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Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi



Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1645)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 101 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 are attending in person in the room as well as remotely using the Zoom application.

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

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. You may speak in the official language of your choice.

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

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

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 29, 2024, the committee will commence its study of Canada's approach to Africa.

I would now like to welcome all our witnesses.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we're grateful to have Ms. Cheryl Urban, assistant deputy minister; Ms. Caroline Delany, director general, southern and eastern Africa bureau; Ms. Apeksha Kumar, director, Maghreb and Egypt; Mr. Marcel Lebleu, director general, west and central Africa bureau; and Ms. Susan Steffen, director general, pan-Africa bureau.

In addition, we have, from the Department of National Defence, Major-General Gregory Smith, director general, international security policy.

I understand that Ms. Urban will speak on behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development; and Major-General Smith will speak on behalf of the Department of National Defence. Each of you will be provided five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will go to the members for questions.

Ms. Urban, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Cheryl Urban (Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I'm honoured to appear before you today. *Eid Mubarak*.

Thank you for this opportunity to update the committee on Canada's approach to Africa. The committee's study is timely as the department is thinking strategically about how to advance Canada's interest through our overall engagement with Africa.

Canada's engagement is guided by the African Union's strategic vision for the continent as captured in "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want". Canada's partnership with Africa is anchored in our mutual priorities, informed by African solutions to African and global challenges.

As a vast, increasingly integrated continent made up of 54 countries, Africa is forecasted to be the world's second fastest-growing region with 12 of the 20 fastest-growing economies in 2024. By 2050, 25% of the world's population will be living in Africa.

[Translation]

The continent has one of the world's most diverse ecosystems and abundant resources, including 30% of the world's critical minerals, 60% of the best solar resources globally, 25% of global biodiversity and larger carbon capture potential than the Amazon. These resources are key to the green transition and planetary health.

[English]

Africa also boasts the world's youngest population and fastest-growing middle class, providing a source of dynamism and vast market potential in stark contrast to many aging and declining populations elsewhere. With a projected net increase of 740 million people by 2050, the continent will see the fastest increase globally in working-age populations.

Youth play an important role in the continent. To fully contribute to the socio-economic development and security of their country, youth require access to education, jobs and support for entrepreneurship.

In recent years, there has been significant economic growth across the continent; however, growth has not always been inclusive or evenly distributed. Africa houses countries with high-performing economies, but also houses some of the poorest countries in the world, with 60% of the world's extreme poor living in sub-Saharan Africa. Under current conditions, almost all of the world's least developed countries will be in Africa as of 2030.

• (1650)

[Translation]

Deterioration of democracy in some countries, conflicts, inadequate infrastructure and climate change, coupled with unsustainably high national debts, make achieving the sustainable development goals a challenge.

[English]

Africa is set to see 13 national elections before the end of 2024, and Canada is watching closely. Canada is actively supporting democratic governance and electoral processes in Africa through several streams at work. This includes participating in electoral observation missions and one-on-one advocacy with governments in the region on the importance of democracy and strong institutions.

Canada recognizes the key role played by human rights defenders in protecting and promoting human rights. These advocates often belong to groups that face discrimination, including but not limited to women and LGBTI individuals. Canada supports their work through advocacy initiatives and international assistance.

With its 54 countries, Africa is strategically important amidst growing polarization globally, changing multilateral collaboration and evolving global value chains. African leaders are diversifying their international partnerships and fostering stronger relationships with global economic powers like China and India, partners like Turkey and the Gulf States, and, in some cases, engaging in open military relationships with Russia. They are doing this bilaterally and through multilateral fora such as BRICS and the G20.

[Translation]

Canada and our G7 partners are collaborating to ensure that G7 countries maintain and strengthen their partnerships on the continent through strengthened diplomatic engagement, infrastructure initiatives and more targeted international assistance to encourage investment in Africa. The most recent example of this is the priority Italy is placing on Africa as part of their G7 presidency this year.

