for the question.

We already have partners within Syria that are doing procurement locally to provide a response to the earthquake victims. The Red Cross has issued a request for materials for Turkey. Should they release one for Syria, we have supplies that we could also send to Syria. To be clear, it would go through a Red Cross movement pipeline and be distributed by the Red Cross.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bergeron. You had only 15 seconds remaining.

We will now go to MP McPherson.

You have two minutes as well.

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

I'd like to follow up on some of those questions around the barriers we're seeing. Can you explain or tell us a little bit more about the barriers to access that are being caused by Assad, by support from Russia at the United Nations or the impacts of existing sanctions and whether they create barriers to providing humanitarian assistance?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I'll pass the floor to Mr. Dutton.

**Mr. Jess Dutton:** Yes, certainly the Syrian, Russian, Chinese and Iranian regimes have been using the excuse of sanctions as being an impediment to the provision of humanitarian assistance. I can assure you that, from a Canadian perspective, we have exemptions written into the legislation that allow humanitarian assistance to be delivered to Syria.

In terms of the United Nations, as you may know, there was only one border crossing approved by the Security Council. In the past, there had been more available for the provision of humanitarian support to Syria. Thanks to the Russians and the Chinese, that was whittled down to one last year.

As my colleague noted, two other pathways are being opened. These aren't pathways controlled by the Syrian government. They are controlled by other forces in the area. I know that this was discussed by the Security Council both yesterday and today, but we're hopeful that these pathways can be used for the provision of assistance moving forward.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Mr. Dutton, could I clarify, then, just to be very clear, that you are saying there is no issue at all with the existing sanctions impacting the ability of humanitarian organizations to work in the area?

**Mr. Jess Dutton:** What I'm saying is that written into the legislation there are exemptions for organizations that are providing humanitarian support. It's—

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I'm sorry to interrupt. Those exemptions will prevent...or that means there won't be an issue for organizations.

**Mr. Jess Dutton:** I can assure you that, if there is an issue, the organizations can contact us. We will respond to questions on an emergency basis.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Hoback, you have four minutes.

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

It's now 37,000. What's the forecasted death toll now? What is it expected to be? Do you know?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I don't know. I don't have those figures. It's rising quickly.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** In an earthquake, time is of the essence. There's no question about that. The fact that it took eight days to even get a plane on the ground, with all its problems, would have led to an increase in the death toll. Is that fair to say? If we'd been able to get that plane on the ground in a day, two days or three days, do you think we would have been able to have an impact on the outcome?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** If you look at the experience we've had over the years, this is not atypical. In any crisis, infrastructure damages limit access. We also have to remember that the Government of Turkey controls the airports and controls access.

We're following protocol, which is a request from a national society for supplies—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I'm not questioning protocol. I'm just saying that, because of the issues you've faced, more people are going to die. Is that fair to say? We do have parachutes. Is there no way to do airdrops and things like that in a situation like this? How do you explore alternatives other than landing and running it through the Red Cross? You have people who are cold and you have sleeping bags—

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Maybe we should go back to the Turkish Red Crescent. The Government of Turkey has tremendous capacity. They are assisting already. They are distributing thousands of tents with heating and thousands of blankets. The distribution is going on, led by the Turkish government.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** If you can't get the blankets there in eight days, because you don't have the landing strip or the ability to land, aren't there alternatives to get those goods to those people? Does it have to go through the Red Cross and Red Crescent?

I'm a farm kid from Saskatchewan, so I'm looking at it from a very pragmatic point of view. If you drop a sleeping bag, I'm going to grab it and use it. Why do I have to wait for somebody from the Red Crescent or Red Cross to give it to me?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** One of the most important parts of the response when we're faced by emergencies like this is that coordination is fundamental. Everyone showing up at the front door with something to offer can lead to a lot of inefficiencies.

We work through a system that's been established through lessons over the years. It seems slow sometimes and not as immediate. I can understand the frustration, but at the same time it allows

for the efficient distribution of supplies and it's timely, as timely as we can be.

• (1155)

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I get efficiency. Efficient for us is one thing. Efficient for somebody on the ground who is freezing to death is something totally different. You can see where I'm coming from.

One of the other questions I want to get to is that \$50 million is going through the Red Cross. Is that correct? Did you say \$50 million in your presentation?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** There's a \$10 million matching fund. The \$50 million is with partners already in northwest Syria. The money has been disbursed already.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** That money has hit the ground. How much of that \$50 million went into administration? Did it all hit the ground?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** It's all there. It's all disbursed. It's actively being used by our partners to pivot to the response and use those funds to distribute food, medical supplies and shelter supplies. It's active right now.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** What I get from other countries when it comes to the Red Cross is that they tend to take and hive off a certain portion of those funds for next year and the year after, when the funds were intended to be delivered that day or that year or that month. How much of the \$10 million is being delivered this month or next month? How much is going to be delivered next year and the year after? How much is going to administration costs? That is an ongoing complaint I get about the Red Cross over and over again.

**The Chair:** Mr. Salewicz, you have 10 seconds, essentially.

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Those are a lot of questions. I'd be happy to put some of those answers in writing.

