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• (1105)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting 81 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Therefore, members will be attending in person in the room as well as remotely by using the Zoom application.

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

Before speaking, please do wait until I recognize you by name.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available.

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

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

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informed by the kind clerk that the committee has done connection tests in advance of our meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motions adopted by the committee on Monday, January 31, 2022 and Tuesday, May 30, 2023, the committee resumes its study of the situation at the Russia-Ukraine border and implications for peace and security.

We are very grateful to have with us today, for the first hour, our new ambassador to Ukraine, Her Excellency Natalka Cmoc.

We're terribly sorry about the headphone challenge you had last time. We're very much looking forward to your appearance today, Madam Ambassador.

Madam Ambassador, did you want five minutes or 10 minutes for your opening remarks?

Her Excellency Natalka Cmoc (Ambassador of Canada to Ukraine, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I can do it in five minutes.

The Chair: Great.

We will commence with your opening remarks, after which we will open it to questions from the members.

If you see me holding this telephone in the air, it means that we're asking that you wrap up your remarks as soon as possible. That applies not only to your opening remarks but also to the questions posed by the members as well.

That said, welcome. The floor is yours, Madam Ambassador.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: Dear committee members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to give you an update on the situation in Ukraine from Kyiv. I arrived in mid-August and saw first-hand the determination of the Ukrainian people to oppose Russia's brutal war of aggression.

I was posted here at a time when the country was still divided. That is not what I see today. On the contrary, the country is more united than ever. Clearly, Ukrainians have entered a post-colonial period where they want a clear separation from Russia. They also want reconciliation and recognition of past Soviet misdeeds, such as the Holodomor and forced Russification. They want to be modern and European, preserve their democratic society and media freedom, and work toward a more equitable society.

[*English*]

Make no mistake: Russia is threatened by this. This is a war against Ukrainian identity.

Russia purposely targets civilians. Just one month ago, Russia killed 59 civilians in one strike on the little village of Hroza, which has a total population of only 330 people.

Russia steals people. An estimated 1.6 million have been forcibly displaced to Russia. Almost 20,000 of these are children.

This is a war with global impact, as Russia weaponizes food and winter. Ukraine is bracing for an even more challenging winter as Russia is yet again targeting critical energy infrastructure, while damage from last year has not been fully rebuilt. Since February 2020, Russia has stolen six million tonnes of Ukrainian wheat, worth \$1 billion U.S., and sold it themselves. It destroyed 280,000 tonnes of grain and 27 ports, and actively blockades Ukrainian ships.

Ukraine's counteroffensive grinds on at a huge cost of life. Notwithstanding recent gains in the east and south, there's a growing realization that it will be a longer war than hoped. Ukrainians have full confidence that with President Zelenskyy's leadership, they can win, but they need military support. In particular, they need air defence and ammunition.

Ultimately, this is a test of resolve. Ukraine's top priority is winning this war, both on the battlefield and in countering disinformation. This is why Ukraine deeply appreciates Canada being among the first countries to launch negotiations for long-term security commitments, including multi-year funding.

• (1110)

[Translation]

It is estimated that at least \$420 billion will be needed to repair the damage caused by the war, and we are being asked to find creative ways to use Russian assets seized and frozen. This is an opportunity for Canada to create joint ventures with Ukrainian and other partners to rebuild the country, which will benefit Ukraine, Canada and other countries in the fields of food production, information technology and energy.

[English]

I'll close with an issue close to all Canadians.

Russia's deliberate policies to erase the identity of Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people of Ukraine is particularly appalling. Russia denies their status as an indigenous autonomous nation and reduces them to a minority. Since 2014, approximately 200 of the 300 political prisoners in Crimea have been Crimean Tatars.

Russia's conscription has focused on minority populations in Russia and occupied territories, including Crimea. At a time when Canada is pursuing truth and reconciliation domestically, it is important that Canada stand up for the protection of indigenous peoples around the world.

The longer this war drags on, the higher the cost to the world. Ukraine is resolved to defeat Russia and not settle. They are seeking full restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They want the return of political prisoners of war and the taken children, and are demanding that the world help achieve accountability for Russia's crimes.

Rest assured that the Canadian embassy team is now fully operational, is standing up to the challenge and will continue to stand alongside Ukrainians.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Ambassador.

We turn to the members.

The first member up is MP Chong.

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Ambassador, for appearing in front of us today. I wish you well in your new post.

You mentioned in your opening comments that Ukraine needs more military aid, in particular air defence and ammunition.

About a month ago in front of the defence committee, General Wayne Eyre testified that the federal government has yet to reach a deal to increase output of artillery rounds, particularly the most used ammunition, which is the 155 millimetre ammunition used by Canada's M777 howitzers.

Can you tell us if there is an imminent plan to increase that ammunition production in Canada in order to assist Ukraine in its war efforts?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: I am actually not aware of the details of the commitment that Canada has made in terms of the production of ammunition for Ukraine.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Minister of National Defence reaffirmed that “Canada will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.”

At what point would Canada consider that the goals that have informed its support for Ukraine have been fulfilled?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: From what I understand, as the Prime Minister indicated clearly in the visit from President Zelenskyy in Canada, it's that Canada will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes. From my understanding, it is that we'll stand with Ukraine until full territorial sovereignty is regained—that is, the 1991 borders. That is my understanding.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for clarifying that.

In other words, the objective of the Government of Canada's support for Ukraine is to see Ukraine returned to its pre-2014 boundaries—its 1991 boundaries, as you've just mentioned.

To that end, it looks like that objective is stalling. Ukraine's counteroffensive, which was launched in June of this year, has made virtually no gains and its effect at this point is inconclusive. What action is the Government of Canada taking to further meeting its objective, seeing that it's not currently moving in the right direction?

• (1115)

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: From the information I'm receiving from our defence attaché and other sources, including the newly appointed defence minister here, our understanding is that we are seeing gains. This includes countering some of the recent forward motions of Russia in towns like Avdiivka; I cannot find the exact title, but it's around Bakhmut and south of Robotyne. Russia was not successful in capturing Avdiivka and Vuhledar.

Ukraine is making gains south and east, although it's slow. Part of the challenge is that as they make gains, Russia is adding more minefields to that land. That's our understanding.

Hon. Michael Chong: Are there any discussions going on in the government to provide more military support for Ukraine, seeing as that's been the big request by President Zelenskyy in his recent overseas trip?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: I can find the information shortly, but again, in the visit when the president came to Canada, we made additional commitments to military support.

One is that we are evolving the critical training for Operation Unifier. We are providing support—adding to other donors as well—to the F-16 program, which I understand begins in January 2024. We are also providing supports to cybersecurity needs. Also, I understand that there were armoured vehicle commitments. I cannot find the exact source, but I believe it's 650 million Canadian dollars' worth of armoured vehicles that will be beginning production in London, Ontario.

Those are some of the things that run off the base. I could get more information if you would like—

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Ambassador.

I have two other quick questions.

You mentioned in your opening statement that some 20,000 Ukrainian children have been taken out of Ukraine into Russia. As my first question, does the government assess the abduction of those 20,000 children as war crimes under international humanitarian law?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: I'm not an expert in this area, but from what I've been told—and I sit on the peace formula working groups related to this—my understanding is that they are making a case on this already. I believe that this has already been found to be a war crime by—

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm short on time. I just want to ask you a second quick question. It's on the civilian casualties.

You mentioned civilian casualties. There have been roughly 27,500 civilian casualties in Ukraine, as reported by reputable sources. Does the government assess that all of those are war crimes?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: To answer your first question, detained children have been, I believe, considered a war crime, and there's an arrest warrant for Mr. Putin.