[English]

Canadian trade and investment with Africa has witnessed impressive growth over the last five years, with two-way trade in merchandise totalling \$16.2 billion in 2023 and investments on the continent reaching \$16 billion in 2022. This is supported by the work of our trade commissioner service network.

A large share of Canadian direct investment in Africa is in the mining sector. Africa is also home to the second-highest value of Canadian mining assets after the Americas.

Canada also has eight foreign investment promotion and protection agreements in Africa, and these provide Canadian investors

with greater protection, increased predictability and better projections for developing their economies.

[Translation]

In terms of international assistance, Canada is and will remain a leader and trusted partner in gender equality and feminist approaches in Africa. With the feminist international assistance policy, we have put gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at the heart of our international assistance efforts as the most effective way to foster a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world.

[English]

In Africa, Canada is navigating a dynamic security landscape. In some areas, including violent extremist insurgencies, a rise in terrorism and military coups, we are responding through a range of policy and programming efforts. This is complemented by our international engagement with the African Union and leadership in UN bodies such as the Peacebuilding Commission and Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

We have had a number of engagements. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, for example, recently engaged with her African counterparts, including calls with Kenya, South Africa and Benin, and she will meet with senior African Union officials this week. We also interact with the African diaspora in Canada, with the private sector and non-state actors.

We are hearing that Africans want to improve their terms of engagement. They seek to move beyond the traditional donor-aid recipient relationship to mutually beneficial partnerships, including in trade, investment—

The Chair: Ms. Urban, could I ask that you wrap it up?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I am done.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Urban. I am very grateful.

We now go to Major-General Smith.

Likewise, you have five minutes.

Major-General Gregory Smith (Director General, International Security Policy, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I'm honoured to appear before you today. Thank you for this opportunity to update the committee on Canada's approach to Africa.

As you know, the Minister of National Defence announced Canada's updated defence policy, "Our North, Strong and Free" on Monday. As outlined in the document, the Canadian Armed Forces is making, and will continue to make, meaningful contributions around the world as part of coalition-based or multilateral initiatives, including in Africa, to help address growing global instability and advance Canada's foreign policy.

[Translation]

On the continent, our enduring commitment to United Nations peace operations and working in partnership with regional organizations like the African Union reflects the fundamental importance of these multilateral efforts to preserve international peace and security. To this end, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces continue to maintain a variety of engagements in the region.

[English]

For instance, Canada currently provides staff officers to the United Nations mission in South Sudan, UNMISS, and the United Nations organization stabilization mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO. There are also 39 Canadian Armed Forces members currently deployed with the non-UN Multinational Force and Observers, MFO, in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

The Royal Canadian Air Force provides tactical airlift support to France in Africa under Operation Frequence and to UN peacekeeping missions under Operation Presence. We work with Ghana as our primary bilateral partner in Africa for the Elsie initiative, a Canada-led project that aims to increase the meaningful participation of uniformed women in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

[Translation]

We further maintain a network of eight Canadian defence attachés plus supporting staff to manage defence relations across the continent, both with regional partners and with our international allies. For example, in support of the Sahel, we continue to maintain bilateral defence relationships with coastal West African countries to help curb the spread of terrorism in the region.

[English]

I would also note that Canada is currently fulfilling the function of NATO contact point embassy for the African Union. Through this role we have had the opportunity to work with the department of political affairs, peace and security of the African Union Commission on its partnership with NATO.

Furthermore, DND and the Canadian Armed Forces deliver episodic capacity development training to several African countries through its military training and co-operation program, MTCP. These training courses include topics such as combat medicine and enable partners to function better together on peacekeeping operations with the United Nations and with other multinational organizations.

[Translation]

These efforts underpin our diplomatic efforts around the world, helping to uphold the international order and supporting our

African partner nations. We remain committed to leveraging existing operations and initiatives to help strengthen their capacities.

Thank you very much.

• (1655)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Major-General Smith.

We now open it up to members and we start off with Mr. Aboultaif.

