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• (1710)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 97 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

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

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. Also, please bear in mind that this room is equipped with a powerful audio system. Feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to the interpreters and can obviously cause serious injuries. The most common cause of sound feedback is an earpiece worn too close to a microphone.

With regard to a speaking list, thanks to the clerk, we will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members.

Allow me to start off by welcoming Mr. Fast back to the committee. It's great to have you back, sir.

We also have Mr. Steinley today.

We're very grateful to hear from our witnesses. I had a chance to speak to all members. As I understood, there was unanimous agreement for us to go until 6:15 for the testimony from our distinguished witnesses. The last 15 minutes will be devoted to committee business.

Is that okay with everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, November 8, 2023, the committee will resume its study of security at the borders between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses. We're very grateful to have two witnesses today from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. We have Mr. Robert Sinclair, who's the senior Arctic official and director general of Arctic, Eurasian and European affairs, and Mr. Andreas Weichert, who's the director of the eastern Europe and Eurasia branch.

As I understand, you have one opening statement. For your opening statement, you have five minutes, after which we will follow up with questions from members.

Mr. Sinclair, the floor is yours.

Mr. Robert Sinclair (Senior Arctic Official and Director General, Arctic, Eurasian and European Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you for the opportunity to meet with the committee today. As you noted, I'm joined by Andreas Weichert.

I thought I'd begin with a quick recap of key events from the past several months.

To recall, on September 19, 2023, after a 10-month blockade, Azerbaijan launched a military operation against self-armed militias in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. On September 20, Nagorno-Karabakh's de facto authorities announced their acceptance of a ceasefire proposed by Russian peacekeepers, based on Azerbaijan's maximalist goals.

[Translation]

What followed was a mass exodus into Armenia of over 100,000 ethnic Armenians who feared to remain in Nagorno-Karabakh after the conflict of the preceding 30 years and the deprivation and hardship caused by the blockade. The latest updates we have received from the United Nations Refugee Agency indicate that they have registered upwards of 116,000 refugees, effectively the entire population of ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, among them about 2,000 pregnant women. About 70% of these people are currently staying in Yerevan and its region.

[English]

The Armenian government has responded in remarkable fashion, with essentially all arrivals being housed with family or in government-run shelters, or finding their own new accommodation.

UN agencies launched an appeal for \$97 million U.S., and Canada has since announced a combined \$3.9 million in humanitarian assistance through the ICRC, UNHCR and other organizations. This includes an additional \$1 million of funding allocated to the UNHCR for life-saving assistance, such as protection services, shelter and other non-food items.

[Translation]

On October 25, 2023, Minister Joly officially opened the Canadian embassy in Yerevan. In addition to being an important symbol of Canada's long-term support and commitment to the region, our embassy will signal that Canada is better positioned to engage with the Armenian government and communities and to contribute meaningfully to international efforts to support democracy, peace and stability in the region. Canada is also the first non-EU country to join the European Monitoring Mission in Armenia. Furthermore, Canada's Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security will visit Armenia in March.

[English]

In terms of Armenian-Azerbaijan relations, on October 26 of last year, Prime Minister Pashinyan announced his hopes that a negotiated peace agreement and the establishment of relations with Azerbaijan could be reached within months. On December 7, Armenia and Azerbaijan issued a joint statement that reconfirmed their intention to establish and deepen bilateral dialogue, and announced confidence-building and goodwill measures, such as a prisoner exchange that eventually took place on December 13 of last year.

Talks between the two sides have been proceeding since then, though not without their challenges, such as a speech with damaging rhetoric in early January by President Aliyev and ongoing tension along the border, as exemplified by the February 13 killing of at least four Armenians.

[Translation]

Also, today and tomorrow, face-to-face talks between foreign ministers will take place in Berlin, mediated by Germany's foreign minister, Ms. Baerbock. This follows talks between Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev at the Munich Security Conference, sponsored by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Armenia's foreign minister, Ararat Mirzoyan, will also visit Turkey on March 1 to participate in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum. I think that is also a good sign.

