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# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi





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• (1110)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 77 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is being held in public and is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Therefore, members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of members and witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please do mute yourselves when you are not speaking. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled by the proceedings and verification officer. You may speak in the official language of your choice.

Although this room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to interpreters and cause serious injuries. The most common cause of sound feedback is an earpiece worn too close to a microphone.

I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the very best we possibly can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee will proceed to a briefing on the situation in Israel and Gaza. I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we are grateful to have with us Ms. Julie Sunday, assistant deputy minister, consular, security and emergency management; Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen, director general, North Africa, Israel, West Bank/Gaza; and Mr. Sébastien Beaulieu, director general, emergency management and security division.

In addition, from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we have with us Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre, assistant deputy minister, international affairs and crisis response.

Should everyone be agreeable, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development will be allotted 10 minutes for its opening statement. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration has been invited, and they are here to answer any questions that may be posed by the members.

We will start off with the Department of Foreign Affairs.

You have 10 minutes for your opening statement.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen (Director General, North Africa, Israel, West Bank/Gaza, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for the invitation to brief the committee today on recent events in Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Developments are moving quite quickly. I will focus on how the conflict is evolving and on Canadian approaches, but I will avoid discussing hypothetical and future-oriented scenarios.

[Translation]

On October 7, 2023, the terrorist group Hamas launched a large-scale terrorist attack against Israel. Hamas brutally killed over 1,300 Israelis and kidnapped over 100 civilians. The attack shook Israel to the core. Canada and the whole world were stunned by the severity of the atrocities committed by Hamas against innocent men, women and children. We condemn these actions.

Israel and Hamas have been at war since October 7. Hamas has continued to indiscriminately launch rockets into Israeli territory. Israeli defence forces undertook a vast campaign of air strikes in the Gaza Strip, in expectation of a terrorist invasion. Israel's objective is to paralyze Hamas once and for all and prevent a new attack of this kind from ever happening again.

Canada is continuing to meet its commitments to its partners in the region and around the world.

We have underscored the fact that we support Israel's right under international law to defend itself against the terrorist acts of Hamas.

Moreover, as we have already stated publicly and privately, it's essential for Israel to be able to defend itself in compliance with rules established by international humanitarian law. The first such rule is the protection of civilians.

• (1115)

[English]

The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza remains a significant concern for the Government of Canada. It is estimated that nearly 1.4 million Palestinians, including civilians, have been displaced from their homes in the past two weeks. There were reports, which we cannot independently verify, of more than 4,000 Palestinians killed, including civilians and children. It is imperative that humanitarian access be established so that life-saving assistance reaches civilians who need it most. The decision by Egypt and Israel to allow for initial deliveries of humanitarian assistance over the weekend is a positive first step, but it is clear that more must be done. Canadian officials will continue to call on all parties to ensure access of humanitarian aid to vulnerable Palestinians.

Canada remains one of the largest contributors of humanitarian and development assistance to vulnerable Palestinians, with an average spend of \$55 million Canadian per year. Following Minister Hussen's announcement on October 21, Canada's contributions to address the current crisis in Gaza stand at \$60 million Canadian.

All of our funding to support Palestinians goes through trusted partner organizations, such as UN agencies. We will support their efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance while ensuring that none of the funding goes into the hands of Hamas. Canada exercises enhanced due diligence for all humanitarian and development assistance funding for Palestinians. This effort includes systematic screening and strong anti-terrorism provisions in our funding agreements.

It is critical here that we emphasize that Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people, nor their legitimate aspirations. Hamas is a listed terrorist entity. It has brutally murdered innocent civilians, has chosen to invade Israel and has taken hostages in total violation of all international laws and norms.

Turning briefly to the broader region, it is essential that this conflict not become regionalized and spread to neighbouring areas. In this respect, Iran's rhetoric and support of Hamas, statements by the terrorist group Hezbollah, and the launching of rockets into and towards Israel and American forces by actors affiliated with Iran in Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen are all deeply concerning.

[Translation]

Canadian representatives at all levels are continuing to engage with our partners in the region and around the world in dealing with the situation.

Canada remains determined to enforce international law and to support the rights of Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security.

[English]

Canada will continue to support the right of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to live in peace and security. We will continue to support a two-state solution as the only viable means to achieve this outcome.

Thank you.

[Translation]

**Ms. Julie Sunday (Assistant Deputy Minister, Consular, Security and Emergency Management, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you.

I will be speaking to you today about the consular services being provided to Canadians affected by this crisis.

[English]

Since the onset of the crisis, our missions on the ground in Tel Aviv and Ramallah, and more widely throughout the region, have been providing consular services to Canadians. The emergency watch and response centre here in Ottawa operates 24-7 and has responded to over 8,448 inquiries since the beginning of the conflict on October 7.

We immediately surged this team to be able to effectively respond to needs and have had a large team of officers taking calls. For example, in a 24-hour period, we have approximately 100 responders working. We have also deployed approximately 30 members of the standing rapid deployment team to reinforce our missions in Tel Aviv, Ramallah, Athens, Cairo and Beirut, as well as in Cyprus.

• (1120)

[Translation]

These officers are being sent on an emergency basis from Ottawa and our missions in Europe and the region. They are all highly qualified and have been making themselves available for these assignments. We are grateful to them for their efforts, which are often carried out under extremely difficult conditions.

[English]

To ensure clear and timely communications during this crisis, we've set up a dedicated web page on GAC's external website. It includes the most up-to-date information, and we've been encouraging everyone to seek details there.

The travel advice and advisory web pages for Israel, Gaza and West Bank, as well as neighbouring countries, are being continually reviewed and updated as needed. For Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, the overall travel advice is to avoid non-essential travel due to the unpredictable security situation.

In addition, there are regional advisories to avoid all travel to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and to borders with Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and the Gaza Strip.

[Translation]

Canadians in that region and neighbouring areas need to register with the Registration of Canadians Abroad service to receive updates.

At the moment, there are approximately 6,000 registered Canadians in Israel, and over 450 registered in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Of these, we are currently assisting 900 Canadian citizens, permanent residents, and their families. Through various forms of communication, including the Registration of Canadians Abroad service, we are in direct contact with those who have been affected.

[English]

Global Affairs is providing support to six Canadian families following deaths in the current hostilities, and to the families of two other Canadians who are reported missing.

The Government of Canada's first priority is always the safety and security of its citizens. For this reason, we have not been commenting on or releasing any information that may compromise the ongoing efforts to return these Canadians to safety.

Regarding assisted departures from the region, Global Affairs Canada officials continue to be in regular contact with Canadian citizens and permanent residents who've requested help in leaving Israel, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

[Translation]

I'll begin with an update on assisted departures from Israel.

We have thus far helped over 1,600 Canadians, permanent residents and members of their families to leave Israel. By the end of today 19 Canadian Armed Forces flights will have left Tel Aviv for Athens.

[English]

As was communicated by Minister Joly on Saturday evening, we have been closely monitoring the demand for flights out of Tel Aviv. Now that many Canadians have successfully left Israel, the demand is decreasing and commercial options are becoming increasingly available. Therefore, the last scheduled assisted-departure flight from Tel Aviv is taking place today. Canadian Armed Forces aircraft will remain in the region on standby to rapidly respond should conditions change.

For the Gaza Strip, the situation remains extremely fluid, and the Rafah border crossing remains closed to foreign nationals seeking to leave.

[Translation]

We are going to continue to communicate directly with Canadians who want to leave the region. We know that they are facing extremely difficult conditions, and we are doing everything we can to support them.

[English]

We continue to work around the clock to secure a window for Canadians to exit Gaza. We continue to communicate directly with Canadians, giving them the latest information as it becomes available. We are working hard with our allies, with the UN and governments in the region to ensure that Canadians will be able to take advantage of this window.