You have six minutes, sir.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thanks to the witnesses, welcome to the committee.

In a September 2022 paper, the Africa Study Group argued that Canada's engagement with Africa should be informed by two principles: that Canada needs Africa as much as Africa needs Canada, and that Canada should move away from donor-recipient models to one based on relationships between and among equal partners.

The question is, what exactly is Canada's strategy for Africa, and whether we agree that we should move to a different model if the model we have right now is not working as we wish it to be?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: There are a number of reasons that it is in Canada's interest to reinforce our partnerships with countries in Africa and to increasingly have those relationships on a peer-to-peer basis. This is indeed what African stakeholders are seeking, and it's the result of consultations we've undertaken in Canada and in Africa.

I'll break down a little better what is in the Canadian interest and say that, in terms of the Canadian strategy, we have a good history to build on. We have had a presence in Africa for a long time, and a very strong international assistance presence. As I mentioned, with the economic growth in Africa there are increasingly other opportunities for Canada and Canadians, especially in the medium term, when it comes to economic co-operation.

One predominant reason it's in Canadians' interest is that it is a clear way for Canada and the international community to address climate change. I mentioned in my speech that Africa has carbon capture potential. It has 25% of global diversity and 60% of the best solar resources that exist. If Canada partners and engages with Africa—including, for example, in green energy—this is a win-win solution for all of us, for Canada and for Africa.

Another is that partnering with African countries in order to maintain influence will be in Canada's interest. We already know that organizations multilaterally, such as the BRICS and the G20, are growing in influence. There are international organizations that are shifting, and you can even see at the UN Security Council that there are groups that are voting certain ways, and so for Canada to forge strong bilateral relationships with African countries will help us to build like-minded views.

Another is that there is an opportunity for us to foster even more Canadian prosperity. I have mentioned that it is the fastest-growing economy. The African Continental Free Trade Area provides potential for stronger inter-African trade, which will also create opportunities for Canadian businesses. The potential economic market is of \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion. Another, as I mentioned, are mining assets, so Canada has an interest in co-operation economically.

Security and stability are also very important to Canada and something we can focus on. There is the risk of terrorism. There's also a risk to Canadians who are travelling in Africa. There is an important reason for Canada to engage with the international community and with African partners to help them address some of their challenges with insecurity, and we can do so in a number of ways. Examples include partnering through defence and security, and providing them with international assistance, as some of that insecurity arises from the lack of social safety nets for poorer populations, for example, in the north of some western African countries.

Finally, we have people-to-people ties—

• (1700)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Political stability is a very important factor in doing business. We do about \$16 billion of merchandise trade, which, with a population of 1.2 billion, is very minimal. Where are we going, as far as investment in that region? What is the plan of the department to make sure we have a better, bigger and more impactful role?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: We have peace and security programming that we provide through Global Affairs Canada—there are a number of initiatives under way—and we have partnerships with African countries that are best practices. The major-general mentioned that we have the Elsie initiative; women, peace and security; and an ambassador, who was recently travelling in Africa, who was speaking to African leaders and communities about that.

It might really hit it home if I turn to some of my colleagues to provide concrete examples. This is an important element of our activities presently, and it also will be part of future engagement that we undertake within Africa.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: During a visit to Nigeria, I was told by one of our diplomats, “We need the minister here more. We need more presence, visits and activities.” It's a very important region and the focus should be on growing in all directions there. Is the department doing enough? Is the government doing enough?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: There have been a number of high-level visits recently by Minister Hussein to Benin, DRC, Rwanda, Kenya, Zambia, Mozambique and Madagascar. Minister Sajjan has gone to Rwanda, Tanzania and Egypt. Minister Ng had a virtual trade mission in February 2022. Minister Joly was in Kenya earlier, and

there have been a number of high-level visits of parliamentarians and parliamentary secretaries and speakers. There is a high level of engagement and I agree that high-level engagement is an important component of engaging with Africa.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We now go to Dr. Fry for six minutes.

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

Thank you very much for coming and talking to us.