• (1715)

[English]

To conclude, Canada strongly supports these efforts to achieve a comprehensive negotiated peace treaty and continues to promote the principles of non-use of force, territorial integrity of both countries and self-determination. A peace treaty must also guarantee the right of the displaced population to return to Nagorno-Karabakh as well as respect for their property and human rights.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely, including broader regional developments.

With that, Mr. Chair, Andreas and I are happy to answer any questions you and the committee members may have.

Thank you.

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

We will start off with MP Aboultaif.

You have six minutes, Mr. Aboultaif.

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

Welcome, witnesses, to the committee.

Mr. Sinclair, you mentioned in your opening statement that Canada had a monitoring mission with the European Union. There are talks between the two parties in Berlin with foreign ministers, which is a good sign that things are getting, hopefully, to a resolution at some point.

Is Canada involved with the European Union in more of a capacity than monitoring?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Yes. While it's too early to announce the particular individual, we have had individuals interviewed to participate in the mission. We have one person in the pipeline, so to speak, undergoing the process. That will definitely give us added insights and increase our credibility, I would say.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Can we describe the role of Canada as a credible role in this whole thing, yes or no? Okay.

Would you be able to tell us what the official position of Canada is? We know, based on what you are telling us, that Canada is very involved in this, which is good news, but the official position of Canada is not clear to the public. If you're able to brief us on that, it would be great.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Our position is that we strongly support the peace negotiations that are ongoing, and we look to the two countries to come to a negotiated, long-standing peace accord that reflects the principles I laid out in my opening statement—a peaceful resolution, self-determination and territorial integrity.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I know that we're working with the European Union, which is an ally of ours. Do we have to work with other parties on this conflict that we don't agree with? Are you able to name some?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: We continue to support the efforts of those involved in the peace negotiations. We continue to deliver consistent messaging, which I've just stated, of support for the two sides in coming to a long-standing peace agreement.

One of the issues, frankly, is that both sides in the negotiations have their preferred format or sponsors to mediate. There have been some failed attempts, for instance, in Granada. Azerbaijan decided not to participate based on the non-participation of Turkey.

We continue to support efforts such as those by Germany currently that bring the two sides together. If the two sides are together and talking, we support that.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Russia is a big player in this whole conflict, and it's a sanctioned regime by us. How is Canada going to navigate those relationships in order to help in the peace process and the negotiations in the meantime, and enhance further the assurance of a good resolution at the end of the day?

• (1720)

Mr. Robert Sinclair: In that regard I'd note that on February 23, Armenia announced it was suspending its participation in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, CSTO.

Russia's standing in the region is very much diminished. I don't think I'm telling tales out of school when I say that Armenia was extremely disappointed that the Russian peacekeepers failed to do what Armenia expected them to do, during both the 10-month blockade and the actual conflict. It's another example, frankly, of Mr. Putin's miscalculations, and another own goal for him as a result of his unjustified invasion of Ukraine.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: There are now 116,000 people in Yerevan and the region. Based on your personal observation, do you believe these people will go back to where they left in the region, yes or no?

If you wish to answer this question, it would be good.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Frankly, there is a lot of fear to overcome. There are decades of hostility and conflict that need to be overcome.

Certainly our position, as I noted, is that their right to return needs to be reinforced. It needs to be a real right they can exercise without fear and with measures put in place to ensure that property rights and human rights are respected. That will, frankly, be a heavy lift, I think.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you know if this item is on the table now?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I do not have insight into what is on the table between the two parties, but I would imagine it may be being discussed.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to Dr. Fry. As I understand, Dr. Fry was actually in the region.

Dr. Fry, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you very much for the briefing.

I was just in Yerevan in November, and I saw the reality on the ground of the 100,000 refugees in a region with 2.8 million people, which was difficult for them to do. They were looking for funding and help in housing refugees, and for food and medical supplies, especially for lots of the women refugees.

I was also in Vienna a week ago, where, of course, Armenia and Azerbaijan were, being two members of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. They did what we do in question period. They yelled at each other a bit, but they weren't terribly angry. There was no hostility. The heads of state were there, and the people who came from the different political parties talked to each other.