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

For our final questions, we will go to MP Oliphant.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, officials, not only for being here today but for your work. I'm constantly impressed at the professionalism and agility.

I'm a midtown Toronto boy, and I don't pretend to know your work, so I trust you.

Thank you to the officials who moved on this so quickly, not only on behalf of Canada but as humanitarians. I think that sometimes coming to this committee is an abuse. You put up with the abuse well, and your work is appreciated greatly by Canadians. I want to thank you.

We recently looked at the flooding in Pakistan as an issue. What came into my head on that issue was that short-term crisis management is about recovery and trying to save as many lives as possible. The mid-term is to look at whether there's an outbreak of cholera or other things that happen in these disasters. There's a mid-term moment, and then there's a long-term moment. We're somewhere between that immediate first moment and the second moment. We're somewhere in that phase right now.

I know that you don't have a crystal ball and I know that it's a complex situation, but can you give us a sense of where we might be going and what might be demanded or required of Canadians to be supportive?

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** Indeed, this is a quickly evolving situation. Based on past experience, we will see, unfortunately, the establishment of large displacement camps. There's going to be a need for significant support in the medium term to just keep people in shelter and fed. The good news is that markets are working in Turkey, and we'll be able to move to cash operations shortly, in the near term, so that cash can be provided to beneficiaries and they can purchase goods themselves.

The needs in the medium term will continue. I point towards health care. That's going to be a significant one. As we think of the number of people who are dead, there are multiples of that number who are injured during a crisis like this. The requirements for recovery in that kind of situation are tremendous. I think there will be a lot of effort in the medium term to move from this life-saving more into recovery, and health recovery is going to be particularly important.

I expect that the World Bank and others will get involved in looking at that medium to longer term to provide guidance and planning around how best to respond.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** I know we don't have officials here from IRCC, but I have spoken to a number of Kurdish Canadians who are requesting the possibility of fast-tracking family reunification applications that are already in process. Part of that displaced persons issue could be Canada's role in helping resettle not only Kurdish but particularly Kurdish people who are maybe doubly displaced, who had already been displaced once and have been displaced again.

Is there any advice you have for me or for our committee about how we could address that issue?

• (1200)

**Mr. Stephen Salewicz:** I'll turn to my colleague, Jess Dutton.

**Mr. Jess Dutton:** Certainly.

I think engaging with the minister and others will be critically important in that. Certainly I know that, as the government responds to these kinds of crises, we look at all avenues available to help alleviate suffering. Certainly that is one I imagine would be considered.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Let's consider it.

Thank you. I'm done.

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

Before suspending briefly to allow us to go to the second panel, allow me to echo the sentiments of all members of this committee in thanking you for the professionalism you have demonstrated under very difficult circumstances.

Thank you.

For those online, you can remain on this channel. We'll suspend for about three to four minutes.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1210)

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 7, 2023, the committee is holding a briefing on the humanitarian crisis following a series of earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

It is now my pleasure to welcome our witnesses, most of whom are joining us virtually. From the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, we have Monsignor Peter Vaccari, president, and Adriana Bara, national director. From the Humanitarian Coalition, we have Richard Morgan, executive director. From Islamic Relief Canada, we have Usama Khan, chief executive officer. From Oxfam Canada, we have André Charlebois, humanitarian project manager, Oxfam-Québec.

First of all, thank you for being here. You will be provided with five minutes for opening remarks. After that, we will open it up to questions from the members. Once you're 30 seconds short of the allotted time, I will put up this sign. You can hopefully try to wrap it up in the remaining 30 seconds that you have available to you.

On that note, we will now go to Monsignor Vaccari.

The floor is yours, sir, for five minutes.

**Monsignor Peter Vaccari (President, Catholic Near East Welfare Association):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, vice-chairs and the rest of the committee, for the opportunity to be here this afternoon. I accompany Dr. Adriana Bara, who is the national director of CNEWA in Canada.

I will take the opportunity to offer some introductory comments to the Catholic Near East Welfare Association. I believe that Dr. Bara has already prepared and submitted to the committee a very specific report. We certainly welcome this opportunity to share our experiences with the committee and to answer any questions that the committee may have.

The Catholic Near East Welfare Association was organized, founded, by Pope Pius XI in 1926. Since that time, as we approach our centennial celebration now, the Catholic Near East Welfare Association has as its specific mandate to give humanitarian and pastoral assistance to the Catholic churches of the Eastern rites, the Eastern Catholic Churches, of which there are 23.

When we do this, the assistance that we give—be it humanitarian or pastoral—is given as we accompany the local church in a particular area that has been affected by some kind of very difficult situation. It's certainly similar to what we are all aware of right now with regard to the earthquakes in parts of Turkey and Syria.

We have recently given assistance to Ukraine and Lebanon over the last two or three years. We work with the local church and all of the representatives there in providing the kind of humanitarian assistance that the local people—especially where we are working with our offices on the ground—want us to provide with their very specific needs. In this case—

• (1215)

**The Chair:** Monsignor Vaccari, I'm sorry. We're having some sound problems on our end.

Monsignor, could you kindly bring the mike closer to your mouth? The translators are having a difficult time. We'd be very grateful. Thank you.