There are so many questions to ask. I only have six minutes to ask them.

I want to start by saying that we've engaged closely in partnership with the African Union. We have engaged closely in all kinds of bilateral things with countries like Ghana that we think we can work with, but has anything really seemed to work? Africa is still the continent that's most poor. It still has a lot of security issues. We talk about women, peace and security. Is it working in Africa? There is so much war. There is so much insecurity and so much conflict. How can you, even with the best of intentions and the greatest amount of money, cut through all of that disrespect for human rights, that anger, that sense of people not trusting each other and the lack of democratic institutions that Mr. Aboultaif talked about?

There are so many things that we're doing. Are we making any impact? We've been working for so long; a decade is a long time. Have we been impacting anything? What do we need to do? Do we need to shift our focus? Africa remains the single most important, can I say, pimple on the face of the earth because it does not value human rights, and it has lots of conflict. Climate change is unbelievable there. People are poor. There's a lack of opportunity.

Can we shift what we're doing? Should we shift what we're doing? That's a question I want to ask. I know it's an open-ended question, but I want it to be open-ended because I want to have an open-ended answer. I want you to blue-sky it for me.

• (1705)

Ms. Cheryl Urban: Thank you very much. I'll start off, and my colleagues can add, if they would like to contribute.

You're right that there are significant challenges on the continent, but it is really a mixture of different types of countries. There are countries that are thriving, doing well and showing strong global leadership, and there are countries that have fallen into situations of extreme insecurity and humanitarian situations, so you can't paint it with one brush. There are good success stories that we can look at and that everyone can learn from in terms of what African countries have achieved.

I mentioned with BRICS, with the G20 and the AU joining that African leaders are stepping up globally, having greater influence and shifting that around the world.

I attended the Africa Climate Summit in September 2023, and African leaders were there. They were having a stronger voice at COP.

You also see, for example, in western Africa, the threat of terrorism. Some countries have experienced coups and have problems, but there are the predominantly coastal countries that remain strong and that are investing in the north of their countries.

I was just in Côte d'Ivoire and in Benin. It's remarkable that some of that leadership is technocratic and investing not only in security but in social services, recognizing the complexity of what they need to achieve.

Hon. Hedy Fry: My question is not what Africa is doing on its own with strong leadership in some of its countries.

Should we revisit how we work in Africa and what we do in Africa? I don't believe that it's working as well as it could. Should we reinvent this wheel and talk about a different way of engaging with Africa, and if so, what should that way be?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: In terms of Canada's investments and what we've undertaken, I believe that we are having an impact through the feminist international assistance policy. Canada has really carved out a niche for itself helping women and girls, focusing on education and on women's and girls' health, and we do see results. If you look at the documents, the departmental results report and the international assistance report, you can see what some of the results are for the investments that we have made.

Canada, even in international organizations, is pushing very hard and is recognized for how it is helping to push forward the agenda of women and girls on the continent and elsewhere.

I think that this committee will be undertaking a study on engagement in Africa, and I think that's very timely. This is the time for everybody to be reflecting, because the global environment is so dynamic, and the state of how things are in development in African countries continues to be dynamic. This is the time to take another look. This is what we were doing as a department and what the Senate committee is doing as well to determine the best way.

Hon. Hedy Fry: If I have time, Chair, I have one last question.

We cannot be everything to Africa because of the disparate nature of all the different countries and their needs.

What do you think of the idea to focus only on some things that we do well? I have my ideas of what those could be, including health and the feminist assistance policy, climate change and human rights.

Should we just focus on some things and get results from some things, as opposed to casting this wide net to cover everything and not getting very much done?

The Chair: Answer in less than 30 seconds, please.

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I had spoken at length about what the Canadian interests are in terms of engaging, but there's also the question of what the Canadian strengths are that we can leverage on the continent.

Canada has a number of strengths. We have a strong education sector. We have good mining, agriculture, green tech and ICT. As

the committees and the department explore how we can refine our engagement in those countries, we can look not only at building on our strengths in our existing focus on gender equality, women and girls, but also increasingly leveraging our Canadian strengths.