What I understand, following up on what Mr. Aboultaif asked you, is that yes, the EU is playing a role—you are absolutely right. I heard, with no exception from both sides, that they did not want Russia involved at all. They were disappointed in Russia.

Of course, as you know, Armenia would not like Turkey there. What we have is that somebody has stepped up to the bar, and it's

not Canada. It's Georgia. Georgia is seeking to play a role, because it understands what's going on since it's been occupied by Russia and it's been having all of the same problems within the Caucasus region. There is a sense that both sides wouldn't mind Georgia.

What is Georgia going to be able to do given that it's not really a major nation? It doesn't have a lot of money; it doesn't have a lot of anything. Would it just be able to make the talks happen because of the trust between both countries and Georgia? Is that a solution we could look to? Is that something to which we could say, "Let's encourage this", even as Canada? I do know there is a sense from one side that the European Union is not impartial, so we have a lack of trust among all kinds of people.

Could Georgia play a role? Can they do heavy lifting? They have credibility at the OSCE PA. Do you think they could play a role in dealing with some of these issues, including the delineation of borders, because we know that's a big one?

• (1725)

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I'll give the short answer and turn it to Andreas quickly.

Yes, I believe they could play a role, and we would support any honest broker who can bring the two sides together.

I'll turn to Andreas, who has actually been in the region.

Mr. Andreas Weichert (Director, Eastern Europe and Eurasia, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Rob.

My first assignment with this department was in Tbilisi, where I spent six months working on some of these issues.

To your question of whether Georgia could play an honest broker role, I'd say absolutely. They're part of the south Caucasus solution. The three countries of the south Caucasus have to get along. The two combatants—let's call them that for the moment—trust Georgia, and I think from the Canadian perspective, we certainly will work with players that can bring the two sides together. I think that would be key.

Hon. Hedy Fry: My question, though, is, while there's trust and while Georgia is trusted by a lot of the members of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, does Georgia have the heft? That's what I want to ask. Germany has heft and Russia has heft. Does Georgia have heft? You would know more about that than I would.

Mr. Andreas Weichert: I think they have the heft in the region to get the leaders to sit down and talk, so yes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Okay, thank you.

What is it that Canada can do, if we can, to help ease the problems with the refugees? I know that many women are having problems with organizations, with facing violence and with dealing with some of their sexual and reproductive health needs, because some of them were maltreated during some of the skirmishes. Is there something we can do to help with that in the region? Should we be able to step up and do that even if we don't have the heft that Georgia has?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Yes. Our embassy reports on these issues regularly. The visit of Ambassador Jacqueline O'Neill in March will also be an opportunity to further gather information and identify what further steps we can take to support those communities, because obviously it's a priority for Canada.

Hon. Hedy Fry: The imbalance in economic status is great. Armenia doesn't have the money and economic status that Azerbaijan has, so there is an imbalance there and I think Armenia may need help.

I just want to ask a broader question. When we talk about humanitarian and foreign aid, we tend to look to Africa, Asia, India and what we call the "developing countries". I have been to Europe often and met with NGOs that are on the ground, and I think we need to talk about them and countries like Armenia and Hungary as needing humanitarian aid, because there's a great deal of erosion of human rights in those countries.

I would like to get an answer on this, if you have time.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I would agree with you—

The Chair: We're over the six minutes, so if you can, respond in 20 seconds.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I would point to Minister Joly's pragmatic diplomacy speech, if I could call it, from a few months ago, where-in she pointed to the need to reach out to not our usual, comfortable partners. That goes to your point of addressing those questions as well.

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

Next we go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today so they can shed some light on what is going on over there.

Speaking of shedding some light, I have to say this isn't the first time we've had officials from Global Affairs Canada come before us to try to give us a clearer picture. One of the earlier times, in my experience, was during the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020. At the time, the department's representatives said that it was difficult for them to give us any information, because they had no one on site to report back to them. Now, we've had an embassy on site for a number of months, and I was actually part of the delegation that participated in its inauguration.

The ambassador was in town yesterday. Did he leave again before he could appear in committee today?