I think there's a current case being built up in terms of the civilians actively right now, including through the ICC, which Canada supports.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will next go to Dr. Fry. Dr. Fry, you have six minutes.

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

Good morning, Ambassador. Welcome. Thank you for coming.

I'm sorry about the little problem with your mike last time. We would have loved to hear from you.

Many of us are committed. As we well know, the Prime Minister said, “for as long as it takes”, “whatever it takes”. However, Canada is not the most armed nation in the world. We don't have

the largest army. We don't have a lot of capacity to send as many arms as say, the U.S.

However, we've been sending arms, economic aid, training and humanitarian aid. With anything that we can do, Canada has been there.

However, it would seem to people like me, who have lived through it, that there's a fear that Ukraine—because of what's happening in Gaza right now and the other areas of conflict around the world—may eventually end up to be another Vietnam, which would be an absolutely horrifying thought.

We all saw last fall that Ukraine had moved forward and done a great deal of harm to Russia and taken some things, but we can say that right now there are only about 500 square miles of Ukrainian territory that have been recaptured.

I hear what you said that Ukraine is looking for, and I think that's really important. What do you see as a big problem?

One thing we have been counting on is sanctions. I am told that in fact Kazakhstan has allowed itself to become a hub for arms, food, trade and all sorts of things coming from Iran, India, China and other areas, bypassing Europe's sanctions. Is that going to have an impact on Ukraine's ability to move forward? Is that a real problem? Are we concerned about that?

Second, I wanted to ask what is going to happen if we don't hurry, as a Parliament, and okay this trade deal that we're trying to do with Ukraine, because that's part of the economic strength that Ukraine is trying to muster for itself. What are the impacts if that doesn't happen? It's being stalled, as we well know, by the Conservatives.

Can you answer those two questions, please?

● (1120)

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: Yes, we often have that noted to us in various meetings in terms of the concerns about the sanctions and working around them. We also understand that they are making a difference and making it a little bit more challenging or definitely more challenging for Russia. I have also heard of the Kazakhstan situation.

I think that Ukraine is also countering a lot of that by starting to make their own productions and meeting the needs, but I think that continued efforts with sanctions are definitely making a difference and are the right call.

I'm not sure I'm following the second question, so my apologies. If it's in terms of a position in Canada to be able to contribute in trade, then that there are two large conferences that I'll be participating in over the next two weeks. One is in Warsaw, in terms of rebuilding energy, and the second one is in Toronto. It's a broader start to implementing some of the CUFTA commitments and trying to attract Canadian investors and businesses to work with Ukrainians. It will have the participation, from what I understand, of both Ukrainian and Canadian businesses, to see where there might be some possible areas.

Hon. Hedy Fry: There is a trade agreement that's pending with Ukraine. It has to go through Parliament and it's being stalled right now.

This would seem to be a very negative thing to do, given Ukraine's needs, given the winter coming, the lack of food and the lack of fuel. Given all of those kinds of things, it would be really important for Ukraine to get that economic independence of having a trade deal.

That was what I wondered. Do you know what the impact of that would be?

With regard to the issue of the children, I know that the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly have agreed that the abduction of these children constitutes a war crime.

If Putin is the problem and Putin cannot leave his country because he's wanted outside of his borders for war crimes, is that going to create a negative impact for Russia, or does it matter?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: What we have seen is that Mr. Putin has not participated in some of the meetings and has sent a replacement delegate. It is believed that is because of the arrest warrant that is out in his name. We have seen that in South Africa, for example.

I think Ukrainians believe that it is making a difference in terms of his participation.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I have one more question. Are you hopeful, Ambassador, that we are able to push back and to regain everything, including Crimea? What is needed to do that?

• (1125)

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: I would say that the country is incredibly positive and united and very grateful for this global support, and hopes to continue that pressure.

As we saw in the various summit meetings, the last one being in Malta to discuss the peace formula, we're seeing an increase of interest. This last meeting in Malta had 66 countries attending and offering to participate in the discussions on the 10-point peace plan.

Yes, I think there is overall hope that they will be successful. The concern is how long it is going to take and what it is going to take.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Your Excellency, I am very pleased to see you here today. I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all the best in your new mandate. Although I am just as sorry as my colleagues about the situation that occurred during your first appearance, I must admit that I am probably the only one who benefited from this small technical problem, I might say. As you know, at the time, I was in Berlin, where I met someone you know well. I am therefore very pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you today.

You said in your opening remarks that Ukrainians realized

[*English*]

“that it will be a longer war than hoped.”

[*Translation*]

Surprisingly, during President Zelensky's visit to Ottawa, the government announced an additional \$650 million over three years to provide Ukraine with 50 armoured vehicles, including medical evacuation vehicles.

Why is this help spread over three years? Is it because the Government of Canada believes the conflict could last up to three years?

[*English*]

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: It's estimated that it's going to take a little bit longer to win. Again, this is just what I'm hearing from the Ukrainians. They believe that Mr. Putin is holding out to see what the American elections will do. Mr. Putin is having a protracted war and just has to keep steady pressure. It's on the Ukrainian side to be able to make progress in terms of the countermeasures, both in the east and in the Black Sea. We are seeing some advances in the Black Sea as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: We know that Ukraine needs these armoured vehicles, of course, but it needs ammunition. At the end of September, General Eyre acknowledged that Canada's current production rate of 3,000 155-millimetre shells per month was the same as it was before February 2022.

Why not speed up the production to meet the needs of the Ukrainian army?

[*English*]

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: This is beyond my understanding of how that works in Canada, but I do understand from colleagues and the defence attaché—who I heard say that it's not just Canada but throughout the western world—that being able to keep up with production appears to be a bit of a challenge. Countries are needing to figure out together and independently how they can increase some of the production. It seems to be a global issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: In an interview published on October 30 in Time magazine, the Ukrainian president expressed concern about the impact of the conflict in Israel and Palestine on the global geopolitical situation. He feared that the Ukrainian conflict would be somewhat forgotten by the international community, given the current focus on the conflict in the Middle East. What is your perspective on the issue?

On the other hand, do you not believe that this new conflict, like the one that is still going on between Azerbaijan and Armenia, favours more or less the interests of Russia, which aims to divert the attention of the international community from what is happening in Ukraine?

[English]

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: It indeed is something that we're hearing the Ukrainians are absolutely concerned about, but we're also hearing—and I hear that too—that key international partners indicate that the situation in Israel will not affect their steadfast support for Ukraine. That includes U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, who assured President Zelenskyy that the U.S. will continue to provide Ukraine with the necessary support without interruption. As well, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that the U.S. can provide aid to both Ukraine and Israel. As well, the European Commission has stated that the situation in Israel will not lead to decreased support to Ukraine.

These are the same types of statements that we're hearing from Canada. We seem to be well aligned.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Your Excellency, your predecessor explained in the media last April that the embassy was open, but carried out only limited functions. Conversely, you said you hope to have your full team of 22 diplomats by October. What progress is being made?

[English]

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: Mr. Chairperson, we had an almost entire replacement of the team this past summer, so we now have a team of 22 Canadian-based staff and 50 locally engaged staff present, and we are resuming a lot of our work. We're still waiting on some of our equipment that needs to be replaced, but we are operating in I believe 90% of full mode, and I believe that within a month or so we'll be able to be back to where we were pre-war in our services.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Excellency, since the beginning of the conflict, the security situation in Ukrainian territory has been volatile, but it has not prevented foreign elected representatives from travelling to Kyiv to support our ally. Of the G7 members, only Japan and Canada have yet to send a parliamentary delegation to Ukraine. The Prime Minister, ministers and senior officers of the Canadian Armed Forces travel to Kyiv, but MPs are still not allowed to do so. If they go there on their own, as our colleague Ms. McPherson has done, they bear the costs themselves.