We are encouraged that some humanitarian convoys have entered through the crossing. It's an important first step toward the eventual movement of foreign nationals out of the area. Our mission in Cairo continues to engage with Egyptian authorities to ensure that any

Canadians can pass through the Rafah crossing and will be transported to Cairo and onward to Canada.

For the assisted-departure options from the West Bank, we've been assisting the departure by land of Canadians, permanent residents and their family members from the West Bank into Jordan. Our mission in Ramallah continues to be in direct contact with all Canadians in the West Bank who are seeking support to leave.

While we are prioritizing Canadians for assisted departures, we are also supporting permanent residents and working to ensure that family units are not separated. When determining the eligibility for assisted departures, we follow the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which defines "family members". All people looking for this assistance who are in touch with our call centre are made aware of who is eligible under the IRPA.

In the process of preparing for these assisted departures, we have been prioritizing documented and travel-ready passengers, stranded tourists and our most vulnerable clients. Canadians are not being charged for the assisted-departure flights from Israel to Athens or transit from the West Bank into Jordan. However, onward travel and accommodation are at the individual's personal expense.

Finally, I would like to speak briefly about the situation in Lebanon. There continues to be insecurity at the southern border with Israel and, as we saw with protests and violence in Beirut last week, the situation in Lebanon continues to be unstable.

We have now changed our travel advice to advise against all travel to Lebanon. We've amplified this message through social media and direct messages to registered Canadians in Lebanon. Our best advice is that Canadians should not travel to Lebanon for any reason.

For those Canadians who are already in Lebanon, we strongly advise that they seek commercial options to leave as soon as possible.

Whole-of-government planning is actively taking place to prepare for all scenarios. We have also pre-positioned our standing rapid deployment team officers in the region, and the department has stood up an emergency response team specifically focused on contingency planning for Lebanon.

Thank you very much. We'll be pleased to take your questions.

• (1125)

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

We will now go to the members for questions. For the first round, every member will receive six minutes.

The first member is MP Aboultaif, for six minutes.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):** Thank you very much for appearing this morning on the very heartbreaking situation that's taking place in the Middle East. Thanks for the information that you've provided.

First, Ms. Sunday, you mentioned that 8,448 inquiries have been received so far. Do you have a breakdown on these inquiries? Do they come from Gaza, from Ramallah, from Lebanon, from Jordan, or, of course, from inside Israel? If that information is available, we would be happy to receive it.

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** I don't have a precise number for you right now, unfortunately, but I would say with confidence that the majority of those inquiries have been from Israel. We have smaller numbers from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but they're nevertheless significant. We have fewer inquiries from Lebanon, though we do see our registration of Canadians in Lebanon going up slightly.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Why do you think we're not getting numbers as high as on the Israeli side from Canadians who are in Lebanon and in the other regions?

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** I think in part it's the numbers, initially. I think we have fewer Canadians, permanent residents and family members in the West Bank and Gaza who are seeking help. I would say that right now we know this group very well. It's a smaller group. We've been reaching out directly to them by phone and by email to stay in touch and to understand what assistance they require from us.

In Israel the numbers were initially very large, but we've watched those numbers decrease as the situation calms in Israel proper. Those calls are becoming quite reduced. Certainly our numbers of affected persons have significantly decreased. Right now we have just over 150 individuals in Israel who are identifying themselves as affected persons who require support from us. That is a much, much smaller number than we had a week ago.

• (1130)

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Do you know if Internet service is available to people out there? I've been contacted by people who have family out there. They're not necessarily Canadian citizens, but they're family to Canadians. I have received unofficial notes on the number of casualties on the Gaza and Ramallah side who are cousins of Canadians. It's a very high number. It's a very troubling number. I have asked those families whether they've been able to connect with their families or their parents out there. Again, they could be Canadians or non-Canadians.

Is there any information from the ground through our teams on whether Internet service is at least available so that these people can have the chance to connect and report and tell us what's going on and we can know the path forward to be able to save as many lives as we can?

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** Thank you for the question.

We have also recognized over the past week, in our calls to individuals in both the West Bank and Gaza, that the telecom situation has been up and down. Sometimes we're able to contact them and sometimes we're not. We've been using email and phone and all methods of communication. It is very challenging in terms of reports of individuals who may have been killed or injured.

Again, we do not have any reports from the Palestinian territories right now, but of course we are available to receive additional information when people have additional information.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** To your knowledge, has the minister or our government made a request to have some of our people there on the ground, whether in Rafah, which is on the southern border with Egypt, or in the north in Ramallah? Has there been any discussion to be able to deploy some of our teams, or maybe some individuals? Was there any negotiated safety zone there so that we could put people on the ground to understand the situation and have the ability to assess the situation properly, rather than leave it up to people to see it on social media and on TV?

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** From the perspective of assisting Canadians—and I'll turn it to my colleague on the broader diplomat piece—we have a team in Ramallah, and they are working hard to assist the departure of Canadians, permanent residents and their family members. We have assisted with departures from across the West Bank. We are, I would say, one of the only countries to be doing this as effectively as we are right now.

From that perspective, we have a very good understanding of the context right now in the West Bank and how to help people cross that border into Jordan, with the assistance of our embassy there as well. Both of those teams—our team in Amman and our team in Ramallah—are completely mobilized to help Canadians and their families get across that border.

The Rafah border is a much more complex situation. We are working very closely with all of the regional players—Egypt, the U.S., our Five Eyes partners and of course all who have a stake in that border—to ensure that when that border opens, Canadians, their families and permanent residents are able to have onward safe passage to Canada.

We are working all angles on that very issue, and we are deeply engaged with all who can help facilitate that movement. It will be a multinational movement in terms of the Gaza situation.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will next go to MP Chatel.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

People in my riding are very worried and feel powerless. As a mother, I'm also very concerned about the circumstances of children affected by this horrible conflict. The children and families of people in Gaza are almost out of food, water, electricity and medical supplies. Israeli children are being held hostage and must be returned to their families.

Canadians agree on one thing: and that is that it's absolutely essential to provide humanitarian aid. It's true that Canada has committed \$60 million for humanitarian aid, but based on what we can see on TV, aid is only trickling in.

Can you explain to Canadians what is preventing humanitarian aid from reaching those who need it most? They don't understand the difference, technically speaking, between a ceasefire and a cessation of hostilities. The process of providing humanitarian aid has to be safe for humanitarian workers, and the lives of civilians need to be protected.

• (1135)

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Thank you for that question.

The government is also concerned about the impact of this conflict on innocent civilians, including children, and about protecting them. Our priority is to keep people informed of what we can do. With a contribution of \$60 million so far, we are among the major contributors.

We are still working with reliable partners to obtain aid, particularly for women, families and children. That's a part of our humanitarian aid philosophy. We are working with organizations that will be providing assistance to these people. Given the context of this conflict, that is clearly a difficult task.

[*English*]

There are a number of proposals out there: ceasefire, humanitarian corridor, safe zones—a range of things. The Government of Canada is advocating humanitarian access at this point. We will continue to call upon all parties to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure that this aid can be delivered.

There are a great many *enjeux* working their way out in the region right now in terms of access for humanitarian assistance to go in through the Rafah crossing and for access out for internationals through the Rafah crossing. Some of the parties are putting those two things next to one another and putting on conditions one way or the other.

As of this morning, the first 34 trucks of humanitarian assistance have passed through the Rafah border. It is important that it be delivered, and we will continue to deliver that message.

I will stop there.

[*Translation*]

I'll be happy to take other questions.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Thank you.

People in my riding, and Canadians generally, often raise the issue of access to water. It's absolutely essential; a family can't live without water for very long.

Over a million children are being deprived of water. Why don't they have access? What can we do to help with this situation?