• (1730)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sinclair: He is still in town, and there were discussions about availability. He was unavailable to meet on one of the possible dates because of a conflict. He was meeting with diaspora groups on one of the possible committee dates. In the end, the decision was taken for us to appear.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Please, don't get me wrong: I'm very happy that you are here, but I would have liked to see the ambassador appear as well, since he is in town. It is really too bad that the committee won't be able to hear his testimony.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sinclair: He is in town mostly on personal leave.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I know he took part in official activities yesterday, but it's too bad he isn't able to join us.

That said, Armenia has been asking for military aid from western countries for some time now. To date, Canada has refused to offer this military aid, on the grounds that Armenia was part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Since Armenia has withdrawn from this organization, and France is so far the only western country willing to supply arms to Armenia, what's stopping Canada from going ahead?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Currently, we have no specific policies or restrictions regarding the export of controlled goods and technology to Armenia. Obtaining an export permit requires making an application, and each request is assessed on an individual basis.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you for your answer, which is different from the one given by the minister. In fact, the minister said pretty bluntly that, since Armenia is part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, we couldn't really go ahead. I am therefore grateful for this new openness to the possibility of supplying arms to Armenia. Perhaps this would be a good thing, since we have once again agreed to sell arms to Turkey. We know that what enabled Azerbaijan to win a military victory in 2020 were the weapons we sold to Turkey, which ended up in Azerbaijan.

A few days ago, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention raised the red flag on the possibility of renewed Azeri attacks against Armenia. Do you have any information suggesting something along the same lines?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: No, we don't have any such information.

I would like to clarify one thing.

[English]

We don't have a special policy for the export of controlled goods and technology under our export controls regime. That's what I was talking about. There's a broader question you referred to, and I'll defer to my minister on that broader question.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: My question is precisely about what you describe as a broader issue. Since the Collective Security Treaty Organization seemed to be an obstacle, from the moment Armenia froze its participation, do you think it stopped being an obstacle?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I will have to get back to you on that confirmation. It's a suspension, not a total withdrawal.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: When it comes to supplying weapons to Armenia, what problems can Canada see that France doesn't?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I will have to ask France that question.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Okay, we'll ask France that question.

Do you have any information indicating that the cultural and heritage assets of Nagorno-Karabakh are currently being plundered by the Azeris?

[English]

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Certainly the protection of cultural property is a concern. UNESCO is involved in that.

It's something we continue to watch closely. I will turn to Andreas to confirm whether he has seen any specific reporting on that from our mission.

• (1735)

Mr. Andreas Weichert: The short answer is that there have been some short reports saying there's no evidence of destruction of cultural property, but the ability to verify is still limited.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have five seconds left, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: That's fine, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Weichert, when you talk to the people from UNESCO, what are you hearing about that?

Mr. Andreas Weichert: I'm sorry, I didn't understand the question.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: When you contact people from UNESCO, what information do you get about that?

Mr. Andreas Weichert: The department has no direct contact with UNESCO.

I'll have to get back to you on that later.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: UNESCO is following the developments on this file. That's what I—

[English]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You don't have any reports from UNESCO.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm afraid we're considerably over.

Next we will go to MP McPherson.

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to both of you for being here today [*Inaudible—Editor*] democracy unfolds.

I am just following up on something that Mr. Bergeron asked with regard to the end of our presumptive denial policy for applications to export or broker group 2 items to Turkey. Obviously, that was a problematic decision for many people, and it was made by the government. Certainly, in my office, I got an awful lot of correspondence about that issue.

Of course, the rumours are that it was very closely related to the inclusion of Sweden in NATO, which we're very happy about. It does seem, however, that it's a bit of horse-trading that may not be in line with our Arms Trade Treaty obligations.