**Monsignor Peter Vaccari:** Is that better, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** I think it has improved things on our end. We'd be grateful if you could continue to do so.

Once again, the floor is yours. We did save you some time to make up for this interruption.

Thank you.

**Monsignor Peter Vaccari:** Again, I thank the chair and I thank the committee for this opportunity.

The Catholic Near East Welfare Association works with the local churches and with our offices on the ground. Particularly in the case of Syria, our office in Beirut is the office that is really responsible for and is in contact with the needs that develop in Syria.

We are cultivating partnerships, as we do in other places, particularly now with Caritas in Turkey, to be able to also request support from our donors to try to give assistance to those areas. It's primarily in Syria, through our office on the ground in Beirut, and through partnerships trying to give assistance in Turkey.

We began this emergency campaign shortly after learning, as the world did, of the earthquake that came into Turkey and Syria. The immediate needs we're now responding to are for blankets, food, milk, diapers, medication and mattresses. Again, I believe all of these are in the report, which was submitted to the committee. This is so you have a sense of where we go, at least initially.

We will continue as long as we can along those lines. In other instances, we have transferred as needs develop. Through contact with our office, particularly here in Beirut, we see where else we have needs and where else we must respond. In many other instances, that has included moving toward further humanitarian needs and, of course, at a certain point in time—we're not near that here—toward the psychological and social needs of a particular people.

Our aid comes because of the requests that we receive. Our aid, humanitarian especially, is distributed to everyone. There is no question about faith. There is no question about any other condition for someone who is in such a horrific situation as this. Our work is

very much directed towards people of every faith and people who are in any kind of condition of need. That has been the purpose. That has been the work of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association for the areas where the Eastern Catholic Churches are located, which are in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, India and in eastern Europe. We continue to work and be of service.

It's a great privilege for us to be able to answer a fundamental gospel mandate for us, which is the parable of the good Samaritan. We try to answer the question, "Who is my neighbour?"

Again, I thank the committee for the opportunity. I'm sure that you'll hear from Dr. Bara on the report that she submitted, which is a much more extensive and comprehensive view of what we are doing. Then we would both like to be available to answer any of the questions that any committee members may have.

I thank the committee.

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

We go next to the Humanitarian Coalition.

Mr. Morgan, you have five minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Richard Morgan (Executive Director, Humanitarian Coalition):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting the Humanitarian Coalition to attend this meeting and discuss the urgent situation in Turkey and Syria as well as Canada's response to the crisis.

I'm happy to see two of our members, Islamic Relief Canada and Oxfam-Québec, also present at this meeting.

[*English*]

While it is not yet a familiar name to many, the Humanitarian Coalition brings together 12 of Canada's leading international aid agencies working in 140 countries. These include Action Against Hunger, Canadian Lutheran World Relief, CARE, Doctors of the World, Humanity & Inclusion, Islamic Relief, Oxfam-Québec and Oxfam Canada, Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision. In addition, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank is a member that brings together 15 other church-based development agencies, including Mennonite Central Committee, Caritas Canada and others.

Together we provide Canadians with a simple and effective way to help when disaster strikes. Since 2009, we have raised \$160 million to aid eight million people in over 120 disasters. Our members work across the peacebuilding, development and humanitarian nexus with combined annual operations exceeding \$1.1 billion. We reach 16 million to 18 million Canadians, and we are supported by more than 2.5 million active donors.

Last year we partnered with the Canadian government, as many of you know, to respond to the hunger crisis in sub-Saharan Africa and to the flooding in Pakistan, but you may not know that we also responded to more than a dozen small-scale responses worldwide.

With that background in mind, allow me to focus on three key messages today.

The first is that the needs in Turkey and Syria are massive and growing. Beyond the search and rescue efforts that have been the focus of much of our discussion, a second wave of humanitarian needs is already upon us. We need to shelter, feed, protect, reunite, care for and educate tens of thousands of homeless, displaced children, women and men in the coming weeks and months ahead, particularly during this cold winter period.

Second, our members are already responding and scaling up in the affected areas, but government and private funding to date has been inadequate. A much more significant response from Canada and the global community is urgently required.

Third, I would like to emphasize the value add that the Humanitarian Coalition brings as a partner with the government. The government cannot and should not do it all, and Canada lags behind many of its OECD counterparts in terms of leveraging philanthropy during humanitarian crises. In partnering with the Humanitarian Coalition and its networks, the government can mobilize more Canadians to help save more lives.

As you may have seen, the death toll in Turkey and Syria has risen to more than 37,000, although reports, of course, are different depending on which source you are referring to. Many thousands more, at least 100,000, have suffered injuries, and these numbers will continue to rise. The World Health Organization estimates that up to 26 million people, 15 million in Turkey and 11 million in Syria, are affected in both countries.

Six thousand buildings or more are damaged or destroyed, including hospitals, residences, schools and government buildings. Many others remain standing but are unsafe, and more will come down. As you may know, more than 2,100 aftershocks have been felt in the last week alone. This leaves thousands of families in both countries without adequate shelter and livelihoods. Urgent action is needed to avert a further catastrophe.