Can you give us any further details about it?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** What makes the situation so difficult in Gaza is that fuel is needed to purify water, and we don't have any at the moment.

[*English*]

We are working with our partners in the region, with the Egyptian government, with the Israeli government, with international organizations and with other key partners internationally to impress

on the parties to this conflict the need to be able to get life-saving humanitarian access in, including access to water. That would include starting up again the capacity of Gaza to produce purified water as well as bringing in tanks of water, which is one of the efforts that's being made by humanitarian organizations now at Rafah.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Chatel.

We now go to MP Garon. You have six minutes.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses who are here with us today.

On October 18, the Secretary-General of the UN, Mr. Guterrez, called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Middle East to "ease the epic human suffering" resulting from the conflict.

I would like to know what the Government of Canada's position is on a possible humanitarian ceasefire. Have there been any conversations about this with Israeli representatives?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** As I mentioned earlier, various proposals are being looked at, including humanitarian corridors and a ceasefire.

[*English*]

We will call upon all parties to continue to respect international humanitarian law. We will call upon all parties to protect civilians. We are deeply concerned, evidently, about the humanitarian situation in this region. Our priority is ensuring that humanitarian assistance can reach those in need. Those are the conversations that we are party to right now.

We think we need to make it clear that Israel, following this horrible terrorist attack, has the right to defend itself according to the principles of international law. That is central for us as well, and we are profoundly preoccupied with Israel's security in the region. Without security for Israel, there is no sustainable peace in this region either.

We need to continue to impress on the players of the region the need for respect for international humanitarian law and for humanitarian access, and that will continue to be the conversation.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Thank you very much.

In international law, the first rule is to protect civilians. In fact you mentioned this in your opening address.

At the moment, Israel's blockade is preventing the delivery of essential goods. This is causing all kinds of problems: there are shortages of the fuel needed to purify water, in addition to medical supplies, food, electricity, and many other essentials. The situation is worsening and NGOs are alerting governments about the impact this situation might have on civilians. I'm thinking of things like disease transmission.

According to the UN, "[w]ar crimes are those violations of international humanitarian law (treaty or customary law) that incur individual criminal responsibility under international law".

According to you, and according to the Government of Canada, is the current blockade a violation of international law?

[English]

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I'm not in a position to assess whether this is a violation of international humanitarian law. We do have grave concern for the deteriorating conditions in Gaza. We feel it is our place, alongside our partners in the international community, to continue to raise the message of the need to protect civilians and the need to respect and uphold the principles of international law. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs have spoken publicly about the need to respect the laws of war. Even war has rules.

We will continue to make that message known from our perspective. We will continue to have those diplomatic conversations and we will continue to call on all parties to facilitate access for those in need, as well as to make the point ourselves about the importance of our contributions, hoping that this can spur others to increase their contributions, given the gravity of—

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Canada has not yet taken an official position on the status of this blockade with respect to international law.

Is that correct?

[English]

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Canada has not taken a position on that. We're not in a position to determine that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Yesterday, Canada and its main allies "reiterated their support for Israel and its right to defend itself against terrorism and called for adherence to international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians."

Can you tell us exactly how far Israel's right to defend itself extends? Is it limited in any way?

[English]

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** It's a question of proportionality and international law that I believe you're referring to here. We can return to you in writing with some further detail on that.

These are questions on which I gain the good advice of our colleagues who work in our legal department. There are rules of war laid out in terms of the protection of civilians and proportionality, and those are the reference points.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** In fact, I would like the committee to receive a written response. Many have raised the issue of proportionality, and I am among them. This question is going to be raised more and more often.

Mr. Chair, as I have only a few seconds left, I'd like to give the floor to my colleague.

● (1145)

[English]

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Thank you all very much for being here. I know how difficult this has been and I know about the work you've all been doing on consular support on this very difficult issue in a very difficult time, so thank you for the work you've been doing. I deeply appreciate it. I know Canadian citizens also appreciate it very much.

Obviously, we are all devastated by the terrorist attacks by Hamas on innocent civilians, including children. So many Canadians have been traumatized and are in mourning, and now so many Muslim and Palestinian Canadians are also feeling deep grief and fear as a result of the siege of Gaza.

There are eight families in my community of Edmonton who have lost loved ones in the past two weeks. Together, they've lost 95 family members, and those are just the families I know of in Edmonton. Across Canada, there are hundreds of families who are mourning the loss of their loved ones in Gaza and are terrified because of the ongoing bombing.

So far, the NDP is the only party that has called for a ceasefire.

I need to start with one very basic question. Do you, as representatives of the Government of Canada, believe that the collective punishment of Palestinians is, in fact, making Israelis safer?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Thank you for the question. It's a thoughtful question.

I appreciate the impact this conflict is having on Canadians. We see it among our staff members at our embassies and our local staff as well, and we feel for them, evidently.

I am not in a position to judge on "collective punishment" as a term. It is a term that has been used, but it's a term that has specific meaning as well.

Israel's right to self-defence that we were referring to before has circumscriptions, and we want to remind them of that—that the protection of civilians remains paramount and that we need to make sure that civilians have access to humanitarian assistance. This is our focus right now, and we will continue to focus on that.

We feel for two and a half million Palestinians in Gaza, and they require humanitarian assistance. As an international community, we need to carry that message forward in an effective way.



**Ms. Heather McPherson:** The government—your government—uses the language of “protecting civilians” and “international law”, but Defense for Children has now stated that over 2,000 Palestinian children have died as a result of the siege of Gaza.

You have still not called for a ceasefire. The Palestinian and Muslim communities are asking the government to call for a ceasefire. This is their number one ask. Where are those conversations and why have they not yet been undertaken?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We are undertaking conversations with all of our partners in the region as Global Affairs Canada. We are hearing from the neighbouring countries. We are receiving reporting from our missions on the ground, including the mission in Ramallah, about the circumstances as they occur. We are speaking to international organizations to better understand the circumstances and to better understand how we can achieve traction to be able to get humanitarian assistance in to the people who need it.

We're very focused on this right now—

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I'm sorry to interrupt, but clearly you can see that it's impossible to get the humanitarian assistance to individuals if bombs are still falling. That's not going to be possible, is it? A ceasefire is the best way to ensure we can get that humanitarian assistance to the people who so desperately need it.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** There have been a number of propositions that have been put out about how to generate safe zones and humanitarian corridors, including ceasefires. These conversations are ongoing at various levels.

For Canada, the question is, what is going to be most effective in the short term in getting assistance in to the people who need it while also respecting Israel's right to defend itself while rockets continue to fly?

• (1150)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I would urge the government to consider that the Canadian citizens who are so desperate for the Canadian government to stand up and protect their rights are calling for this, and I would hope you would take that into consideration.

Our efforts to ensure security for all must also, of course, include justice. I think my colleague from the Bloc alluded to this. We certainly recognize international law and international humanitarian law, and, as you so rightly mentioned, the rules of war, because there are rules of war. It's a very low bar, but they are there.

We are seeing that the rules are not being followed, and I'm wondering where the Canadian government is in terms of using international mechanisms such as the ICC or the ICJ to ensure that all war crimes are prosecuted.

Further to that, considering that Canada has been very vocal about using those mechanisms for places like Ukraine and Syria, why is there such a hesitation so far to use those mechanisms in this case?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We are indeed a steadfast supporter of the International Court of Justice as the principal legal organ of the United Nations, and the International Criminal Court as a founding member of that, and we recognize the important role it can play in the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Right now, we're looking at humanitarian access as the key point and the most urgent point. We're looking at the situation of Canadian citizens, obviously, and we're looking at all hostages being returned. We do need to work with all of our partners to be able to encourage allies to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international law, and our political leadership has been outspoken on that point. We have conversations with our partners in the region about the need to respect international law.