● (1710)

The Chair: We next go to Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here and for their very enlightening comments and answers.

The general observation is that western countries have removed Africa from their priorities in recent decades, and since politics abhors a vacuum, powers like Russia and China rushed to move in. We saw the consequences of that when the United Nations was voting on the war in Ukraine, and a number of African countries voted against resolutions or abstained from voting in favour of resolutions denouncing the Russian aggression into Ukraine. Western countries need to reinvest in Africa. I'll come back to that a little later.

I'd say that Africa is the continent of the future, economically speaking. So Canada absolutely needs to invest in Africa. In 2022, our esteemed colleague the parliamentary secretary was tasked with establishing and defining a strategy for Africa. In 2023-24, the departmental plan talked instead about a new strategic framework without really providing any details. The 2024-25 departmental plan no longer even refers to a framework; it talks about intensifying Canada's engagement with countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with special emphasis on economic co-operation.

You made no mention in your presentation of the strategy or the framework. Where are we at? Do we have a strategy? Do we have a framework in place, or has it simply reverted back to a desire to enhance our relations in terms of economic co-operation, particularly with sub-Saharan Africa?

[*English*]

Ms. Cheryl Urban: It was in Minister Ng's mandate letter that we should have a strategy for economic co-operation for Africa. Following that, a lot of work was undertaken by Parliamentary Secretary Oliphant in order to get out there. We did a whole series of extensive consultations in Canada and Africa with a view to getting input into how we can think about engagement with African countries.

That took place over a long period of time. We have brought pulled together the information we have. We have reviewed it and are at the moment looking at that and articulating how that can inform a Canadian strategy.

It coincides with studies that are also being done by this committee and the Senate committee as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'm sorry to belabour some points, but this is just to enlighten us. Have we reverted back to the words "African strategy", a framework or simply a willingness to intensify our relations with sub-Saharan Africa?

Please enlighten us, because I must say that it's hard to make heads or tails of this. I myself have been completely lost over the past few years. I no longer know what the government's intentions are with respect to Africa.

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Urban: At the moment we're pulling together thoughts on engagement. It doesn't have a name at the moment. We are looking at the information and pulling together an approach, recognizing that what's important to African countries is that we are looking at our engagement in partnership with them.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Okay. We started with a strategy, which then became a framework, and ended up being an approach.

Is that right?

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I'm just saying that we don't have a name for it at the moment.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Okay, that's fine.

I'm wondering why the departmental plan specifically talks about sub-Saharan Africa.

What about North Africa?

[English]

Ms. Apeksha Kumar (Director, Maghreb and Egypt, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): In North Africa, much of what my colleagues have said still applies to North Africa. I can highlight the more particular nature of that region.

North Africa is a nexus between very critical regions for us. It's not only on the top of the continent, obviously, but it's also a gateway to the Middle East and Europe. In that, it holds a strategic importance that's somewhat different from the rest of the continent.

We share the priorities with the rest of the continent in helping to preserve democratic gains and other progress that has been made over the last while of our engagement. We will build on having been a valuable and credible partner in that region, and that really means something in these countries. We have strong people-to-people ties. We have strong trade connections.

Three of the largest economic partners for Canada are in North Africa, for example, so we're going to make use of the advantages we have on the global stage. For North Africa, we have language. As my colleague has mentioned, we have an expertise and a focus on gender. On development, we are one of the only donors that focuses on the most vulnerable.

Perhaps I'll close by noting that we are very well looked upon in North Africa, and this will be, I'm sure, considered as we move for-

ward in determining what our engagement looks like. However, we have a different history in Africa from some of the major players. We don't have a colonial history, and that really plays well for us.

● (1715)

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

We now go to Madam McPherson. You have six minutes.

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

Thank you all very much for coming here today. It's an important study. We have decided that we would be studying this for several meetings, so I am going to take my time right now to read a motion that I'd like to make sure is on the record, mostly because we have a number of meetings to discuss this.