Is it because the embassy would be unable to provide support for a Canadian parliamentary delegation?

[English]

The Chair: Can you keep your response to 20 seconds, please?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: We will be in position to be able to host delegations here, and that could be as early as winter.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to MP McPherson.

You have six minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us today, Your Excellency. It's nice to see you. Congratulations on your new position.

Just to follow up on what my colleague Mr. Bergeron has said, it would be very important, I think, for this committee to visit Ukraine, to be able to go to Kyiv. I know that what I saw when I was there in March has fundamentally strengthened my resolve to support Ukraine, which was already an extraordinarily strong resolve.

We've talked a bit about the fact that Ukraine requires military support. We also know that there are some limitations on the military support that Canada can provide. We are not, as Madam Fry said, a well-equipped military, but what we are known for is our demining efforts, and we do know that right now Ukraine is one of the most mined countries in the world. We know that it is a huge deterrent to making progress, particularly in the southern parts of Ukraine.

Can you talk a bit about the support that Canada has provided, and then what more support Canada could provide with regard to demining? We do have this expertise, and this is something that Canada could be increasing our support for.

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: Yes, Canada is leading on both military and humanitarian demining, and we are making a lot of contributions here. I'd be happy to send the details. They're just not at my fingertips.

I did just visit two days ago one of the training sites near Lviv—I can't provide the exact details—with humanitarian demining and saw in action 160 Ukrainians who have been trained for humanitarian demining so far. They've already had, I think, eight classes of 30 people each. That's just one example. The Canadian military has also been providing a lot of support in terms of operational demining, as well as a lot of equipment. I will need to find that information and send that to you to directly, separately, as I can't seem to find it currently.

• (1135)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. That would be useful.

When I was in Kyiv in March I met with a group of teenagers who were going out with very rudimentary equipment to demine fields so that people could go back into communities like Irpin and Bucha. For me, this seems like something that would align perfectly with Canada's interests. To be able to provide those supports, I think, is important.

Another key support I think we want to be able to see is support for the ICC and ICJ investigations. In the international human rights committee, of which I'm also a member, we are looking at the stealing and taking of 20,000 Ukrainian children. It is obviously horrific.

Canada has supported that investigation, but there is obviously a long road ahead in terms of making sure that tools are available to identify and to build that case. Is Canada involved in that at all?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: The ICC has just recently opened up a field office. We are present, and in fact when I went to hear Prosecutor Khan speak, he thanked Canada specifically.

We recently increased the number of Canadian personnel deployed here to 10, and also provided \$2 million to the ICC trust fund to increase the court's capacity to investigate criminal activities, including sexual and gender-based crimes and crimes against children.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I want to note that Ukraine and Russia are not signatories to the Rome Statute, as are other regions that are currently at war, so Canada should be applying the rule of law equally to all regions.

One other concerning thing we've seen recently coming out of Russia is that Putin is pulling back on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

How concerned are you with that? What is Canada's position on that?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: It is a concern. From what I understand, we've seen evidence that they have started performing some tests as well. I would be able to provide the information that I have from here, and I agree that it is concerning.

Ms. Heather McPherson: When you say they've started to do the tests—I know this is asking for an opinion—can you tell me whether you think this is sabre-rattling and is just meant to be a deterrent, meant to be a threat? How valid do you think that threat is at this point?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: I understand that Russia's parliament completed the legislative process of de-ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty by unanimous vote in the upper chamber of parliament. A presidential decree is expected soon to complete the unusual step of de-ratification.

While Russia insists that it is not withdrawing from the treaty, we are seeing reports of Russian nuclear training exercises, and Canada is monitoring the situation.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now move into the second round.

First up is MP Chong. You have five minutes for this round.

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

Since a member on this committee made a partisan comment about Conservative support for Ukraine, I'd like to clarify the record on Conservative support for Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, it was a Conservative government that, on December 2, 1991, was the first nation amongst western nations to recognize Ukraine's independence. It was a Conservative government, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, that negotiated the Canada-Ukraine free trade deal that is currently in place.

It was the same Conservative government that initiated Operation Unifier, which, I would note, the opposition voted against at the time on the question of funding, Operation Unifier being critical in ensuring that Ukraine's military was prepared for the Russian invasion. In fact, many people were surprised by how Ukraine fought back when Russia began its invasion in February of last year, and many people attributed the strength of Ukraine's armed forces to Operation Unifier, which was initiated under a Conservative government.

It was the same Conservative government, I would remind members of this committee, that changed the "G8" to the "G7". It was under the leadership of Prime Minister Harper that Russia was expelled from the G8 for its behaviour and for its belligerence toward Ukraine, which is why we now have the G7 rather than the G8. It was the same prime minister, I would remind members of this committee, who at the G20 told President Putin directly to his face, as captured on camera, that, quote, "You need to get out of Ukraine" at the G20 summit in Australia. Also, as this country's official opposition, we have continued on with that strong support for Ukraine.

In this Parliament, we made numerous calls on the government in 2021 and early 2022 to provide lethal military equipment to Ukraine, a call for action that the government refused to uphold. In fact, on January 27, 2022, less than a month before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when it was clear to all that Russia was going to invade Ukraine and when our closest military allies were providing lethal military aid, Prime Minister Trudeau refused and said, quote, "The solution to this tension should be diplomatic."

Then, several weeks later, I note to members of this committee, he flip-flopped, and in a quiet cabinet decision taken 10 days before the invasion began on February 24, announced on February 14 that the government was willing to provide lethal aid. I would add, Mr. Chair, that it was too little, too late, to pre-empt the invasion.

In all of these initiatives, it was Conservatives who led in the support for Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, I hope that clarifies the record for members of this committee about Conservative support for Ukraine, and I cede the floor to you.

Thank you.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you. You still have a minute and a half remaining.

Mr. Aboultaif, did you want to take it?

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Your Excellency, I have a couple of questions for you.

The positions of the international community as far as the Russian invasion of Ukraine goes haven't been all the same. Do you believe that some of those positions have been influenced by economic reasons? If you can give an example, that would be good.

Thank you.

Ms. Nataalka Cmoc: Yes, we are seeing that the disinformation is making a difference in terms of the Global South countries—for example, Brazil.

Another example is the recent Slovak election, where they have declared that they are no longer going to be providing military assistance but will continue humanitarian assistance. They also had declared that they are supportive of the European Union accession of Ukraine as well.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Could Canada play a different role, a bigger role, in order to change that narrative or that position somehow to allow more support for Ukraine from the larger international community members?

Ms. Nataalka Cmoc: From what I have seen, I think that having more diplomatic relations with the Global South is making a difference. We're seeing that in the working groups for the peace formula. While we have a tight G7 and European group here, we're now expanding that to include others.

Just last week I met with the new Turkish ambassador, and that went very well, and I met with the Brazilian ambassador, so here on the ground I also am trying to expand in terms of the people I'm meeting and engaging with. I'm encouraging their participation in the various working groups, and it's also to be able to get a better understanding of what they are thinking and their concerns or hesitations.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Food security and energy security—

The Chair: I'm afraid that you're out of time, Mr. Aboultaif.

Next we go to MP Alghabra. You have five minutes.

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

Ambassador, congratulations on your new assignment. Let me express my gratitude to you and your colleagues at the embassy in Ukraine for your public service under difficult circumstances. I'm glad to see you are back and able to brief us in front of this committee.

I want to build on the previous question about the reports that we're hearing coming out of Europe and the apparent weakening of collective resolve. Can you give this committee your assessment of European resolve towards supporting Ukraine?