I'll stop there for a moment.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We next go to MP Epp. You have five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today and briefing us.

I'm going to start with a question for Ms. Sunday and pick up from where my colleague left off. It's just a question of clarification.

Regarding Rafah and our Canadian presence there, did I understand you to say that we already have a presence there or we're working at having a presence there? If I understood your other testimony, we do have Canadians in Ramallah prepared to receive Canadians and assist them on the way out.

What is the exact status of our presence at the moment in Rafah?

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** In Ramallah, yes, we have our team on the ground. In Rafah, we do not have officials there. The Egyptian authorities are not permitting us to take officials there right now.

We also, of course, have to assess the security situation, so we are in active discussions right now about where we will be collecting our Canada-entitled persons when that border opens. That is a discussion that's under way, and many other countries are having this discussion as well. That whole northern Sinai region is closed off right now to all but an extremely small group.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Okay. I have a follow-up, then.

If I understood it, 34 aid trucks were prepared to go or have gone in through that point. Is that being monitored? Is any of that our aid, Canadian aid? Who is monitoring that if we don't have a presence there?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We don't have a presence at the Rafah crossing, nor do our like-minded colleagues. It's a non-permissive environment and we require the permission of the Egyptians to be there, but international organizations are organizing there and in the El Arish airport, 50 kilometres away from the border, to organize the conveyance of humanitarian assistance across the border.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you. That leads right into my next question.

In normal times, Canada flows aid bilaterally from government to government or flows it to our trusted Canadian organizations and their partners. I heard in the testimony that the aid that has been announced is being channelled through UN trusted partners. Correct me if I'm wrong here.

In that flowing to the partners of Canadian organizations, is it flowing bilaterally to governments there or is it flowing to the UN? Exactly what is the flow of the announced aid? What is it now, or what is it planned to be?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We are still without an announcement of exactly which partners those are, but we have a plan in place that will be announced shortly.

These are trusted partners. You can probably come up with a pretty good answer to that by looking at the appeals that have been issued. We've responded to the international appeals. Those are trusted partners that we'll be writing cheques to in order to ensure that they are able to carry out their vital, life-saving work in the region.

• (1155)

**Mr. Dave Epp:** I recognize that the announcement has not been made, but could there be a matching kind of scenario that is flowing through trusted partners of our Canadian organizations to their partners in the field? Would that be a potential scenario for flowing aid?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I find it a little hard to address hypotheticals.

What you described has been done in the past and would be considered.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Are land borders the only access points for delivering aid into Gaza, such as through Rafah or through an Israeli checkpoint? Is delivery by sea a possibility?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I have not heard of any partners discussing delivery by sea. The discussions are exclusively focused around the Rafah crossing at this point.

The two Israeli crossings into Gaza are closed and are being blockaded, as you know, so Rafah remains the crossing point of choice to be able to deliver aid. Fortunately, we have a partner in the Egyptian government that we are working with to be able to facilitate this delivery.

There's strong focus in trying to come up with practical solutions here.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Along the same line of questioning, with solutions, you're talking about pre-positioning aid.

Is that primarily in Cairo or near the Rafah border? Are there other locations that potential trusted partners could deliver to, places where we are already working to get aid in place?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** The pre-positioning of aid by international partners is being done primarily at the El Arish airport, which I referred to before. That's 50 kilometres away from Rafah.

It's a good place to muster to be ready for the moment the border crossing opens to greater effect. We had 20 trucks that went on the

first day, and there were 14 on the second. We have high hopes that there will be a stronger stream over the coming days.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We go next to MP Zuberi. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I would like to start by stating and recognizing clearly that a person is a person is a person. I'm sure that this is a value that guides Global Affairs. All of us around this table recognize the common humanity we all have. We hope for a peaceful tomorrow, when everybody can live in true peace and dignity throughout the world, including in the Middle East, in Israel, in the West Bank and in Gaza.

We also recognize that there was a dramatic escalation of violence on October 7. What Hamas did terrorized Israeli civilians. We mourn the loss of each and every life—the 1,400 who died. We want to see the hostages who are currently being held freed. We also mourn the loss of life that is occurring right now as we speak, hour by hour, within Gaza and other parts of the region.

I'd like to focus on humanitarian aid.

Thus far, Canada has committed \$60 million in humanitarian aid. We were the first within the international community to say that we will be there to help people who are facing a humanitarian crisis within Gaza. We were the first country to do so.

There has been a major challenge in terms of actually getting that aid to the people who need it. Can you tell us what the impediments are to getting the aid into Gaza?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** The Rafah border crossing remains the only means to get much-needed humanitarian aid into Gaza. The two Israeli crossing points into Gaza are closed for security reasons, and our focus has exclusively been on the Rafah crossing. That has required a variety of conversations.

You understand, of course, that at a border crossing, you have the crossing going out and you have the no-man's land in between the crossing points and then the crossing going in. It's vice versa for people who would be heading out, like Canadian citizens and what-not.

There have been some physical issues with this crossing, with bombing of the no-man's land and other damages that have needed to be repaired. That has been an issue.

• (1200)

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Which parties are involved in allowing aid to pass through? Are there any impediments from any parties to allow aid to pass through to Gaza?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** There are several parties to this. On one side, the border is controlled by Egypt. It goes from Egypt into Rafah. On the border going from Gaza into Egypt in the other direction, it's controlled by the local authority, which would be Hamas. They control the border there.

We have challenges in terms of coordinating access.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Is Egypt the only party involved in allowing goods and humanitarian aid to enter into Gaza? Is Egypt the sole deciding party?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Egypt is not the sole deciding party, but Egypt is the party that must decide to—

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Which other parties are involved?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** That's Hamas, the local authority in Gaza.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** So Egypt can choose alone to allow things to enter from its border. There's no other screening that's happening.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I'm sorry...?

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** There are no other countries, such as America. Other countries are not involved in....

I'll move on to my next question, but essentially I was trying to understand which parties are involved in allowing humanitarian aid to enter into Gaza.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Okay, you mean a screen going on of the humanitarian aid to make sure that there's nothing...? Yes, that is happening.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Is Egypt the only party, the sole and unique party?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I would have to get back to you on that. I do not know the answer as to exactly who is involved in that.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** Please, yes, do that. To my knowledge, there are additional parties. I would like to get that information.

My second question is in terms of what's going on right now with respect to the conflict. Beyond dealing with Hamas, is there a solely military solution to seeing that everybody lives with dignity and respect within the region—Palestinians and Israelis—or is there a political solution? Do you want to elaborate on that?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I think Canada has been very clear and continues to be very clear that there needs to be a political horizon. The political horizon that has been laid out by the international community in UN Security Council resolutions and other frameworks is the two-state solution. This is a solution, though, that would need to be negotiated between the parties. We think it's tremendously important at this moment in time that the political horizon be there. We look for ways to encourage that.

You'll see that the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for International Development participated in a conference held in Egypt this weekend that was dedicated on the one hand to humanitarian assistance and on the other hand to trying to make sure that there is discussion of this political horizon, that we keep this out there and keep it as the horizon of hope. Without that horizon of hope, we're not going to be able to engage the players in what we need to do to move this situation forward in a healthy way.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We next go to MP Garon. You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since the attack on October 7, Israeli strikes on Gaza have killed 4,651 Palestinians, almost half of whom were children. There were also a reported 14,245 injured and 29 UN employees killed in the region. Of course, we mustn't forget that these numbers come from the Gaza Ministry of Health.

Ms. Flanagan Whalen, you talked about proportionality a little earlier. Before condemning the facts I have just reported, I'd like you to tell me whether we are still doing proportionality calculations.

[*English*]

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** The figures that you're citing are horrifying. These are people. We are very concerned with the humanitarian impact that this conflict is having. We're very concerned about the impact on civilians.