Worldwide, our members are already actively working through national offices and local partners, and I want to emphasize that localization aspect of our work. In Turkey, seven of our members are actively programming, and some have been there for more than 20 years. In Syria, all 12 of our member agencies have been active there for at least a decade and, as you know, 4.1 million people in the northwest area are already dependent on humanitarian assistance due to years of conflict.

My colleagues at Islamic Relief and Oxfam-Québec will speak more to their work, but overall our response includes the multiple stages of immediate, near-term and then medium and longer term response: ongoing assistance with search and rescue; emergency food and multi-purpose cash; shelter and non-food items; primary care and medical supplies; water, sanitation and hygiene, including menstrual health management support; mental health and psychosocial support, assistance with devices for those who have experi-

enced life-changing injuries; protection and safe spaces for children and women particularly; education in emergencies, which has been terribly disrupted; and eventually building back better and recovering livelihoods.

Despite the scale of the devastation, Canadians are not abandoning hope. To date we have raised more than \$8 million together, and this will help approximately 400,000 people. Each donation makes a difference in another person's life. A blanket may cost only \$8 but can make the world of difference to someone out in the cold.

To give you one inspiring example of Canadian generosity, Izmir Kassam from Calgary just turned 10 years old on February 6, the day that the earthquake struck. He loves to run, and he's running to raise funds for the victims of the earthquake in Syria and Turkey. He will do 10 runs of 10 kilometres each over 10 weeks starting this Sunday. We need more of Izmir's compassion, more of his courage and more of his creativity in the coming weeks.

In summary, the needs in Turkey are significant and growing. The members of the Humanitarian Coalition are already responding and scaling up, but government and private funding so far has been inadequate. The government cannot and should not do it all, as I said earlier. It needs to leverage the power and creativity of philanthropy in support of this response.

This leads me to two recommendations for the committee. One, in support of the work that you heard from Mr. Salewicz earlier, the government needs to mobilize substantial and supplemental funding. Second, we would urge that the government consider a matching fund with the members of the Humanitarian Coalition so that we can stretch the support that Canadians are willing to provide and so that we can mobilize media and public-corporate networks to transform this terrible situation.

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks again for inviting us to share some of our comments and recommendations with you, and I thank you for your attention. I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have.

[*English*]

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

Next, for Islamic Relief Canada, we go to Mr. Usama Khan.

Welcome back. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Usama Khan (Chief Executive Officer, Islamic Relief Canada):** Thank you so much.

Good afternoon, honourable chair and members of the committee. I just wanted to start off by thanking all of you for the really important work you do. I know recently you had a study on Bill S-211, and it's now awaiting third reading. We really appreciate all of the hard work.

Today, we are here to talk about the earthquake that happened just over a week ago.

I'm here to represent the more than 85,000 injured people who no longer have a home. I'm here to represent all those we lost.

I'm here to represent our courageous staff members, both in Turkey and Syria, who've been living there, are nationals over there, and many of whom have lost their own family members. One of our staff members lost 32 members of his extended family, yet after burying them, with so much courage, patience and a sense of community service, he is back distributing aid to those who have survived.

I'm also here to represent the 21,000 Canadians across the country who have donated to Islamic Relief Canada, and the many more tens of thousands who have donated to our various partners of the Humanitarian Coalition. Canadians across the country have seen the images and the videos on social media and in the media, and they're deeply impacted by what those in Turkey and Syria are going through. I'm here to represent the concerns they have and the expectations they have of public officials, elected officials, from all sides of the aisle.

As you know, the epicentre of the earthquake was in Turkey. I was in Gaziantep a few years ago. The southern parts of Turkey have hosted millions of Syrian refugees who have escaped a decade of civil war and conflict. The infrastructure in Turkey has been well established and their disaster risk readiness is well established, so hours after the earthquake they were able to bring excavators and construction vehicles to start digging.

However, because of the constant air strikes, many of the buildings in Syria were already unstable. More than 3.3 million people in northwest Syria have already been displaced, and not just once but multiple times. There is a lost generation of children who haven't been able to go to school.

They didn't have construction vehicles or bulldozers to respond to the cries they heard from their family members. I was speaking to our head of mission of Syria yesterday, and he was telling stories about people being able to hear their family members but not being able to move rocks and rubble to help save them.

As you know, the constant fear of air strikes, the lack of health infrastructure and the recent outbreak of cholera all make this incredibly difficult for the Syrians in the northwest and throughout Syria. There were access issues to get aid into Syria in the first few days after the disaster. The only border crossing between Turkey and Syria was closed. That has recently opened. Just yesterday we heard about the UN facilitating the opening of a few more access points from Turkey to Syria.

Our local staff in both Turkey and Syria have been operating there for more than a decade. We have warehouses in Syria. We have procurement supplies that we solicit in Syria. We have banking mechanisms to ensure that funding can be spent on people in a reliable way through our local staff members. We have more than 600 project staff and more than 60 permanent management staff in Syria coordinating all of our aid efforts.