• (1145)

Ms. Nataalka Cmoc: What I understand is that on November 8, there will be a European Commission report that will speak to the seven points in terms of the European integration and some of the reforms. In my conversations with the European ambassador, all sense is that it's going well. They're feeling that there is progress and that it will likely be continued progress when working with Ukraine.

I think that there is large support, but we'll know more after November 8.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: To carry on this narrative, there is a risk, which has been talked about regularly out there, of fatigue with the ongoing war on Ukraine. With the fact that public opinion is paying attention to other international conflicts and other domestic issues, this is a risk that President Zelenskyy has highlighted. This is a risk that the Government of Canada needs to be aware of and that we, as parliamentarians, especially in this committee, need to address.

What is your advice to us as parliamentarians, as members of this committee, to address this risk? Can you help us to re-emphasize the point as to why it is so important for Canada that Ukraine be victorious?

Ms. Nataalka Cmoc: Overall, I think there's agreement that this war is a global war and it is about the principles that we need to be able to maintain. We're starting to see that divide between the rules-based world and the non-rules-based world or others—the BRICS, as they call them.

I think that the rule-based order is really critical. Also, what we spoke of in terms of food security and energy security are issues that are going to affect all of the world. They are not going to disappear if Ukraine is defeated. In fact, the sense here is that they will increase.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Your Excellency, can you also talk about the role of Russia in spreading misinformation, particularly online—although it's not only online—and how that is having an impact on public perception in the west, including here in Canada?

What is your advice to us, again as MPs, in addressing this challenge?

Ms. Nataalka Cmoc: I agree that this is probably the more dangerous part of the war, the disinformation and the malinformation that's out there and that's being created. It is taking a partial truth and making it unclear so that the public no longer knows whether it's true or false. There are a couple of examples there.

There is a lot to be done in this area. It's not my expertise, but I agree that this is something we need to do. GAC has a rapid response mechanism that continues to monitor and report on Russia's attempt to manipulate the information environment and spread it. I think it has been very well received by the Canadian public. We're in close coordination with allies and like-minded partners to counter Russian malign influence campaigns.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Your Excellency, I think I might be running out of time.

I'll list one final question to you. I will emphasize this because it was in my previous questions.

What is your advice to us, as members of this committee, as we are doing what we can to remind Canadians of the importance of this battle and why our resolve is critical at this moment?

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: I would say to continue to support the fight and the war with supplies for the military and with military training.

I think it's a good opportunity now to consider investing in Ukraine as well, particularly in certain areas that might align very well with Canadian sectors, such as energy, critical infrastructure or nuclear power, for example. There's a lot of interest in rail, and I think it would align very well with Canadian strengths as well. Critical minerals is another area that's been mentioned.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to MP Bergeron. You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to reiterate how important it is for Canada to hurry a delegation of parliamentarians to Kyiv. I guess that I am misusing the word “hurry” here because we have not been too much in a hurry until now. Canada claims to be Ukraine’s closest ally. Yet we have yet to set foot there. Despite security concerns, parliamentarians from just about every allied country have already visited.

Excellency, I would like to come back to the functioning of the embassy. I know that there is perhaps less demand today, but are we going to go back to processing visa applications in Kyiv instead of forcing Ukrainians out of their country to apply for visas to come to Canada?

[*English*]

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: Yes, visas seem to continue to be a critical issue here. Currently, the visa regime is still done outside of Ukraine—in London and in Poland at this time—until we can return a lot of the computer infrastructure required for secure information. That is still an issue here in Ukraine, in the embassy in Kyiv.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Your Excellency, I understand that the objective is to eventually resume issuing visas in Kyiv itself. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: That is correct. It's just taking some time to return the servers required to be able do that, which—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Excuse me for interrupting you, Excellency, but you will be able to follow up on the same train of thought because I will continue on the same topic. When can we expect the resumption of visa applications processing in Kyiv?

[*English*]

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: From what I understand, it could be a few days to a couple of weeks. We're not talking months. It's in a short-

er term that we should be able to increase that service here within Kyiv itself.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Your Excellency, you know that during—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. I'm afraid your time is over.

For the final two and a half minutes, we will go to MP McPherson.

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

Thank you again, Your Excellency.

I also have a question about the embassy.

Earlier in this war, there were reports that Russia was going to invade and that the Ukrainian embassy staff were left to their own devices. We know that this is based on a decision that was put in place, I think, by Stephen Harper in 2014 in Afghanistan. However, we still have not seen the embassies change with regard to the fact that there is duty of care for our staff who are not from Canada. We saw that the Canadian staff were actually told to not tell the Ukrainian staff that they were at risk. This is appalling.

I'm wondering if you can update us on whether this has been changed to make sure that our local staff in embassies across the world, particularly in countries that are experiencing war, are being protected.

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: My duty of care applies to all the Canadian-based staff—currently, I have a hard cap of 25—and also to all LES, locally engaged staff, while they're at work. The current situation is still the same.

However, we do share information very openly. I have monthly meetings with them, where we talk about a lot of these issues and questions very regularly. I'm as open and transparent as I can be, in terms of the staff, about what I can and cannot do.

I think that first it's making sure that they have the information about what is happening and what's happening in Ukraine.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I would just like to articulate that from my perspective, not having duty of care for all staff of the Canadian embassy is appalling. I would certainly like to see that changed.

The very last question for you is just to get some insight.

We know that Prigozhin has been killed. What are the impacts on the Wagner Group? How does that change the math or the calculations with regard to the Wagner Group?

• (1155)

Ms. Natalka Cmoc: Mr. Chairman, from what I understand, the Wagner Group is still present under new leadership, and other groups are also there. They're still part of it, but it's still not affecting the war any differently or less than it has so far.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

The Chair: At this point, Madam Ambassador, allow me thank you on behalf of all members of this committee. We're very grateful that you made yourself available. We look forward to hearing from you again, hopefully very soon.

That said, I'm going to pause the meeting for approximately four or five minutes. We have more witnesses lined up for the second hour. I will suspend for approximately four to five minutes.

Thank you.

• (1155) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone.

We will now resume our meeting on the study of the situation at the Russia-Ukraine border and implications for peace and security.

I would like to welcome our witnesses.

First we have, from the United Nations World Food Programme, Matthew Hollingworth, who regrettably had some challenges last time. We're grateful that he could make it back. Mr. Hollingworth is the World Food Programme representative and country director for Ukraine.

From the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance, we have Michael Harvey, executive director.

Last, we're grateful to have two witnesses from the Canadian Canola Growers Association. We have Dave Carey, vice-president, government and industry relations, as well as Ms. Gayle McLaughlin, who is manager, government and industry relations.

You will each be provided five minutes for your opening remarks. I understand that Ms. McLaughlin and Mr. Carey are going to share the five minutes.

That's for opening remarks, and then we have questions from the members. If it's getting close to the time that the members have available to them, I will hold this phone up in the air. That means you should please try to wrap it up as soon as possible.

We will start with Mr. Hollingworth.

You have five minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Matthew Hollingworth (World Food Programme Representative and Country Director for Ukraine, United Nations World Food Programme): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the United Nations World Food Programme in Ukraine, I'm honoured to sit before the committee today.

As you know, the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has persisted now for more than 20 months. Every day we bear witness to the enormous human suffering and indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and critical infrastructure, causing destruction and waves of displacement in the north, northeast and east of this country.

Over the past month, intensifying conflict in all frontline communities in the eastern crescent from Kharkivska to Khersonska has

made it increasingly challenging to provide essential humanitarian assistance where it's most urgently needed. In the south, attacks on the port and grain infrastructure following the termination of the Black Sea initiative last July have created additional hurdles to Ukraine's agricultural exports.