I'm wondering if you could tell me a little about why the Government of Canada chose to end its presumptive denial policy for applications to export or broker group 2 items. Could you perhaps go into some of the factors that were considered in making this decision?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: This decision wasn't taken overnight. Since 2021, Canada and Turkey have been engaged in regular dialogue on export controls with a view to building confidence and greater co-operation. As a result of that three-year long dialogue and of commitments received from Turkey, Canada decided to revert to the long-standing practice of reviewing export permit applications for group 2 exports on a case-by-case basis, including for military items, so every export application is reviewed.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Then there was no correlation between Sweden's accession to NATO and this decision by the Government of Canada.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Trade among NATO allies was definitely part of the discussions.

Ms. Heather McPherson: To be fair, though, I asked about the accession of Sweden to NATO.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Yes, I'm getting there.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm sorry.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: The decision was consistent with our commitment made in the communiqué of the NATO summit in Vilnius to “reduce and eliminate...obstacles to defence trade and investment”. We were also clear, however, that we wanted Turkey to ratify Sweden's accession. Resolving both of these issues, I would say, strengthens the alliance.

Ms. Heather McPherson: That's an interesting answer.

Does the Government of Canada have any concerns that Canadian goods that are subject to export controls and exported to Turkey could be re-exported to Azerbaijan? Can you give your rationale for that, please?

There are bells, sir.

• (1740)

Mr. Robert Sinclair: As part of the conditions for export permits to Turkey, there needs to be an end-use statement that the goods will not be re-exported outside of any NATO allies, other than Ukraine. There is always the option to reimpose the blanket pause, if you will, on exports.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Are you quite comfortable, then, that this will suffice?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Yes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Okay.

I'm going to ask one other quick question, if I can finish my six minutes. Is that all right?

The Chair: Sure, that's all right.

Ms. Heather McPherson: On November 17, the International Court of Justice issued an interim order that called on Azerbaijan to ensure that those who left Nagorno-Karabakh after September 19 and wanted to return are "able to do so in a safe, unimpeded and expeditious manner". It also called on the Azerbaijani government to ensure that those who wish to stay "are free from the use of force or intimidation that may cause them to flee."

To what extent, if at all, is the Azerbaijani government complying with the International Court of Justice interim order? Does the Government of Canada support the ICJ recommendations in this particular case? Of course, we've seen other cases where they have not.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: We're a rule of law nation, and the ICJ interim order has much merit to it.

In terms of what is happening on the ground, I would note that in the military operation, the Azeri military was, as we understand it, careful not to inflict collateral damage. In terms of creating the conditions to return, that's going to be a long-term process.

As I noted, we have decades of fear on both sides to overcome. It's definitely something we'll continue to watch closely.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

The Chair: We now have 27 minutes before a vote. Is it the opinion of members that we should adjourn? Is there unanimous support to adjourn the meeting?

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: We'll continue on.

I have one more round of maybe three minutes per party. Is that good?

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): We'd have a little more time than that, wouldn't we?

The Chair: Well, if we did three minutes for your party and the Liberals, and a minute and a half for the others, that would give us 15 minutes before voting takes place.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Unless someone wants to go back to the House, I think we can continue with five, five, two and two.

The Chair: Okay.

We next go to Mr. Epp or Mr. Fast.

Mr. Dave Epp: It's Mr. Fast.

The Chair: Mr. Fast, you have five minutes.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you to our officials for appearing before us today.

The most recent conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh started September 19. On the same day, Canada issued a statement that basically called on the Azerbaijanis to refrain from any actions or activities that would be a risk to the safety of the civilian population and to work in good faith to restore humanitarian access to the region. However, six days after that relatively benign statement, Canada's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations described the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh as "a complete failure of global diplomacy in the face of ethnic cleansing". The term "ethnic cleansing" was used by our official representative to the United Nations.

Is it Canada's position that ethnic cleansing has taken place or is taking place, or both, in the region?

• (1745)

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Ethnic cleansing is a term that has been used frequently in the context of this conflict. It is not, however, recognized as an independent crime under international law. It may constitute an element of a crime falling under the ICC jurisdiction—and I would note Armenia has just signed on to the ICC—such as crimes against humanity or certain war crimes when the conditions for the commission of such crimes are met.

A legal determination of those things needs to be done by a competent international or national court or tribunal. In the absence of a viable route to determination by an international court or tribunal, an investigation by an independent and impartial investigative body, ideally established by the UN and its associated bodies and agencies, could form the basis of a potential recognition of these crimes.