This is what we're talking about with our partners internationally. This is what we're talking about with the players to try to make sure that the rules of war and international humanitarian law are respected in this conflict and that civilians are protected to the maximum extent. This is absolutely critical, being able to protect civilians. These are conversations that we are having.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Has Canada publicly taken a stance on the deaths of United Nations employees working with Palestinian refugees who are collateral victims? Has Canada responded in any particular way?

● (1205)

[*English*]

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I'm certain that there has been. I have to admit that it's a bit difficult for me in the flow of everything to be able to recall whether this would have been by tweet, but obviously, any deaths of international humanitarian personnel are of great concern to us.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** I'll be brief.

We know that there has been a lot of disinformation during the conflict. Do you believe that the statistics reported to us by the Ministry of Health in Gaza are accurate?

[*English*]

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I have no doubt that there are significant casualties on the Palestinian side. I cannot vouch for any numbers that are out there. There's a wide range, but the fact of this extraordinary number of Palestinian civilian casualties is our concern.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll next go to MP McPherson for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Mr. Chair, I'll say thank you again to the witnesses for being here and sharing your expertise with us.

I want to ask about the situation in the West Bank and in Jerusalem. We are seeing increased settler attacks on Palestinians and IDF killings of Palestinian civilians, including children. Settler attacks have unfortunately become a feature of the occupation, and Canada rarely if ever says anything about them.

Is the increase in settler attacks a factor in the slow pace of assisted departures for Canadians in the West Bank, and if not, could you explain to me the difference in the speed between assisted departures from Israel and from the West Bank?

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** We moved quickly on all fronts in this as the conflict escalated. We watched our numbers increase in Israel in terms of those who required assistance, and we moved quickly to address that. We also moved very quickly to be able to support people in the West Bank and Gaza.

In the case of the West Bank, it took a bit longer because it was a more complex environment for us to be able to support people. That said, Canada was the first Five Eyes country to assist departures out of the West Bank—

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Can you just give me a bit more information about why it's a complicated place? That's what I'm asking about. What are those complications?

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** There are multiple complications, in the sense of.... Ramallah is one part of the West Bank, and certainly we moved quickly. The first bus of Canadians and also some Australians out of Ramallah happened for those were individuals who were in that area because we were able to move really quickly.

There are Canadians across the West Bank, so we've been working to support them. There are challenges because of checkpoints and other issues. We've been working closely with a group called COGAT, the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories. It's an Israeli group, because we have to be sure that we are alerting them of our movements so that they're able to support us. They, of course, liaise with the IDF.

We also work closely with our colleagues at the UN who are responsible for security. We have very good relationships with them. They are on the ground. We are sharing information all the time to be able to ensure that Canadians can move effectively in the West Bank. We have transported people from Bethlehem to the border with Jordan, where we have our mission there collecting people.

One additional complexity in the case of the West Bank is that we also have IRCC officials with us on site in Ramallah so that they are able to do approvals of family members. That can take a bit of extra time, but we've been doing that really quickly. We've been able to move even mixed families across the border with Jordan, and that's something that is great. In the early days, we needed to do our homework to ensure we were able to do that safely without creating issues for people. We wanted to ensure their security and safety across that whole movement, which was and is quite complex.

We now understand it quite well, which is why our allies are asking us for advice on how to do that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll next go to MP Chong for five minutes.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing.

I have a question for Madam Flanagan Whalen.

Thank you for taking the time to testify.

You mentioned several times that the Government of Canada calls on all parties to uphold international humanitarian law—in other words, the laws of armed conflict. In light of this, do you assess that any of the parties in this war—in other words, Hamas, the IDF and others—have violated international humanitarian law?

• (1210)

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I'm not in a position to make that judgment.

We are watching a fast-moving situation on the ground. We are encouraging all parties to do what they need to do under international humanitarian law to respect the laws of conflict and to ensure the protection of civilians.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you.

Is the Government of Canada calling for a ceasefire?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** The Government of Canada has not called for a ceasefire specifically. The Government of Canada has encouraged parties to the conflict to follow their obligations under international humanitarian law and to ensure humanitarian access, particularly into Gaza, given the desperate conditions there.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you.

The government has stated that the State of Israel has the right to defend itself within the laws of armed conflict.

Does the government accept that a state's right to defend itself includes a state's right to prosecute the war at a pace and time of its choosing—in other words, to decide when the military action will begin, when it will end and whether there will be a ceasefire?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We have indicated that the Government of Israel needs to abide by the rules of war and international law. Those are questions that need to be responded to. There are questions around military strategy that the Government of Israel will take on itself but that we're certain will be closely watched from outside.

We will remind Israel, as well, that there needs to be a “day after” in this. There needs to be a plan for what comes next. What we want is to get on the path to a sustainable peace here, and we need to think about what the day after looks like.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** The government accepts that a state party's right to defend itself under the laws of armed conflict includes a state party's right to prosecute a war—to begin a war, to end a war—within the parameters of international humanitarian law and the laws of armed conflict at the pace and time of its choosing.

Does the government accept that this is included in the inherent right under article 51, I believe it is, of the Charter of the United Nations and within the parameters of international humanitarian law?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We have been emphasizing those parameters of international humanitarian law and international law. That is what we've been saying: that they must act within those parameters that are established.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that the explosion at the Gaza hospital was “illegal”. In other words, it was counter to international law. What did the Government of Canada mean by that?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I'm sorry, but I'm not aware of that statement. I do know that there is a statement—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** She said very publicly on Twitter, on X, that the explosion at the Gaza hospital was “illegal”. What did the Government of Canada mean by that?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** The Government of Canada's most recent statement on this, which came out on Saturday from the Canadian Forces and the Department of National Defence, indicated that the assessment we have made, with a high degree of certainty, indicates that this came from the Palestinian side.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Yes, I read that. The statement I believe said that it was the result of a rocket fired from within Gaza, which would imply that it was fired by a terrorist group within Gaza. That, combined with the word “illegal”, would suggest that the Government of Canada has assessed that the rocket firing was deliberate and not proportionate. That's what logically those two statements combined would lead one to conclude. That's why I asked what the Government of Canada meant when it said that the explosion at the Gaza hospital was illegal.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** The events are moving very quickly, and it's important for us to be able to step back and take a pause, look at the evidence—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Agreed, but I'm wondering, in light of that, if the department or the minister will issue a clarification to her assertion that the explosion at the Gaza hospital was illegal.

• (1215)

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** The statement released on Saturday indicates what we believe happened with a high degree of certainty, based on the intelligence we've seen, based on our analysis of the blast zone and based on what we can see.

I think this is the most definitive statement we've made at this point about what we think happened there and I think this needs to be taken as the most definitive explanation of where the government sits on this—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Well, I think there's a great deal of confusion, because of the earlier statement.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Chong, I'm afraid you're over time.

We next go to MP Oliphant for five minutes.

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

I find myself emotional on this issue. I thank you for your professionalism.

I have three things I'd like to accomplish.

The first is thanking the officials. As most people know, I was very involved in repatriation during COVID, and we learned a lot of lessons. You have acted brilliantly. I want, on our behalf, or at least on my behalf, to thank you publicly for the incredible leadership you've provided in helping not only Canadians but also the world. Thank you, Ms. Sunday and team, particularly. I know you co-opted hundreds of people from other parts of the department, and they haven't slept. I took two days off this weekend and didn't look at the news, because I needed a break. You don't get a break.

I also thank the diplomatic teams in Ramallah and Tel Aviv, as well as in Jordan, Egypt and everywhere, else for their professionalism in perhaps the worst crisis we have seen since 9/11, probably. It's a disaster. Thank you.

The second thing I want to focus on are your comments, Ms. Flanagan, about Iran.