As of this week, the Office for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented 29 such infrastructure attacks. These attacks have targeted grain terminals, warehouses, port infrastructure, industrial equipment and administrative buildings, in direct violation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 2417, which condemns the use of hunger as a weapon of war. Moreover, these attacks have severely impacted the livelihoods of Ukrainian farmers and all people involved in food systems in the country, many of whom are women, thus compounding the hardship faced by rural communities and causing massive food production challenges, thereby endangering the right to lead an adequate life and have an adequate standard of living.

Mr. Chair, when it comes to the impacts of war on food security, I have three very significant concerns regarding food production and food systems in Ukraine.

The first is that remnants of war—land mines and unexploded ordnance—seriously constrain farming activities in frontline communities, thereby leaving many farmers unable to sustain themselves and unable to support their communities. That is a micro food system crisis that we're already facing.

The second is that the area from the northeast to the southeast, the crescent in which the front line exists, was the wheat-growing area of Ukraine. This was a country that was able to export \$5 billion of wheat to the world in 2021, the equivalent of almost 20 million tonnes. Ukraine was incredibly important in terms of food production for the world, but this crescent, as well as countless countries that depend on imports from Ukraine, is suffering the great impact of the war. That's a macro food system crisis.

As I mentioned earlier, the targeted missile strikes on food infrastructure across this country are most likely to continue throughout this winter and have created long-lasting harm to both domestic and global food security.

Mr. Chair, the World Food Programme is unwavering in our commitment to the Ukrainian population, especially as this winter looms. Despite the challenges from the ongoing conflict, we've adapted swiftly to meet evolving needs. To date, from the outset of this war, with Canadian help, we have distributed the equivalent of 2.3 billion meals to more than 10 million people, and 85% of everybody we support lives within the frontline areas.

WFP continues to rely on the generous support of Canada and other members of the donor community that work with us alongside the Government of Ukraine and other humanitarian partners that provide humanitarian relief and support to millions of Ukrainian families across the country.

Mr. Chair, I will stop now as the clock is ticking by, but I'm happy to answer questions about the food system crises inside this war and globally related to it and the impact of the full-scale invasion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hollingworth.

We'll next go to Mr. Harvey from the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance.

Welcome, Mr. Harvey. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Harvey (Executive Director, Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance): Good morning, and thank you to the committee for inviting me today.

The Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance, CAFTA, is a coalition of national organizations that advocate for a freer and more inclusive international trading environment specifically for the agriculture and agri-food sector.

CAFTA's membership includes farmers, ranchers, producers, and producers and exporters from major agri-food sectors such as beef, pork, grains, oilseeds, sugar, pulses and soybeans.

[*English*]

CAFTA represents the 90% of Canadian farmers, producers, processors and agri-food exporters who rely on access to global markets. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has, of course, had very negative effects on global agricultural markets, global food security and nutrition. My knowledge of the dynamics of the war and its regional effects come only from reading the media, so I'm not qualified to comment on that.

However, I would like to underline a few points that the war has brought home from the perspective of Canada's producers.

The first point is that interrupting the free flow of agricultural products leads to worse nutritional outcomes for the world's poor. Trade is not just about farmers and people employed along the food supply chain; trade also contributes to reducing food insecurity across the globe, including by buffering the impact of shocks such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Trade serves as the bridge to get food from where it is grown to where it is needed. In doing so, trade enables food security while creating economic opportunities for producers, farmers and SMEs. Trade is also a key factor in the sustainable and efficient use of scarce global resources.

My second point is that the conflict has significantly undermined the global rules-based order, creating greater uncertainty for Canadian producers. This is difficult for middle powers, like Canada, that have depended on this rules-based order. CAFTA believes that Canada must continue to work to reinforce the multilateral trading system to keep markets open as much as possible, thereby limiting

the knock-on effects of shocks such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

The last point I want to make is that we should not respond to global uncertainty by turning inward and limiting our economic relations to countries with the same views. The best way for Canada to achieve economic resilience is to open markets, not close them. For example, the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance strongly supports the Government of Canada's efforts to expand into growing markets in the Indo-Pacific region, including the opening of the Indo-Pacific Agriculture and Agri-Food office in Manila.

I would be pleased to answer questions from members.

[*English*]

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

We will now go to the Canadian Canola Growers.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Gayle McLaughlin (Manager, Government and Industry Relations, Canadian Canola Growers Association): Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to provide comments on this important study. I will share my time with my colleague Dave Carey.

CCGA represents Canada's 43,000 canola farmers on issues that impact the success of their farms. As the world's largest exporter of canola, Canada exports 90% of what we grow as seed, oil or meal, which was valued at \$14.4 billion in 2022. International trade underpins the canola sector's \$29.9 billion annual economic contribution and over 200,000 jobs nationally. Canola and its products are sold to 50 different countries.

Ukraine is also a major producer and exporter of oilseeds globally, focused on sunflower seed and to a lesser extent canola. Known in the Europe and the Black Sea region as oilseed rape, Ukraine production is relatively small in the larger oilseed complex. On average, it exports three million metric tonnes, largely destined to the European Union.

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine created significant uncertainty in global grain and oilseed markets and widespread concerns with food security at a time when the world was already reeling from the global pandemic, high food and input prices and widespread supply chain disruptions. The conflict highlighted the importance, one, of trade to global food security; two, for supply chains to nimbly pivot between markets as demand shifts, sometimes overnight and in unexpected ways; and three, for strong trade corridors to move product to market.

Trade provides food for one in six people globally, ensuring that food and other essential goods, such as fertilizer and crop inputs, get to where they are needed in a timely, reliable fashion. According to the World Trade Organization report called "One year of war in Ukraine", "Trade is a critical means of adaptation to crises." Trade between the affected countries has remained resilient; alternative suppliers stepped in to cover the gaps, and with the United Nations-brokered Black Sea grain initiative—which Russia has since terminated—the war's impact on food security was dampened. That said, the potential impact means global food security remains fragile and tenuous and should be closely monitored.

I'll go over to you, Dave.

Mr. Dave Carey (Vice-President, Government and Industry Relations, Canadian Canola Growers Association): The war highlights the importance of strengthening our multilateral trading system to ensure it remains relevant in our increasingly unpredictable world and contributes to a further breaking down of barriers to trade. For example, the WTO underpins our global trading system, providing rules of engagement, mechanisms to ensure transparency between member states and a forum to ensure trade corridors remain open.

The canola sector relies on these clear, predictable rules, as well as those provided by Canada's suite of free trade agreements, to manage our risks and uncertainty when selling abroad. In recent years, we've witnessed an alarming move away from multilateralism and are concerned with an increasing trend towards national—sometimes protectionist—approaches. World leaders are meeting this February for the 13th WTO ministerial conference with a goal to further operationalize reform, reinstate the settlement function in 2024 and deliver meaningful outcomes for agriculture and food security and other areas. An ambitious outcome would send a message globally that WTO members are committed to strong, inclusive multilateral trade.

Today the canola sector faces a range of market access issues that limit our ability to seamlessly pivot between markets. Differences on sanitary and phytosanitary measures, food safety requirements and approaches to modern agriculture create significant barriers when looking to shift trade flows. More emphasis on trade-facilitative approaches and recognition of international standards would ensure more efficient movement of agriculture and food products.

The importance of open markets applies equally to the inputs required to grow food. In March 2022, Canada imposed a series of trade restrictions on Russia, withdrawing the most favoured nation status and imposing a 35% tariff on fertilizer imports. Russia is a key exporter of fertilizer, an essential building block to achieving

plant yields and to sustainable production. Multi-country trade restrictions impede the movement of fertilizer globally, including to Ontario and Quebec, and the Canadian tariff increased Canadian farmers' costs by an estimated \$34 million as of November 2022. Canada remains the only G7 country to retain a farmer tariff on Russian fertilizer.