There is no doubt that some horrific things happened, but for a determination at law, we would look to a legal process to make that determination.

Hon. Ed Fast: Can you tell me why our ambassador to the UN would use such a highly explosive term at a time when probably the last thing you would want to do is exacerbate a really explosive situation within the region?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I cannot speak for our ambassador to the UN, but I can say there were lots of expressions of deep concern over what was happening at the time in an effort to ensure that such activity stopped. I'd put that statement in that category.

Hon. Ed Fast: All right. I draw from your comments that, in fact, it is not Canada's official position that ethnic cleansing either is taking place or has taken place in the region.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Might have taken place....

Hon. Ed Fast: I didn't even hear them say "might have".

You said that it was up to an official "legal determination" to come to that conclusion.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I think what I said was that ethnic cleaning may be a constituent part of other legally recognized crimes and that we would look to a legal process to recognize those crimes per se.

Hon. Ed Fast: Given that our ambassador actually made the statement, I'm assuming he does reflect Canada's policy and position on this. Can we draw from his comments that ethnic cleansing may very well have taken place, at least as part of something larger that would be determined in the future?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I would look more to an independent investigation to make that determination.

Hon. Ed Fast: Should that not have happened before the statement was made?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Again, I will defer to our ambassador to the UN.

Hon. Ed Fast: All right. Maybe we'll have him before our committee someday.

I'll cede my time to Mr. Epp.

The Chair: There is no more time to share, I'm afraid.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You've been muted.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We will now go to MP Oliphant.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you to our officials for being here today.

I'd like to ask a couple of questions about the state of the border skirmishes, which we have read about of late. That would then lead to the state of the negotiated peace that we believe is in place.

Do the skirmishes indicate that this is not in place, or are they rogue elements? With respect to the prospects of peace, going forward, what is the best role that Canada can play?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: In terms of the border skirmishes, the border is obviously a very tense area. I take it as a very good sign that the peace talks are ongoing, despite what we understand was a sniper attack on the 13th, not by Armenian forces but by a militia-type group, and then the shelling that killed four Armenians. I think the two sides are managing that situation and are moving ahead.

In terms of what Canada can do, to the maximum possible, it's to ensure that the conditions for those discussions continue and that we avoid inflaming the rhetoric in any way, shape or form.

• (1750)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Do you feel that the discussions between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia are in good faith and that we may be supportive of that?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I believe they are in good faith. I also believe that they're incredibly difficult after decades of hostility. There are no doubt very tough negotiations going on. We also just had the election in Azerbaijan on February 7, and President Aliyev's very unhelpful comments in early January are exactly the kind of rhetoric we want to avoid.

However, I believe the talks are ongoing. We had President Erdogan just recently, in the last couple of days, also calling on both sides to take advantage of this opportunity. That's significant as well.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: That leads into my next question on the role of Turkey in this. We read that there are ongoing discussions about normalizing the relationship between Armenia and Turkey. Is that helpful? What is your take on that?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I think that's absolutely helpful.

Turkey has very close relations with Azerbaijan, so any indication of a warming of relations with Armenia and Turkey is a good thing. That's something to watch.

Turkey has linked normalization with Armenia to peace discussions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. They've said that they'll hold off on normalization until Armenia and Azerbaijan come to an agreement, which, I would say from Turkey's perspective, is leaving as many cards in Azerbaijan's hands as possible. The fact that it's being discussed is a very good sign.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: With respect to Canada's role, is it helpful or neutral that Canada has established an embassy with a full-time ambassador in Yerevan fairly recently? Is that proving to be worthwhile or helpful? Can you comment on that as well as on Stéphane Dion's report?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I would say that it's absolutely helpful. It's a sign of not just our political moral support but tangible physical support for Armenia and the region.