It seems to me that this rogue state has a band around it that is potentially engaged in this, whether it is directly with Hamas—which it appears to be, but I don't know—or with Hezbollah in perhaps causing instability in Lebanon, which we are watching very closely, or with action in Yemen, Iraq and Syria.

Is there any intelligence you can provide to this committee on what we're watching? I don't want you to be hypothetical. What do we know? It seems to me that this, again, is elevating our concerns about Iran.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Indeed, the regional context of this is extremely challenging. I think we, with our international partners, are working very hard on questions around de-escalation there.

We don't have any evidence that Iran was directly involved in the terrorist attacks of October 7. That said, we remain gravely concerned about Iran's destabilizing actions across the entire Middle East region, and we're watching very closely.

That fragile situation on the border with Lebanon is especially concerning. We know that Israel and Hezbollah have been exchanging fire over the last couple of weeks and there have been a limited number of casualties on either side. I think there is good awareness on both sides of what escalation might mean. Certainly, we remain in close contact with the Government of Israel to understand their perspectives on this. We have a great number of Canadian citizens in Lebanon who are extremely concerned about the situation there, evidently.

We need to be able to plan adequately for anything that might come of that, apart from our broader concerns about stability and security.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Thank you.

I'm going to cut that, because I have a third thing I want to get in.

I feel a little naive, but a month ago, I was at the UN speaking about "the day after" and looking at incentivizing a two-state solution of peace with justice so that Palestinians and Israelis can live side by side. It was drawn together by the EU, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and a number of countries. I feel naive now, because none of us predicted this mess.

Obviously, Canadians want peace with justice for both Palestinians and Israelis. Do you have any thoughts about the day after? How can we move Canada into a position...?

We have solved crises before. I'm not saying we can do that with this one. Is there a role for Canada in this next phase?

● (1220)

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Thank you.

Certainly we're interested in being part of those conversations about how we can incentivize a two-state solution. Canada has engaged deeply on the Middle East peace process over the years. We've built up an excellent reputation and expertise on some of the final status issues between Israelis and Palestinians, including the refugee file and Jerusalem. We've been outspoken on settlements and a variety of other issues that serve as barriers to peace between the two parties.

We want to be there. We want to be helpful. We are engaging in conversations now to better understand. I would say that it's very premature at this point to think about what the day after looks like in any granularity. This is very raw on all sides and it is ongoing, as well all know, but we want to be part of those conversations, and what that means right now is making sure that we're understanding the preoccupations of each side and the constructive engagement that other players in the region can have, because normalization ultimately needs to be a part of this as well. Israel needs to be secure in its region.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We next go to MP Hoback. You have five minutes.

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

I want to join Mr. Oliphant in thanking the department and the officials for all the work you've been doing over the last few weeks and what you're going to go through going forward. We really appreciate your efforts and your concern for Canadians abroad and

how you are taking care of them and getting them home or into a safe location at least. We know it may be even tougher going forward, so we just want to thank you for that work.

That leads into my next question. We see what's going on with Lebanon, and I want to look at the purely humanitarian aspect. There's a time and a place for judging who's right and who's wrong and what was done right and what was done wrong. Right now we have families being ripped apart. We have kids being killed. What can we do to help that?

I understand the unique situation in Gaza, where it's very restricted, but in Lebanon, are there things we could proactively be doing to make sure that if we did see that situation escalate, we'd actually have supplies on the ground and we'd be able to meet the humanitarian needs in that area at that point in time?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I think our focus right now in terms of preparations is mainly on the side of my colleague, who's looking at Canadians in the region and how to support their needs if there should be an escalation in the region.

That said, we have long-standing relationships with Lebanon. We have a Middle East strategy that has been in effect for the last several years, and a good amount of development assistance is being delivered.

Lebanon has been in a state of economic and political crisis for years. The situation before this conflict was not promising; the situation after any escalation would be worse. I won't get into those hypotheticals, but I am quite certain that on the consular side, our current focus is being closely looked at. We are planning for that and we are continuing to gather our analysis, our information and our intelligence to better understand circumstances on the ground and to better understand how we might be able to engage, should there be an escalation.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Wouldn't it make sense to start stockpiling medical assistance and basic food in some of those regions, just anticipating that the worst could possibly happen?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** This is not a conversation that has been ongoing at this point, but I will certainly take your comments back to our team, and we will—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** So the government hasn't considered the scenarios if we see an escalation and considered what we can do to be proactive to offset the civilian damage or casualties?

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** At this time, obviously we're very focused on getting information out to Canadians who are in Lebanon as well as to permanent residents and their family members. There are a good number of them. Our best advice, of course, is always to follow our travel advice, which is telling people to leave—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Ms. Sunday, I'm just going to interrupt you. You mentioned that there is a phone number that Canadians can call to register. Do you know the number off the top of your head? If so, can you just tell it to us? We have some reporters here who can—

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** For Lebanon, I can let you know that we have 16,700 Canadians who are registered on our ROCA, the registration of Canadians abroad, so—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Okay.

When the war on Ukraine happened, the Ukrainian community here was able to send blankets, food aid and medical aid into Ukraine. Has anything been coordinated in Canada to help families send aid into Israel, into Gaza?

I understand that Gaza has its own set of problems today, but two weeks from now, it could be a different scenario. What are we doing to assist people to at least feel that they're contributing to helping out? We see protesters, and they're frustrated because they feel they can do nothing to help their families. Are we putting together a program there? Have you looked at that?

• (1225)

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Certainly we have put out our information about the Canadian humanitarian assistance that is being provided, the \$60 million to date. There will be further appeals, and there are certainly—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** There's nothing for civilians to participate in, though. There's no guidance to say that if you donate money to the Red Cross, let's say, for lack of a better name.... Is there anything whereby the government is going to match the contribution for assistance to civilians? The families and the kids are the people I'm looking at right now. I want to make sure that they're kept as safe as possible and are reunited somewhere down the road.

Again, if we're proactively looking ahead, there's going to be a day when people in Gaza are going to return to an area that's totally bombed out, that has nothing. What process can we put in to assist them just to make a living, just to survive? Are we proactively looking at anything there?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** There are a couple of questions there.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Yes.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** On the assistance from Canadians, we are aware that individual Canadians have been making contributions through the Red Cross and through others that have appealed. We know that in the Jewish stakeholder community in Canada, a variety of different appeals have moved forward. I saw a report this morning that there's \$100 million in assistance that has been gathered by Canadians who feel an affinity with Israel.

Individual Canadians are making those determinations and beginning to step forward. The question of the matching funds has not been broached at this point, but certainly Canada has been front and centre in terms of government-level contributions to make sure that the assistance gets to those who need it most, especially in Gaza.

The longer-term question you raise about livelihoods is one that in the Palestinian territories we've been deeply engaged in. We do

work with trusted partners on livelihoods, including for women in particular. We have been deeply engaged in that. I envisage that we will continue to be engaged in that. We have a very good baseline of development support that Canada provides to Palestinians each year. It is \$55 million, which is the envelope we typically work with each year.

Apart from this immediate crisis and the immediate catastrophe that we're trying to deal with right now, we do have a longer-term commitment to working with the Palestinian people, including on questions related to livelihood and economic opportunity.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I assume I'm out of time, but if the chair is going to let me keep going, I'm going to keep going.

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

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** We now go to MP Alghabra. You have five minutes.

**Hon. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to the officials.

I also want to add my personal gratitude to everyone here and to all at their offices who are working around the clock diligently to assist Canadians who are in need and to figure out the best that Canada can do to offer peace and stability in the region.

I'm going to start with a question that I'm curious about. In the opening remarks, I heard reference to “the West Bank” and “Gaza” repeatedly. Are we no longer referring to them as “Palestinian territories”?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We've separated out the way we talk about the West Bank and Gaza in this because the situations are so different in the immediate conflict. My colleague was speaking, for instance, about evacuating Canadians from the West Bank, where the set of circumstances differs appreciably from Gaza's, but we do not, as a political entity, differentiate between the West Bank and Gaza as Palestinian territories.