In conclusion, I'd like to stress the importance of strong Canadian trade corridors.

Since the invasion, Canada has witnessed labour strikes that have impacted the movement of grains and oilseeds in both our western and eastern ports and have complicated our ability to supply global markets. In addition to port capacity, Canada needs an effective and responsive rail transportation system to provide grains and oilseeds globally in an efficient and competitive manner. For prairie farmers, grain travels an average of 1,500 kilometres by rail to reach port position. Disruptions can significantly increase farmers' costs, constrain deliveries and hinder Canada's reputation as a reliable supplier.

Thank you for the invitation. We look forward to your questions.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carey.

We will now go to members for questions.

For the first round, every member has five minutes. We start off with MP Epp.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing today.

The war in Ukraine, the illegal invasion, has interrupted what has been obvious—the food trade—and it's also been obvious in the energy trade, particularly in Europe. We were exploring at this committee how Canada can respond, but that link perhaps isn't quite as obvious, and I'm going to build upon Mr. Carey's comment that "an essential building block" of food is fertilizer. Actually, an essential building block of fertilizer is natural gas. Fifty per cent of the world's production is dependent upon access to and conversion of natural gas.

I'm going to start with Mr. Hollingworth.

Would you agree—and we've had previous testimony around this—that essential to your work is access to natural gas for synthetic fertilizer so that we can feed the world collectively?

Mr. Matthew Hollingworth: Certainly, Mr. Chair, the unavailability of fertilizer in the world stands at the worst level since pre-pandemic: We know that the price indexes are now at 98% above the pre-pandemic level for fertilizer, according to the IMF. It's very clear that without access to fertilizer, the poorest and most vulnerable countries in the world that rely upon it to eke out sufficient food to cover parts of their sustainability are the worst affected.

We know from the IMF that the estimated additional costs to the import bills for some 48 countries in the world most affected by food shock are almost \$9 billion today from the pre-February 2022 invasion time. Conflict, economic shocks, climate extremes and elevated fertilizer prices have an impact on global food insecurity, and today we see a situation in which 345 million people in 79 countries face acute food insecurity, so a fertilizer crisis—

Mr. Dave Epp: My time is limited. Thank you.

I'm going to add to that. I'm going to look with more of a Canadian perspective at Canada's policy, given the change in the status with Ukraine.

Canada has announced targets for fertilizer emissions. On my own farm—I have shared this with this committee before—we've used more Belarusian potash and more Russian urea on our farms, yet, as a country, we don't have the infrastructure in place.

Can you comment on the consistency of our policy on fertilizer and the calls from the world to produce more food? Are we being consistent? Have you seen a shift yet in the Canadian position to actually answer the calls, given what we can do as a country?

I'll start with Mr. Carey, please.

Mr. Dave Carey: Thanks for the question.

Absolutely. For canola, for example, nitrogen is the second most important input after moisture. If we do not have nitrogen, we cannot grow a canola crop, and canola is a heart-healthy cooking oil. It figures prominently in biofuels, etc., and meal, particularly for animal feed.

As a country, we have not made significant investments in our infrastructure—going back to the 1970s, really—whether it's electrification or the fact, as you noted, that if you're in eastern Canada, the gasoline you're using in your car is probably from Venezuela or Saudi Arabia and not from Alberta. The same issues are certainly true with natural gas and propane, and then you get into fertilizer.

In western Canada, our farms are mostly supplied by western production, with huge amounts of potash coming from Saskatchewan. However, because of the state of our own infrastructure, it's too expensive to move products from western Canada to eastern Canada. It's actually cheaper to import urea, nitrogen and other products from abroad, whether that be from Morocco, Belarus or Russia.

Certainly, Canada is a very fortunate country production-wise, and we have an economic imperative to get our products abroad.

• (1220)

Mr. Dave Epp: I also want to give Mr. Harvey a chance to comment.

Is this war teaching us anything, Mr. Harvey?

Mr. Michael Harvey: Sure. Mr. Carey gave quite a bit of information there.

I'd just add from a broad perspective that often, when Canada wants to play an important role in the world, the things that hold us back are things that we do in Canada. It is very important for us to play this role of exporting our food and exporting our natural resources to contribute to global peace and security, so we have to work on the things that hold us back inside Canada and prevent us from playing that global role.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

Going back to canola, Ukraine was a significant exporter of sunflower product. What is the interchangeability of canola and sunflower? Is the canola industry seeing an impact specifically on your canola exports because of the Russian invasion?

Mr. Dave Carey: Yes. On our exports, we haven't noticed a huge.... Canada is the global leader. We export about 60% of the world's canola.

Sunflower is certainly part of the broader oilseed complex. Ukrainian production of sunflower is far less than Canadian production. Australia is our biggest competitor.

However, as my colleague Gayle alluded to in her opening comments, the concern is that it's very difficult to pivot and do quick transfers, because even in times of crisis, if we don't have the proper sanitary and phytosanitary measures for exporting a commodity into a country, we still can't move it.

It speaks to the global insecurity we are facing, and our inability to position more quickly means that markets that require our products go without them.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here today.

I wanted to talk about trade with Ukraine. As you probably know, there's a modernized Canada-Ukraine trade agreement currently trying to get its way through the House.

I'm going to start with the Canola Growers Association. Do you export canola oil or canola to Ukraine?

Ms. Gayle McLaughlin: No, not to our knowledge.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Where do your exports go?

Ms. Gayle McLaughlin: We export to about 50 markets around the world. It goes largely to the United States, China and the European Union to be used for biofuel, as well as to Mexico and Japan.

Ms. Pam Damoff: To all the witnesses, I'm wondering if you have any comments on whether you see benefits from this agreement. It eliminates the majority of Ukrainian tariffs on agrifood products.

I'll start with you, but I'd like to hear from all the witnesses about whether you see that this would benefit your trade between our countries.

Mr. Dave Carey: Yes. We're supportive of the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement. Ukraine is a competitor globally; however, we know we have a huge diaspora of Ukrainians in western Canada. A lot of western Canadian farmers are of Ukrainian descent. We're agnostic about the benefits for our sector, but we're very supportive of Ukraine as a nation, and of modernizing our free trade agreement into something that also helps to uphold rules-based trade.

We are supportive, but agnostic as a commodity.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Harvey, would you comment?

Mr. Michael Harvey: Along similar lines, for our members, which include the canola growers, it's not that there's a deep economic interest. It's more a question of solidarity with Ukraine at a time when Canada should be showing it.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Hollingworth, do you have anything on that at all?

Mr. Matthew Hollingworth: I think it's critical for Ukraine to maintain and have sustained market demand across the world, including in Canada, for the products that it grows.

Ukraine is suffering because the Black Sea initiative has been halted by the Russian Federation as of July. It's suffering because its supply chains were always built to export through the Black Sea to the rest of the world.

Right now, the EU's Solidarity Lanes into the European Union have an increased price for everything that departs this country. What can be shipped through the Black Sea is more competitive, and they desperately need the market because without a market—and, frankly, the market has suffered through this war and continues to suffer—there are poorer incentives for Ukrainian farmers to continue to farm. That might not be this year's problem, but it will be a problem in years to come, and it will reduce the availability of crops in the global market. As we heard earlier, if there are shocks or issues, without Ukrainian grain or Ukrainian oilseed getting into the global market, you lose a potential level of resilience that the world always needs and needs today.