The asks, I think, are primarily for funding.

• (1230)

The Canadian government has announced \$10 million and a \$10-million matching fund for the Red Cross. As my colleague Richard Morgan has said, it's imperative that the government announce an extension of the matching fund through the Humanitarian Coalition. The 12 agencies will be able to go to their donor base and the general public to incentivize Canadians to continue to step up after this news goes off the news cycle and off our social media feeds. Unfortunately, the needs will be very long term in terms of shelter and rebuilding infrastructure and livelihoods.

We ask for a more direct funding commitment from the government. We ask for a matching fund. We ask that in the upcoming budget there not be a decrease in the ODA and the development portfolio. We understand that Canada itself is facing a potential economic recession and rising inflation. However, there's an imperative that we step up and continue to help those around the world.

Last, we ask this committee to take an interest in the underlying crisis in Syria, ensure that more humanitarian corridors are open and use our soft power with our multilateral partners and the UN to push for a resolution of the 10-year-old civil war.

Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** We go next to Oxfam Canada. We have with us Mr. André Charlebois.

You have five minutes, Mr. Charlebois.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Charlebois (Humanitarian Project Manager, Oxfam-Québec, Oxfam Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, my name is André Charlebois, humanitarian project manager at Oxfam-Québec.

Throughout its 50-year existence, Oxfam had dedicated itself to fighting inequality and ending poverty. Oxfam-Québec and Oxfam Canada are members of the Oxfam International confederation, comprising 21 affiliate members. Oxfam-Québec and Oxfam Canada are also members of the Humanitarian Coalition, which Mr. Morgan spoke about earlier.

I'm here today to speak more specifically to Oxfam's presence in Syria.

Oxfam has been present in Syria since 2013. For 10 years, it's been working to supply safe drinking water through infrastructure upgrades and to increase vulnerable populations' means of sustenance. In order to work in Syria, we've had to negotiate framework agreements with local partners, government departments and the public water utility company. We have three offices: The first is in Aleppo, in the north, the second in Deir ez-Zor, in the east, and the third in Damascus, in the south.

Since the quake, Oxfam has been hard at work dealing with the humanitarian emergency and addressing immediate needs. When the quake hit, Syria was already fragile. The earthquake only exacerbated a humanitarian crisis that was already gripping the country. The people were already reeling from the aftermath of 12 years of conflict. The communities are destroyed, the economy's weakened and the infrastructure is crumbling. There is a serious lack of basic services, which is now being compounded by the destruction wrought by the quake, a cholera epidemic and, of course, a harsh winter. More than ever, the Syrian people are in need of long-term, lasting support.

Before the quake, close to 15 million people were already in need of support. Moreover, 85% of households were unable to meet their basic needs. Seven million people had been displaced internally, and two million were living in camps.

Humanitarian response often occurs in the short term. In other words, the goal is to save lives in the days and months following a disaster, and yet the impact on communities and families continues to be felt over the long term, in the range of several months to several years, even. Immediate aid is not enough; we need to rebuild these communities. We need lasting, long-term support. We need to go beyond the initial response to a humanitarian crisis and support reconstruction efforts. Long-term aid means forging ties with local partners, supporting communities and strengthening civil society organizations.

Two-thirds of Syrians are currently living outside of active conflict zones. Their needs are changing, and the aid as well as the funding need to adapt. Oxfam believes that the best way to lift people out of poverty is to upgrade public infrastructures. Before the war, Syria had large-scale infrastructure and public services. We need to build on that to help the Syrians.

There are still barriers to lasting support, however: the lack of flexible, long-term funding as well as the global sanctions that undermine humanitarian response and ultimately hurt the people. Everyday Syrians are hardest hit by these sanctions, as they lack fuel and electricity. Sanctions prevent operations from going smoothly and being efficient and long-lasting.

Let's move on to our requests. In order to give the Syrian people a chance to make it, governments need to focus on lasting solutions. Canada needs to show leadership. It has a duty to invest not only in emergency assistance, but also in infrastructure rebuilding efforts. It needs to provide flexible, multi-year funding. The aid should be completely apolitical. Our humanitarian response is guided by our principles: impartiality, neutrality and independence. Canadian aid should adhere to the same principles.

I'll happily expand on that during the rounds of questions.

Thank you.

• (1235)

[English]

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

We now go to the members. The first member up is MP Genuis.

You have three minutes for the first round.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here and, more importantly, for the important work you are doing in this crisis situation and the important work you do at all times, helping some of the most vulnerable people around the world.

I want to just start by underlining our party's support for more inclusive matching programs. This has been a consistent ask. Our preference is that the government try to be as inclusive as possible in its approach to the matching programs so as to not, in effect, deter donations to smaller organizations. Certainly a matching program for the Humanitarian Coalition as a whole would be much preferable to a matching program involving the Red Cross only.

That concern is reflected in the report that was tabled today on our findings related to the response to the earthquake in Pakistan.

Thank you to all of you for being here. I want to start with a question for CNEWA and Islamic Relief.

Could you both share a little bit about the particular impacts of this crisis situation on religious and ethnic minority communities, people who may already face various kinds of challenges and people who are displaced as well?