**Hon. Omar Alghabra:** That's a question I've been asked. There is no aversion to referring to them as “Palestinian territories”.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** No.

**Hon. Omar Alghabra:** Thank you.

You've sensed from a lot of questions from committee members here today that clearly Canadians were rightly shocked and shaken by the terrorist attack on October 7 that attacked civilians in Israel. There was consensus by Canadians to stand in solidarity with those who were impacted and with Israel and those who suffered by or from that attack.

Now, within a couple of weeks, moving on, Canadians are also horrified by the magnitude of the civilian damage that has taken place in Gaza. You referred repeatedly to the rules of war and international law. I understand that you or Canadian officials from Canada are unable to determine what violations, if any, have occurred. Who is the arbiter? Who is the referee when international law is being violated?

• (1230)

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** At present, as I say, I'm not able to ascertain whether violations of international law would have taken place. We will have to look at the way forward politically on this and at the end of the day, as an international community, think about where accountability needs to be brought forward.

There are international institutions of justice, and we've been asked many times about applicability of these institutions of justice to Israel and Palestinian matters. While we are strong supporters of the International Court of Justice as the primary institute of the legal institution of the United Nations, we have not felt that it has been an appropriate place to adjudicate issues between Israelis and Palestinians that are more properly matters of the peace process. That has been a focus of our international legal consideration around this conflict to this point.

Obviously, this conflict raises new issues, and those are ones that we have not, at this point, looked at.

**Hon. Omar Alghabra:** I think it's a reasonable question that Canadians are asking, and I think it's fair to expect an answer regarding who Canada will look to as the arbiter or the referee for this question.

As my final question, can you give us an assessment of the current situation in the West Bank from a security perspective or from the perspective of the well-being of Canadians and potential escalation over there?

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** Thank you. I'll take that question.

We're very concerned about the security situation in the West Bank. We are watching it very carefully. This is partially why we are so closely networked with our Five Eyes partners there, and with the UN and with others to understand what's going on and where there are risks. This is also why we are facilitating movements of Canadians to be able to exit, because we are concerned about an increase in checkpoints and about increased scrutiny at those checkpoints. We have heard from Canadians that they themselves are concerned about going through those checkpoints and that they feel more secure with our assistance and with our being there with them.

Tensions are very high. We will continue to monitor the situation. Some days are more straightforward than others. We're learning. Every time we are out, we are adding to how we mitigate our own risks there.

Again, we've surged a number of our standing rapid deployment team officials into Ramallah, specifically to assess the security situation and ensure that we are enabling duty of care to our staff and that we are able to continue to support Canadians, their family members and permanent residents to exit, should they require our assistance.

It's moving all the time. Are we concerned that it could deteriorate? Absolutely. This is why we are taking every opportunity right now to be agile and to assist. We've been very clear in our messaging that if Canadians require our assistance, we want them to contact us now.

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

We next go to Mr. Garon. You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The has just announced that Canada will not support the idea of a ceasefire. Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Flanagan Whalen, in your testimony, you said that there were serious technical problems involved in sending humanitarian aid. This is an acknowledged fact, and you mentioned it to my colleague Mr. Zuberi. What the UN's Mr. Guterrez is asking for is a humanitarian ceasefire.

Canada traditionally supports the UN. Does the fact that Canada is not responding to Mr. Guterrez's request constitute a diplomatic position against sending humanitarian aid?

• (1235)

[*English*]

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Certainly we recognize the extraordinary difficulties in getting access for aid to get into Gaza, and we need to continue to work with the parties to be able to make sure it gets in. This has been challenging. There is a live conflict going on, as you've noted, but we need to try to find a way to make sure that this aid can get in. These are conversations that are ongoing with the parties to try to make sure we can get that assistance in and get—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Forgive me for interrupting, but my speaking time is limited.

I'd like to know what Canada is doing, concretely, to ensure that the current humanitarian corridor door is not subjected to bombing. And I emphasize the word "concretely".

[*English*]

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Concretely, we are speaking to our partners in the region. We are speaking to the Israeli government. We are speaking to the Egyptian government. We are speaking to others who deal with the authorities in Gaza, whom we don't directly speak with. We are making clear our expectations that civilians will be protected and that civilians will have access to much-needed humanitarian assistance. We are continually doing this.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Has Canada's refusal to support the humanitarian ceasefire led to further discussions with these governments in the region?



[English]

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We are having conversations with those governments and we are addressing the issues around humanitarian access in those conversations. We are making clear our expectations that humanitarian goods need to get in and that this needs to be part of this process. Those are ongoing discussions with all of the relevant authorities of the region.

We have good relationships with each of those authorities. I think the fact that the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Development were present in Cairo over the weekend at the summit was a good thing. The Minister of International Development was able to reach out beyond the governments to a series of international partners, the international organizations, to better understand their challenges and to ask them how Canada could be helpful.

What we're hearing from some of these partners is that the mere fact of Canada's standing up, meeting with them, being public about the meetings with them and being public about our very large donation is tremendously helpful to them.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will go next to Madam McPherson. You have two and a half minutes.

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

Again, thank you for the testimony.

This morning the Humanitarian Coalition did say that they have requested a matching fund. As a New Democrat, I want to express that we would strongly support that request and that we hope the government will take steps to put that in place.

What I want to ask about now is military sales, military goods that go to Israel every year.

Canada exports about \$22 million in military goods each year. We've long called for a ban on those arms sales to Israel while the occupation continues. Canada is also a signatory to the Arms Trade Treaty. Obviously that requires the states that have signed on to consider human rights in their arms deals.

Do you track whether any of those military goods or technologies sold to Israel are being used in the war in Gaza? Also, how can Canada be in compliance with the Arms Trade Treaty while it continues to export weapons to Israel at this time?

Thank you.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We do have a strong export control system, and respect for human rights is enshrined in that. We are required to look at goods that have military purposes to assess them on a case-by-case basis in that framework and to put them against the Arms Trade Treaty's criteria that are enshrined in our Export and Import Permits Act.

Permits for controlled goods are not issued if we feel that there is a risk that they would be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international human rights law. It has not been a question thus far in this conflict. I can say that with some certitude.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Just to clarify, that means that from your understanding, no Canadian arms are being used in the current conflict.

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I have not seen any requests for shipments of any military goods.

• (1240)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** What about ones that have already been shipped? Do we have any way of knowing whether Canadian arms have been used in this conflict?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** We do keep track of the goods that we ship. We do the assessment at the time they are exported to make sure that it is done under the conditions of our own legislation as well as the Arms Trade Treaty. That is where we are right now.

I don't have information about anything that is currently going into Gaza, but certainly anything that would be applied for to go into Gaza now would be looked at against the criteria to try to figure out whether it might be a risk to violating our obligations—

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Could you provide to the committee at a later date information on whether arms that have already been sent—not arms that are currently being sent, but arms that have already been sent—have been used in the war?

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

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

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of questions about some of your testimony in your opening remarks.

I note that you said in your opening remarks that Hamas has killed more than 1,300 Israelis. We know where that data comes from. It comes from the Israel Defense Forces and the State of Israel.

Later on in your opening remarks you said, in reference to Palestinian civilians in Gaza who have been killed, that there are reports of 4,000 killed. Where do these reports come from?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** There are a variety of different sources for the reports of Palestinian deaths. Those include the local Ministry of Health, as well as non-governmental organizations and international organizations.

The reason—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Does the department treat reports from the State of Israel and the Israel Defense Forces as having the same veracity as reports from the Ministry of Health in Gaza?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** There's been a greater consistency in the reporting from Israel. We trust the reporting from Israel. There are a wide range of figures that have been asserted on the Palestinian side. That makes it a lot harder for us to be able to judge what the precise numbers would be.