• (1225)

Ms. Pam Damoff: I know from speaking to a woman I know who owns a popcorn company called Comeback Snacks that the lack of sunflower oil caused tremendous issues for her, because you make popcorn with sunflower oil. Then she told me that farmers in the U.S. had switched from corn to sunflower to try to meet the market demand for sunflower oil. As a result, she was having trouble getting both products and was going to have to increase the price of her product.

I'm wondering if any of you can talk about the impact that this has had on inflation here in Canada with what's going on.

Mr. Carey, would you comment?

Mr. Dave Carey: Yes, it could be.... I think that 2023 was likely the most expensive crop year ever planted for Canadian farmers. The cost of inputs—whether fertilizer, seed or crop protection products—has never been higher, so we're certainly seeing farmers pinched in a way that they haven't been. A recent report suggested that the largest fallout on farm was the gap between on-farm income and on-farm costs was the biggest decline. We've seen about 21%, which is the biggest since 1974.

Farmers are resilient. The resilience of Ukrainian farmers is actually incredible—they're still getting a crop off the ground—because we've heard of land mines in fields. Again, with the deterioration and Russia pulling out of the agreement, it's incredible that they've still managed to get a crop in and a crop off the ground.

We're all feeling the global pinch on commodity prices. Also, the ability for farmers to change what they're growing is difficult. Farmers in Canada, for example, typically have to have decided this month what they're growing next year, so if something catastrophic happens next year, they've already made all their input purchases.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

I think that's my time.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you.

Next we go to MP Bergeron.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today and helping us to reflect on the ongoing situation in Ukraine.

My first question would be for the witnesses who are here in person.

We have imposed a sanctions regime that is ultimately intended to make things more difficult for the Russians. However, some measures were put in place and proved counterproductive. I am thinking in particular of the 35% fertilizer tax, which has made Canadian products less competitive than Russian products on international markets. The Canadian government has recognized that fact. Canada is the only G7 country with a 35% fertilizer tax.

In its latest budget, the Canadian government promised to allocate \$34.1 million over three years, starting in 2023-24, to help farmers who rely most on Russian fertilizer imports. First, I would like to know your opinion on this tax, and then I would like to know whether your people have started receiving that money from the federal government.

[English]

Mr. Dave Carey: It's our understanding that there's a mechanism in place to return the money, but it's also our understanding that none of that money has yet been returned. It's just a commitment to make that return.

We certainly wouldn't want to speak to how the government does diplomacy with Russia, but taxing our own farmers for Russian fertilizer, much of which was already purchased before the conflict began, seems counterintuitive. It makes Ontario and Quebec agriculture production, in particular, much more expensive. Farm groups from those regions asked for that money to be returned directly. The federal government indicated that there's no mechanism to return it directly, so it will return it via programming that farmers can then apply for. It has taken about \$34 million or \$35 million out of the hands of Ontario and Quebec farmers, and it's done nothing. They still purchased that fertilizer, just at a loss of income.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Harvey, would you like to add something?

Mr. Michael Harvey: No. I have nothing to add.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Hollingworth, we know that countries like Hungary, Slovakia and even Poland are now blocking access to Russian grain to protect their farmers. It is a bit of a perfect storm, so to speak: it is no longer possible to get the grain out through the Black Sea to supply developing countries, and it is becoming much more difficult to get the grain out by land.

What measures are being considered to enable the shipping of grain to developing countries, knowing that 57% of the food exported by Ukraine is for them? What is being planned to try to remedy this situation?

• (1230)

[English]

Mr. Matthew Hollingworth: As I said earlier, markets for Ukrainian food production are critical. It's critical that we find ways to get food from Ukraine, which is produced by incredibly resilient farmers for the developing world and countries that depend upon it and need it.

The bans put in place to protect farmers in five countries next door to Ukraine are to protect against cheap produce from a war-torn nation. Those countries have taken those decisions. However, our focus is getting Ukrainian food not to those countries but to the countries in the Global South that need it the most. When the Black Sea initiative was still functioning, and through a period of not quite a year, we managed to push 725,000 tonnes of Ukrainian food to countries in the Global South that desperately needed it. Very importantly, food got to the global marketplace. It got to countries well beyond those in the neighbourhood.

Solidarity Lanes have continued to allow grain and other non-cereals, including oilseed, to be exported from this country, to the tune of almost 60 million tonnes. It is still possible to get food from this country to the rest of the world. It is still possible to use Black Sea ports through neighbouring countries like Romania. Even though we've seen a stop on domestic purchases by the neighbours, there are still other opportunities available.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll next go to MP McPherson. You have five minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. This is important.

Mr. Hollingworth, I'm going to start with you, if I could.

We know Canada has invested in humanitarian aid for Ukraine. Part of that has been around supports for food production and food storage.

What more can Canada do, at this point, with regard to financial support in the food sector?

Mr. Matthew Hollingworth: Earlier, in your previous discussions with Her Excellency the ambassador, you noted the issue of mine action in this country. Canada has had a specific interest in that area of work in the past, as it does currently. As I noted, a significant region of this country, from northeast to southeast, which is the wheat-growing breadbasket of the nation, and many other areas—the vegetable basket of the nation—are desperately affected by unexploded ordnance and mines, etc. This is a country where it is stated that 174,000 square kilometres of land are affected by mines and UXO, or unexploded ordnance, of which 25,000 square kilometres are potential agricultural land.

There is a need for every actor in the world with a mine action component or speciality to come together to support rural producing households, which are, by the way, the mainstay of vegetable and fruit production in this country, with 85% of vegetables and 83% of fruits and berries grown on small allotments. *Babushkas* sell their wares at the end of their road. It's incredibly important for domestic food security. The massive wheat belt in this country produced in excess of five billion dollars' worth of wheat alone before the invasion in 2022.

These are the regions we need to focus on. We need to focus on non-technical survey. We need to focus on the cancellation of land following the perception of contamination. We need to help farmers get back to farming in those areas, particularly in areas that have been, as it were, liberated. If there is no reason for people to stay because they can't make a living or have a livelihood, why do people fight to have them liberated?

That's a key area for Canada to support.

• (1235)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Do we have a point of order?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bergeron.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'll just stop my time.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, there seem to be problems with interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: Yes. I was just advised of that, just prior to that point of order.

Mr. Hollingworth, I'm afraid we're having the same challenges we previously had, and the interpreters have advised that we can't hear from you anymore. Obviously, if questions are posed by the members, please do take the liberty of writing us and providing responses.

Again, we offer our apologies because of the connectivity challenges, which we had last time as well.

Mr. Matthew Hollingworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We're terribly sorry about that, Mr. Hollingworth.

You will get your few minutes back, Madam McPherson.

I also want to advise everyone that there could very well be bells going off for voting. I've had an opportunity to speak to everyone, and everyone seems fine with wrapping up our session approximately 10 minutes early. I wanted to share that with everyone.

Madam McPherson, you have two minutes remaining.

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

Mr. Hollingworth, I will still put questions to you. I know you are not able to respond. I'm very sorry about that. I'm very interested in your perspective, so I would really appreciate it if you would write to us.

The next question I have for you is that, knowing that Canada can and should be contributing to the rebuilding, to humanitarian assistance for Ukraine, my concern is that if that money comes from our ODA bucket instead of from a separate fund, as we used, for example, in Syria, that will take away from the contributions we need to be making for development around the world. I have some serious concerns about all of the resources going towards Ukraine at a time when we absolutely should be supporting Ukraine but we can't ignore that there are other issues around the world.

That's one question for you that I'd like your perspective on.

The final question I want to get your perspective on is this: You talked about hunger as a weapon of war and how Russia is using hunger as a weapon by targeting the specific food infrastructure that is in place. We know the conflict in the Middle East has resulted in the people of Gaza not having access to food. In fact, the head of the World Food Programme recently said, "Right now, parents in Gaza do not know whether they can feed their children today and whether they will even survive to see tomorrow."