Maybe we will start with CNEWA and then go Islamic Relief.

**Dr. Adriana Bara (National Director, Catholic Near East Welfare Association):** Thank you.

I just want to mention that CNEWA always helps people in need, regardless of their religion or Christian affiliation. Although the name is Catholic Near East Welfare Association, we open the door to everybody.

We have in place religious communities that help people. For instance, the Marist Brothers have around 1,000 families in their covenant because people just go to the covenant, to schools and to halls searching for help. They never ask what their religion or their city is. They just help people with food, with clothes and the basic needs.

One sister at CNEWA said that we don't help people because they are Christians. We help people because we are. This is a slogan we use for CNEWA. We never ask people what their religion is and we never make differences in helping people.



**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you.

I'm almost out of time.

Mr. Khan, is there anything you are noticing in terms of differential impacts that you'd like to share?

**Mr. Usama Khan:** In any crisis, anybody who is a minority or marginalized is definitely impacted more.

I can speak from our experience not just in Turkey and Syria but around the world. We definitely do not discriminate at all. There are strict criteria to look at the most vulnerable populations irrespective of their faith, their creed and their background. Aid is delivered to them without any discrimination.

• (1240)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you for your great work.

That is my time, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We next go to MP Bendayan.

You have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd also like to take a moment to thank our witnesses for all the work they do on the ground and also for being here with us this morning to discuss this tragic and horrible situation.

Mr. Charlebois, one of my colleagues asked earlier if humanitarian aid was distributed fairly and equitably on the ground and if certain ethnic and religious considerations came into play. I noticed that Mr. Genuis is in full agreement.

What has been your experience, as an Oxfam official?

**Mr. André Charlebois:** Thank you very much for the question.

Oxfam operates by applying the basic humanitarian principles of complete independence, neutrality and impartiality, and by responding to the needs of the most vulnerable. Obviously, we work in government-controlled regions, but displaced persons cross borders and enter occupied territories not controlled by governments. We work to help the most vulnerable. That is how we focus our programs.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** Very well.

You also said that the sanctions were an obstacle. I understand that the situation in Syria is difficult, but I want to say that I'm strongly opposed to lifting the sanctions on Bashar al-Assad's regime or on Vladimir Putin's government.

Aren't we able to deliver more aid and work with trusted partners on the ground without giving carte blanche to two of the worst regimes currently in power?

**Mr. André Charlebois:** It's not about giving anyone carte blanche; however, I think that exceptions should be made for humanitarian actors. The current reality on the ground is that the sanctions are stifling the economy and therefore directly hurting people.

Merchants and all those who profit in any way always find a way around those sanctions.

We're not advocating for sanctions to be lifted, but rather for changes that would allow humanitarian workers to do what they need to do and have access to the most vulnerable.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** Very well. Mr. Charlebois, I've run out of time to ask you more questions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bergeron, you have three minutes.

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

First, thank you all for coming. I salute your work on the ground, and I'm thinking in particular of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association. A few months ago, I had the opportunity to meet with L'Oeuvre d'Orient in Paris, which does similar work. Congratulations to all the organizations.

Mr. Morgan, I want to come back to your two proposals. You probably heard the officials tell us earlier that they were working within well-defined budgetary parameters. There seemed to be some openness to the idea of responding to the UN's call for new funding. So there's clearly some openness in that regard.

The matching donations will go exclusively to the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, but you're suggesting that they be extended to the Humanitarian Coalition as a whole. We asked officials that question; you were there. We were told that the existing programs and budgets would enable co-operation with the other organizations on the ground, and that the matching donations were only one component of the humanitarian aid that Canada is providing to Turkey and Syria.

What do you say to that?

• (1245)

**Mr. Richard Morgan:** In line with Mr. Salewicz's comments earlier, the point is that the \$50 million he talked about is already allocated and already being put to use in Syria. The government is allowing greater flexibility in the use of those funds, most of which have already been spent and don't necessarily meet all the new requirements.

The dilemma I foresee and the reason why our first recommendation is that the committee support a broader humanitarian envelope at Global Affairs Canada, is that the department has an annual budget, but all the available funds in that budget have already been earmarked, if I understand correctly. It is urgent for the government to do even more as this crisis escalates. To do that, it will need to seek these funds elsewhere, beyond normally allocated budgets.

I hope that all the parties will support this urgent need so as to substantially increase what the government is able to do. The matching program is just one way to do that. However, Canadians have increasingly less money, and the government too, because budgets are tight across the board. So, we need to make the most of what we have and multiply it.

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** One of the concerns—  
[English]

**The Chair:** I believe you're out of time, Mr. Bergeron.

We'll now go to MP McPherson.

You have three minutes.

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

I want to echo all of my colleagues in this meeting and thank all of you for the work you are doing. The work that you do on the ground is so important. I know the danger you put yourselves in, and I know what your sector goes through to provide these services. I'm very grateful to all of you.

Mr. Morgan, I'd like to continue on with some of the questions that my colleague from the Bloc has been asking. Frankly, it is extremely frustrating for me to see the government not include the Humanitarian Coalition. We know that you have significant access on the ground and that you are on the ground. I'd like you to talk about that a little bit.