However, a life is a life, and we are certainly concerned about the suffering that has occurred on the Palestinian side. We know that there are deaths that are occurring, evidently. It's a little bit harder to get an exact picture of the precise numbers, though, because we do have this range that is put out there.

We recognize as well that there is an information war that is going on and that the numbers that are being put out can often include that element of making a point publicly.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Does the department acknowledge that there's a difference between information provided by a liberal democratic state and information provided by a ministry controlled by an entity listed as a terrorist group under the Criminal Code of Canada by the Government of Canada?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** As I've indicated, we are getting consistent numbers from the State of Israel. We trust those numbers. We've seen, through the media and through other sources in Israel as well, all of the backup that shows this.

On the Palestinian side, we are getting these figures from the Ministry of Health. Our experience has been that the Ministry of Health's numbers are usually quite a bit higher than the numbers we see from other sources on the Palestinian side.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Okay. Thank you.

I'd like to switch topics a bit and talk about evacuations.

We all remember how hundreds of thousands of Canadians were trapped in an emergency situation abroad during the pandemic. The policy of the Government of Canada at the time, if I recall correctly, was that Canadians had to pay their own way back to Canada. The government would offer emergency loans, but it was expected that those loans would be repaid in full.

Recently the government evacuated a number of Canadians from Tel Aviv to Athens. Who was responsible for the payment of that transit?

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** In terms of our policy on evacuations, when we're dealing with a crisis situation, our objective is to get people to a safe country—

• (1245)

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Understood.

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** —so, with regard to that first piece, the Government of Canada has taken responsibility for that.

In this case, that was done through the Canadian Armed Forces. Individuals were evacuated to Athens. They are required to pay their onward travel to Canada and also to coordinate their lodging. Of course, our mission helps support them in getting access to hotels, etc.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Then why is there this seeming inconsistency?

In the early days of a declared global pandemic, many Canadians were trapped abroad, and they were told, in no uncertain terms, that they had to pay for their own flights. In many cases, the flights were very expensive because they were at the last minute. Borders were closing; it was an emergency situation to get back in the weeks following the declaration of a global pandemic on March 11,

2020. However, in other cases, Canadians are not expected to reimburse the Government of Canada. There seems to be a bit of inconsistency in the government's policy here.

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** What I would say to that, Mr. Chair, is that our policy, as applied to conflict crisis scenarios, has been very consistent. In the case of Sudan, we took people to Nairobi, at which point, for onward travel, they were required to support that travel. Of course, we have funding that's available should anyone require a loan to be able to do that. We have something called the distressed Canadian fund.

Also, in Afghanistan—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** That answers my question. Thank you. That's a good clarification.

I have just a quick question. Do you believe that the government should allow—

**The Chair:** You are out of time, Mr. Chong.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We will go to our last question.

Dr. Fry, you have five minutes for the last remaining question.

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses who are here today from foreign affairs, etc. I want to thank you for your ability to rapidly respond to the problem and to be on the ground, as always, making sure that you lever the right questions and help Canadians.

However, I know a lot of Canadians who felt that during the early days of this conflict, they couldn't get any answers from the link and from the phone number that was there to get to people on the ground from Canada. I think you've said that this has been fixed and very few people are trying to call out.

I wanted to ask you about this. We've heard from everyone that the only way to get humanitarian aid through would be from Rafah. How is the Israeli-Egyptian relationship getting along? I know Cairo had a meeting on the weekend. Is there tension in the relationship between Israel and Egypt? I know that Egypt was afraid that there would be bombing along Rafah and they didn't want to sent any aid across that corridor.

What is happening? Is that a stable relationship now? Does everyone feel that Rafah will be open for movement of humanitarian aid?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** I wouldn't want to speak for the government of Egypt or the government of Israel, but I can share some observations of what we're seeing on the ground in Cairo and Tel Aviv.

There is evidently a peace between Egypt and Israel. It's one of the Arab neighbours that Israel has had peace with. This one is a long-standing peace. There is co-operation. Co-operation networks have built up over the years between those two governments.

We welcome this, obviously—

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Thank you. That's a good answer.

I want to find out a little bit about the role that Qatar is playing right now.

Obviously, Qatar is talking about one of its priorities being the release of hostages. How is that moving along? Has there been a release of hostages? Is that moving forward? Is that expansion opening?

Qatar also said that it wanted to see a decrease in the violence and a decrease in the expansion of the conflict. How is that particular movement going?

Those are the questions. It's about hostages and the role of Qatar in moving forward to decrease violence and to decrease escalation of conflict. How is Qatar playing that role in the region? Is Qatar becoming an effective regional diplomat?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Why don't I start with Qatar? Then I'll turn to my colleague on the hostages question.

We are quite appreciative, as the Government of Canada, for Qatar's vital support on a series of different crises, including COVID-19 repatriation and the evacuation of Afghanistan refugees.

The Prime Minister, as well as Minister Joly as Minister of Foreign Affairs, along with the Minister of International Development, have spoken to their Qatari counterparts in the last couple of weeks to exchange views on the conflict and to discuss Qatar's mediation efforts.

We have publicly congratulated Qatar on its successful efforts to secure the release of two American hostages on the weekend. That was very welcome. We also welcome Qatar's ongoing efforts in the region to secure the release of hostages who are being held.

It is fair to say that we share concerns about the humanitarian situation. We want to keep up that dialogue. We agree on the need to protect civilians in Israel and in Gaza.

• (1250)

**Ms. Julie Sunday:** I would quickly add that we are working with all our regional partners on both of those fronts, whether it's helping Canadians to exit Gaza or addressing the cases of our two missing Canadians.

We are intensively engaging, both in capitals and on the ground, with all countries that are playing an important role in this, such as Israel, obviously, and the U.S., and we are also discussing this with regional partners such as Qatar.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Thank you. I have one last question, please.

Is there any substantive difference you see, from your perspective as the foreign affairs department, between the political, social, and military wings of Hamas?

**Ms. Ann Flanagan Whalen:** Hamas is a listed terrorist organization in Canada. We don't draw a distinction between wings. They reinforce one another and, as I say, Hamas is a listed organization in Canada.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Fry.

Having had the opportunity to have three full rounds of questions, and it now being five minutes to one o'clock, I want to thank all the officials for kindly appearing before our committee and taking the time to provide us with your answers and expertise.

In addition to that, on behalf of every member of this committee, I want to thank you for all the incredible work you have been doing for the past two weeks under extremely difficult circumstances. Thank you kindly.

Before we adjourn the meeting, I want to remind everyone that we have to approve a budget that was sent to everyone.

Go ahead, Mr. Chong.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Chair, I move that we adopt the budget.

**The Chair:** Is that unanimous?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Great.

Go ahead, Mr. Chong.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Chair, could you tell us what will be on the notice of meeting for Wednesday?

**The Chair:** We are commencing the food and fuel study, and then on Monday we will finally be getting around to hearing from our ambassador to Armenia.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Did you say our ambassador to Armenia? Great.

Will those two meetings be in public?

**The Chair:** Yes, that's correct.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Do you know what will be on the notice of meeting for Wednesday of next week?

**The Chair:** I did want to ask members. I presume you still want to hear from our ambassador to Ukraine. Is that correct? We will do that for one hour.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Will that be in public as well?

**The Chair:** Yes, that's correct.

Go ahead, Mr. Epp.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Do we know who is on the witness list for Wednesday, and who's testifying?

**The Chair:** We have yet to hear back from everyone, I'm being told.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** It would be helpful to have the notice of meeting several days ahead of time so that we can prepare.

**The Chair:** Fair enough.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, I appreciate that.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.





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