I would love some insight from you on the use of hunger as a weapon of war and whether you think that is occurring currently in Gaza.

Finally, as we see the conflict in the Middle East, we know that, for example, Lebanon was one of the countries that needed the resources, the food from Ukraine. We saw very early on that people in Lebanon were struggling. As this conflict could potentially spread into Lebanon, what are the risks there and how do we mitigate them in any possible way?

I'm deeply worried about the people of Lebanon feeling the double impact of a conflict that is spilling into their region and food insecurity getting very much worse.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we go to the second round, and for the second round we're left with three minutes each.

We start off with Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

I would also like Mr. Hollingworth to send me an answer. I have a question for the group, just for the sake of time.

There's a saying that what policy can do, money cannot. This is something we find in the crises we are facing, especially the Russian-Ukrainian war. If we look at the policies and what has resulted so far, there should probably be some second thought about what we could have done better to get better results out of the situation we're in.

Mr. Hollingworth, if you don't mind, you can email us the answer to this. The same question goes to the panel we have here, maybe to Mr. Carey or Mr. Harvey. If they would like to weigh in on that, it would be great.

Thank you.

Mr. Dave Carey: That's well said. Yes, policy often goes further than dollars do. When we look at our country, the issues we have in Canada seem sometimes silly relative to the issues we're hearing about today with the Middle East.

Canada needs to do a number of things. One is that we need to modernize our infrastructure so that we can move our product from where it's produced to get to export position and to market. The strikes at the port of Vancouver and the St. Lawrence Seaway cannot happen if we have an economic and moral imperative to move an excess of agriculture and agrifood products to countries that have a deficit. Those things need to happen.

We need Canada to be viewed as a country where companies want to invest and commercialize their products of innovation. Agriculture is about innovation, just like telecom, IT, etc. We need to reduce some of our regulatory red tape so that companies see a path to commercialization in Canada and they understand the ROI, the R and D and the regulatory burden.

We need to make sure that our farmers have the tools they need to produce agriculture products. We plant about 150 million acres of field crops every year in Canada. We have an economic and moral imperative to get that to the world.

Look, we need to work across departments. We can't have silos. We can't have one department looking at a reduction in nitrogen and another department talking about a rail review. We're not on the same page as a country, holistically.

We have the ability. The province of Saskatchewan alone produces enough food at every harvest to feed Canada for a year. I think that speaks volumes about the ability. Agriculture is one of those sectors where we have not even come close to tapping the potential we have from an economic and a moral imperative, I think, to move our products from countries of excess to countries of deficiency.

• (1240)

Mr. Michael Harvey: More in my area of expertise, I'd say that Canada needs to invest a lot of effort in buttressing the global rules-based order. That's the case in trade. That's the case in peace and security.

I think we're seeing a time of increasing uncertainty around the rules-based order, with the jungle growing back, as the expression has been used. Canada needs to work hard on that.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: On food security and energy security, do you believe that the right hand knows what the left hand is doing in terms of the policy and overall approach to those crises that we've been dealing with?

Mr. Michael Harvey: That's a broad comment, but quite often we make mistakes in Canada that prevent us from playing as solid a role as we could abroad.

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to MP Alghabra. You have three minutes.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, witnesses.

Mr. Hollingworth, please feel free, if you want to contribute in writing to my question, to submit your response.

We're currently studying the issue of food insecurity due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, but certainly we're talking about public policies, other issues the federal government needs to be aware of and how we can contribute to alleviating those challenges.

To build on the previous question, can you quantify the risk of climate change to food insecurity? What kinds of policies do you think the federal government needs to advocate domestically and internationally in order to tackle that issue?

Mr. Dave Carey: That's a good question, and a very broad one.

I think there's give-and-take in any policy like this. We know that Canada has about 1% of global emissions and that agriculture represents about 10% of Canada's emissions. However, our producers aren't producing widgets: They're growing food, feed and fuel.

Farmers are on the front lines of climate change for sure. I would say that one of the things is to look at agriculture and farming as a climate solutions provider. Canola, for example, is the best field crop at sequestering carbon because of its deep root system and the fact that it's grown on 20 million acres.

There's a lot that we could be doing as a country to look at what we call "sustainable intensification", Mr. Chair: producing more food on the same amount of land while using less inputs.

Climate change is real. Farmers feel it: They're harvesting in very wet conditions. However, there has to be give-and-take, because they are producing food.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I want to clarify my question. This is not an attempt to play on a partisan issue about where you stand and what the current debate is here at home. How risky is climate change to food security here at home and around the world?

Mr. Dave Carey: It's very risky, absolutely.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: That requires urgent action by the world. What can Canada do to lead either domestically or internationally and to take leadership on that role?

Mr. Dave Carey: Domestically what Canada can do is make sure that our regulatory system is allowing, for example, gene-edited varieties of plants onto the market in a timely manner, because they have the ability to deal with the use of far less inputs, whether in dealing with water or dealing with heat blooms. Looking at it holistically is one way, but our approach to plants with novel traits needs to be improved so that farmers get access to varieties that are more resilient and can grow in different temperatures.

I can speak to that, being in our wheelhouse: Make sure that our farmers have access to products that can deal with climate change. That requires our regulatory system to be nimble and agile and all of those sorts of things.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you.

We go next to Mr. Bergeron. You have a minute and a half.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Hollingworth, I do not know if the sound has improved since my previous question. We can try it.

In your answer to my previous question, you seemed to say that you were still able to get the grain out of Ukraine. According to your organization, more than 345 million people would face high levels of food insecurity in 2023, and at least 129,000 people could experience famine in Burkina Faso, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan.

Is that not a sign that it is not enough? What has managed to get out through the Black Sea or neighbouring countries still fails to meet global food needs.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Hollingworth, hopefully you had an opportunity to hear Mr. Bergeron. If you could kindly respond via email, we'd be very grateful indeed.

For the last minute and a half, we go to MP McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Again, thank you all for being here.

I'll be directing my comments to you, Mr. Hollingworth. I know you can't respond, so I'll be giving you some more homework, I'm afraid. Unfortunately, some of the questions that I had prepared were for you.

In your testimony, you talked about the fact that most small-scale farming in Ukraine has disproportionate impacts on women and girls. Of course, that's something that would be of key importance to us as a country with a feminist international assistance policy and a feminist foreign policy. Could you talk about the impact on women and why we should be thinking about that when we think about our commitments to food security?

I also wanted to talk about the indexing of food prices with our development assistance. We know that Canada was one of the first parties to ratify the Food Assistance Convention. We know that Canada has pledged to provide a minimum annual commitment of \$250 million in food assistance, promising to help make the delivery of food more efficient. We heard from Mr. Hagerman, from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, who talked to us about the importance of an increased commitment to that. From my perspective, it would be wonderful if you could talk about whether Canada should be indexing our food prices and whether it should be expected that we would increase that commitment.

Thank you.

Mr. Chair, that's all for me.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam McPherson.

We will adjourn in the next minute or so, it now being 12:49 p.m.

At this point, allow me to thank Mr. Harvey, Mr. Carey and Madam McLaughlin for being here in person.

To Mr. Hollingworth, thank you for joining us virtually. Again, I'm terribly sorry about the challenges you experienced. I understand you're in the same office you were in last week when you connected with us, so perhaps this was foreseeable. Nonetheless, thank you very much for your expertise and your input. As soon as this report is ready, we will certainly make sure we send you a copy. Thank you.

If everyone is okay, we will adjourn the meeting.

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