What areas are the Humanitarian Coalition members responding to specifically in Turkey and Syria? Let's push back on that narrative that the Red Cross was there but that the Humanitarian Coalition was not.

**Mr. Richard Morgan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and MP McPherson.

I would emphasize that, indeed, to your point, the members of the Humanitarian Coalition are deeply localized. The Grand Bargain commitments that Mr. Salewicz was referring to earlier are I think most effectively delivered by members of the Humanitarian Coalition already working through national offices staffed by local and national staff, and also by partners, really driving home the localization commitment we've all made as part of the Grand Bargain.

I'd also add that, as Usama mentioned, many of our members are part of those neighbours helping neighbours. They're digging through the rubble trying to help those whose cries they are hearing. Some of our own members' teams have been lost as a result of these earthquakes. Communities are always the first responders, and we rally in behind them.

What does that mean in terms of our response at the moment in Turkey? It includes Gaziantep, Urfa, Mardin, Hatay, Sanliurfa and Izmir. In Syria the areas include Aleppo, Hama, Tartus, Latakia, Afrin, Idlib, Azaz, Al-Hasakah, Daraa, and also areas controlled by the government and Kurdish parties as well as by Syrian defence forces.

The point is that we have local access in many contexts. We would like the committee as well as Global Affairs to recognize that.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** There's another thing you touched on with my colleague Mr. Bergeron that I'd like to get you to reiterate a little bit. That's around the supplemental funding. One of your recommendations was that there be substantial funding, of course, and also supplemental.

As you mentioned, what often happens within Global Affairs is that as our official development assistance is so low—it's 0.3%, and of course the goal is 0.7%—there is very much the risk of stealing from Peter to pay for Paul in certain situations. Of course, there isn't a person who doesn't want as much support as possible going to Turkey and Syria.

Can you talk about the impacts of this money coming from previously allocated programs?

• (1250)

**Mr. Richard Morgan:** Yes. Thank you for the question.

The challenge is that, when you've made commitments in advance to a multi-year program, you have already identified where you want to respond and what interventions in particular you want to pursue. You make commitments. You source. You procure. Then an earthquake hits. You've already spent some of the money. Now you have to pivot quickly, even where you have available funds, to respond.

I think the point is that the needs in a context like Syria particularly, where you've already had 12 years of civil war, where you already have 4.1 million people needing aid, where you have successive UN requests, underfunded significantly, there's nowhere near enough in terms of using previous commitments to respond to the new challenges. I think the scope and scale are beyond what many expected, and we need to do more.

Thank you for that preoccupation.

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

We go now to the second round of questions. This round will again consist of three minutes.

We go first to MP Genuis.

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

I know that as opposition politicians, it's easier for us to be tough on the government than it is for stakeholders who apply to the government for funding.

Mr. Morgan, let me ask you this. We raise these issues repeatedly about inclusive matching programs. I'm wondering what you think the barrier or the problem is in terms of the government just saying, "Sure. We'll include as many people as possible."

You've made strong arguments today. Presumably, you've made those arguments to members of the government. What do you think the problem is in terms of actually doing this in an inclusive way?

**Mr. Richard Morgan:** It's an important question. Thank you.

I'd say there are a few factors. One is the timeliness of decision-making. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, I think the government was trying to move as quickly as it could and had well-established mechanisms already with the Red Cross. It was easy to respond through the Red Cross. The Red Cross is doing important work, and we support that.

I think the challenge we feel is that the deeply local capacity of our members is underappreciated by Global Affairs. We believe it is actually a resource that the government should be tapping into.

I appreciate that question. We think we can bring more as a value-added partner to the government. In fact, I would add that there are many places where the Red Cross is not able to access and where many of our members are able to deliver. Again, that local capacity in all regions of Syria is a good example of that.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you for that.

Mr. Khan, you mentioned the situation in Syria in general, with a civil war over 10 years, requiring our continuing attention. I'm tight for time here, but I'm wondering if you, and then perhaps CNEWA, have any reflections on what we need to be doing in response to the 10-year-long situation in terms of the civil war and what our political response to that should be.

**Mr. Usama Khan:** I think the first thing is just recognizing what people there have gone through and looking at this issue from the eyes of that four- or five-year-old child, who is now 12 or 14, and has seen nothing but war and air strikes and displacement.

I think for Canadians to understand the crisis.... I get it. It's politically complex. In some ways it's a proxy war among global superpowers and global actors, and there's no easy solution. I think it's about understanding all the factors at play, making sure we use all of our relationships as a government and using the soft power of Canada in international diplomacy to keep the focus on trying to resolve it in a way so that all Syrians are included in the political process and ultimately have stability and prosperity in the country.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Does anyone else want to weigh in on that?

**The Chair:** We're over three minutes. Thank you.

We will next go to MP Sorbara. You have three minutes.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, everyone.

First, thank you to all the organizations that have come here for the work that you do on the ground, not only in this part of the world but in many other parts of the world as well.