Unfortunately, with my limited time, I do need to mention something that's quite pressing. To start, I want to say that despite my motion to study the situation in Israel and Palestine at this committee, which passed in a vote last May, nearly a year ago, that study has not been scheduled by this committee, to the great frustration of the New Democratic Party. The situation in Israel and Palestine should also be a priority of this committee, as it is for foreign affairs committees in other parts of the world. However, I am feeling that our efforts here are consistently being blocked.

I will use the remainder of my time to give notice of a new motion that addresses the government's failure to provide the documents that this committee requested back in February. I have been trying for weeks to get this committee to agree to make the few documents we received public, and to return to Global Affairs Canada with instructions to provide the rest of the documents.

In addition, I am frustrated that on March 18, the Minister of Foreign Affairs promised us that she would issue a notice to exporters regarding arms exports to Israel, but this has not yet been done. I don't understand the lack of urgency, when 13,000 children have been killed and more people are starving to death every day.

Here is the motion that I am giving notice of today:

That, given the failure of Global Affairs Canada to produce the documents requested by this committee on February 12, 2024, and the letter to the committee from the Deputy Minister dated March 13, 2024, requesting further instruction, the chair instruct the clerk to publish the letter and annex received from Global Affairs Canada on Canada's arms exports to Israel on the public committee web page; that the committee instruct Global Affairs Canada to:

- a) provide details on all current open export and brokering permits for military goods and technology to Israel, without redaction for commercial confidentiality, as the Committee requested in its motion of February 12 2024;
- b) provide details on all export or brokering permits for military goods and technology to Israel, whether open or expired, dating back to 2020, not 2006 as the Committee requested in its motion of February 12 2024;
- c) reissue the annex without redactions for commercial confidentiality, as the committee motion specified;

That these details be provided within 30 days of adoption of this motion;

and, That, once received, these documents be made public on the committee website.

With that, I will ensure that the clerk is given copies of this motion in both English and French.

I would now like to turn to our witnesses.

I thank you for your patience as I brought that forward. It is very important to me that we are able to get the documents that so many organizations across Canada have been wanting.

What I will start with is some of the information that you provided, Major-General, on peacekeeping. In 2016, we know that this government had committed to 600 military peacekeepers and 150 military police who would be allocated as peacekeepers around the world. How many peacekeepers have been allocated to the continent of Africa?

• (1720)

MGen Gregory Smith: Thank you, Chair. I'm doing a quick count here.

I think the Democratic Republic of Congo has approximately 10. South Sudan also has about 10 and—they're not UN peacekeepers—the number through Multinational Force and Observers is 39. Therefore, that would be a total of approximately 59.

Ms. Heather McPherson: In 2016, there were going to be 750, but in Africa at the moment we have 59. It's really a fraction, considering the conflicts that we see.

Why is it difficult? I would like to get a strong understanding of why it's difficult to get peacekeepers on the ground. Canada has that reputation. We have that history of providing peacekeepers meaningfully. We have a government that has made a commitment to do so, and yet that hasn't resulted in peacekeepers on the ground helping to maintain peace in the continent of Africa.

MGen Gregory Smith: We, the Canadian Armed Forces, go in accordance with Global Affairs' foreign policy on what exactly we're going to achieve. I did peacekeeping back in 1993-94 in Croatia. We manned a zone of separation between two warring sides. That was very traditional peacekeeping.

The kind of conflict that we see in Africa, for example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is almost war fighting. It's a very difficult situation. The types of security situations that we're seeing where there's intercountry conflict are not what we would call “traditional” peacekeeping. That makes them that much more of a challenge. However, I'd step back and say that there may be a broader Global Affairs perspective on that.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Perhaps Mr. Lebleu could respond.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lebleu (Director General, West and Central African Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): The numbers go up and down.