On Monsieur Dion's report, we have put things in place to implement a number of the recommendations from that report. We still have a ways to go, I would say, but it's the signal of political moral support and investment that Armenia really appreciates.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sinclair.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have two and a half minutes, sir.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Sinclair, I want to make sure that you will actually end up answering our questions. We're still waiting for the answers from your colleagues who testified to inform us on the situation in Gaza, and I hope we'll be receiving your answers more quickly.

When she appeared before the committee, the minister said that the Government of Canada did not believe there should be restrictions on military exports between NATO allies. Personally, I found this statement rather odd, considering what happened in 2020. The minister added that she had had very firm and direct conversations with her Turkish counterpart about Armenia, in particular.

Can you tell us what guarantees the minister has obtained from Turkey that the technology and equipment we would be sending to Turkey could not be used once again in a possible conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

• (1755)

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Thank you for the question.

I will refer to the agreement we have with Turkey.

[English]

The key elements of that say Turkey must inform Canada of any intent to re-export any Canadian military-use component, whether stand-alone or fixed to or integrated into another platform or system, to any non-NATO country, Ukraine excepted. That's before the export permit is granted.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Can we trust Turkey's word this time?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: Yes.

[English]

Frankly, we wouldn't have entered into an agreement if we weren't confident that the agreement would be followed.

We had a previous question on this. Canada and Turkey continue regular bilateral consultations. We will continue to review this agreement.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. That was perfect timing, Mr. Bergeron.

Madam McPherson, you have two and a half minutes.

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

Again, thank you to the officials for being with us today and sharing this information with us.

Just to end off the session, I'm going to ask a bit about some of our humanitarian aid going to the region. Of course, this committee is the foreign affairs committee, but it's also the international devel-

opment committee. It's something that I think we sometimes miss a bit.

We know that the United Nations has launched an appeal for \$97 million to support the ethnic Armenian refugees who have fled Nagorno-Karabakh. Do you know if that appeal has been completely funded? What will Canada's role in that be?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: The appeal has not been completely funded. Forgive me. I was looking at the figures last night, and I believe there's about \$47 million left, but I'll need to get back to you to confirm that.

That's a guess at this point, to be frank, but it has not been filled.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Can you tell me what Canada's contribution to that is? What contributions have we made?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: So far it's \$3.9 million, as I outlined before, with \$2.5 million of that to ICRC, \$1 million to UN-HCR, \$350,000 to World Vision Canada and \$40,000 to Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Ms. Heather McPherson: You said it was \$3.9 million, so it's a relatively small amount of money so far, but you did use the phrase "so far". Are there plans for the Canadian government to increase the amount of humanitarian assistance and development funding that will be going to the region?

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I'm not aware of any plans at this point.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP McPherson.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank our two witnesses. Every single one of us is very grateful to have heard your expertise and your perspective, and we look forward to seeing you in the future.

Friends, before we leave, I have a couple of quick things to run by you.

First of all—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Do we have committee business?

The Chair: We do. We agreed to committee business for 15 minutes.

If I tell people what the committee business is, I wouldn't be surprised if everyone agrees to it within less than a minute.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Okay, go for it.

The Chair: The first is with respect to our approach to Africa. The analysts have very graciously agreed to take all of the witnesses. All of the witnesses were submitted. Thank you to members.

The analysts have kindly offered to take the themes they had previously provided to us and slot in the witnesses we have provided so we have a better sense of how it's shaping up. They'll send that back to us by March 18 so we can review it. Is that okay with everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much to the analysts.

The second issue has a confidential element to it. You will recall that we were preparing a statement, and then Mr. Bergeron kindly made some edits and sent them in. We have yet to hear from Madam McPherson regarding her edits, but once they come in, which I understand is going to be by tomorrow—

• (1800)

Ms. Heather McPherson: They already have them.

The Chair: They have them.

For the statement we want to send out, can we send it out to everyone by end of day tomorrow? If everyone can approve it so we can get it out as soon as possible, that would be great. Is that okay?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's excellent.

I've just been advised that in all likelihood it will be Friday morning. However, I would be really grateful if everyone could pay attention to their inboxes so we can get this out by end of day Friday. It is time-sensitive, as you are all well aware.

Thank you very much.

• (1805)

The meeting is adjourned.

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