The riding that I'm privileged to represent has a very large Turkish population, also members of Kurdish heritage, to the extent that if I go to my local park with my daughters, I'll hear the Turkish language being spoken quite frequently. There are a number of restaurants and cafés run by individuals.

I first want to start by expressing my condolences, because I know many members of my community, especially of Kurdish heritage, have lost members back home. I've spoken with many of

them. They've lost a lot, not just property but loved ones as well. My heart goes out to them.

In terms of the short-term needs of the population, if we can divide it between the impacted areas in Turkey and the impacted areas in Syria, what more can we be doing on the ground that we are not doing at this moment in time?

The federal government has made commitments. We are there. I was thanked by the Turkish ambassador here in Canada when I went to see him last week. What further can we be doing to assist that would make a tangible difference?

Perhaps I could start off with Oxfam Canada, then go to Catholic Near East, then to Islamic Relief and then finish up with Mr. Morgan, if he can answer quickly. Thank you.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Charlebois:** I apologize, but could you please clarify your question?

[*English*]

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Mr. Morgan, can you commence, please?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Richard Morgan:** Of course. I will then pass the floor to Mr. Charlebois.

[*English*]

The point we would be emphasizing is the multiple phases of emergency.

As Usama pointed out, in the first instance, mobilizing heavy machinery to be able to move debris was very challenging and remains challenging. What's heart-wrenching for all of us is that the window is shrinking fast. I think we're moving tragically from a point of rescuing people in rubble to rescuing bodies. That's heart-breaking.

Once you've managed to get as many people as possible out of the rubble, then you absolutely need to shelter, feed and care for these people. This is not only going to be a matter of weeks. It's going to be a matter of months. So many buildings are compromised on both sides of the border: in terms of Syria from previous hostilities, and in the case of Turkey from challenges in terms of building codes and other issues. So many buildings are unsafe. It's not habitable for people to be in such proximity for such extended periods. Shelter is going to be a huge issue.

Then, people have experienced psychosocial trauma and need support. The children have gone through something that's unimaginable for the vast majority of us, and they'll need support. Then, of course, there's the long-term recovery of livelihoods.

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

We next go to MP Bergeron.

You have a minute and a half, Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

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

I think that one of our concerns, especially for me, is that, although Turkey has been greatly affected by the earthquakes, it still has infrastructure that allows it to respond to the situation to some extent.

Syria is different in the sense that there is no longer a civil authority in much of the country. There was a civil war. There are sanctions, which no one here is suggesting be lifted. It is the same with Afghanistan: Some of the parameters of Canada's regulatory and legislative framework undermine operations on the ground.

What would you like to see us do to ensure that aid is much more effective on the ground, particularly in Syria?

**Mr. Richard Morgan:** To whom are you addressing the question, Mr. Bergeron?

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** It is for whomever wishes to respond.

[*English*]

**Mr. Usama Khan:** Sure. I can take a stab at it first.

One of the factors, as Richard mentioned, is that the access for the Red Cross equivalent, which is the Red Crescent, is in Damascus-controlled regions. Multiple witnesses mentioned the displacement in northwest Syria, and, really, the need that's in northwest Syria around Idlib and Aleppo should be a focus of the government.

The other point I'd like to mention is that historically we've seen in crises and responses from the Canadian government, but also from governments around the world, the split between multilateral agencies like the UN bodies and civil society actors like Oxfam, Islamic Relief and the other members of the Humanitarian Coalition and other Canadian charities. I think it's important for the committee, for the government, to recognize effectiveness, recognize the speed of delivery and tilt the balance towards more of the NGOs. That should be of consideration as well.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** For the last question, we go to MP McPherson.

You have a minute and a half.

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

Again, thank you for your testimony. I don't have very much time. I'll ask Mr. Khan.

Perhaps you could continue on that thought. What does your organization and other organizations require to meet the needs in Syria for the short- and long-term recovery? Just give your final thoughts on that as we have a very short amount of time.

**Mr. Usama Khan:** Thank you for the question.

I think the analogy of giving people fish and teaching them how to fish applies. There are absolutely urgent needs in terms of search and rescue, in terms of providing tents. Last night it was -5°C in the region. Lots of people are being forced to sleep in cars. Tents, blankets, food and non-food items, these are the urgent needs in Turkey, but very much so in Syria because of all the points mentioned.

For this crisis, the needs will not go away in a week, in months or even years, so there has to be a long-term commitment from countries like Canada to make sure that we can ensure safeguarding, we can ensure health care facilities and infrastructure, we can rebuild public infrastructure and roads, and we can ensure there are long-term safe dwellings for families.

For our teams and other organizations, I think it's going to take all of us together to do this, and it's going to take a commitment for many years.

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

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

It is now one o'clock. I just wanted to thank all of our witnesses—Monsignor Vaccari, Ms. Bara, Monsieur Charlebois, Mr. Khan and Mr. Morgan. Thank you ever so much for your expertise and your perspective today, but also thank you for everything you've been doing for many years. Obviously, given the terrible devastation and the scope of what we have seen in Turkey and in Syria, we are very grateful for all your efforts.

Thank you for making our world a better place.







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