However, I'd like to point out that Canada has deployed a 250-person contingent to Mali as part of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, or MINUSMA, which is a peacekeeping mission. Unfortunately, Mali has asked the United Nations to end this mission. The same thing is happening with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or MONUSCO. Discussions are

ongoing between the United Nations and the countries receiving these missions. So it's a very different context.

I'd also like to point out that, with respect to MONUSCO, Canada is offering specific financial contributions of approximately \$30 million, and not military personnel. Until very recently, we had more or less the same thing in Mali.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to MP Epp.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm going to begin with Global Affairs. The direction that I'm going in follows in line with the questions from Ms. Fry and Mr. Bergeron.

In response to my colleague, Ms. Urban, you stated that Canada has a good history of engagement with Africa, yet the Centre for International Policy Studies has described Canada as having “no profile in Africa” despite this government's efforts over the last nine years. It says that “the government's policy in Africa...[is] a repackaging and re-energising”. Another academic has characterized it as a series of consistent inconsistencies. Would you agree with those statements?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I would point to the ways in which we do have a presence with African countries and on the African continent. For example, we work hand in hand with la Francophonie and the Commonwealth, and we achieve a number of things together. If you look at the African Development Bank, you will see that Canada is the fourth-largest non-regional shareholder, having quite a big voice. We have really stepped up our engagement with the AU, and we now have a permanent observer office, so that is increasing.

I don't know if any of my colleagues want to add to that.

Ms. Susan Steffen (Director General, Pan-Africa Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): One of the things I think is key to our engagement now and for the very near future is our newish and bolstered relationship with the African Union and the African Union Commission. We had a high-level dialogue in October 2022 that brought a large delegation from the African Union Commission—including the chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki—to Canada to meet with our Prime Minister. That has really launched us into a new relationship and a bolstered relationship with that apex organization on the continent, an organization that is taking its place on the international stage in a new way, joining the G20. Canada is supporting the African Union's accession as an observer to the World Trade Organization—

• (1725)

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

I'm sorry to cut you off, but I do have some questions to go through here.

I agree with your opening assessment of the potential of Africa. With a youthful population, labour sources and natural resources, there is a whole host of opportunities, yet Canada only has 27 missions in Africa. Again, an approach of future opportunity...yet our presence there does not seem to reflect that hopeful approach. How would you respond?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: We have relationships with a number of countries through each mission. Our embassy or high commission have staff who are responsible for relationships with a number of countries. Our ambassadors and high commissioners are accredited to a number of countries, and they are very active. If they are representing Canada with a given number of countries, they will travel there and will establish those relationships, and they are able to undertake business and do diplomacy in that manner.

Mr. Dave Epp: However, with 25% of the world's population or future population.... We have 55 missions in the Americas, which have a much smaller relative population. Given the potential... I know that here at this committee we just finished a study on the future of diplomacy. Should there be a reprioritization of resources?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I think part of the reason for the footprint we have is the nature of the work we're doing. One of the discrepancies, perhaps, between the number of missions in the Americas versus in Africa is the amount of commercial sector engagement that happens with the United States, which requires a high degree of commercial support by our diplomats.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

In my last remaining minute, I want to zero in a bit on Mali.

You mentioned in your comments that we have mining interests in Africa. We have many mining interests, particularly gold, in Mali. Right now, our Canadian companies are paying up to \$10 million a month in royalties to the government. I'm sorry. I'm misspeaking here. Ten million dollars a month of Mali...is going into supporting the Wagner Group for security.

What are the tools we have as a country to redirect some of those Canadian assets producing royalties in a foreign country into the health or education fields of Mali, as opposed to the Wagner Group?

The Chair: Again, I apologize. Please keep your answer down to less than 30 seconds.

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I'll start with this: We work with regional organizations like ECOWAS and the African Union in order to help support African solutions to security in African countries, including in western Africa and Mali.

I don't know if my colleague wants to add anything about Mali, specifically.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: Generally speaking, the trade commissioner service that supports Canadian companies abroad asks those companies to sign a statement of integrity. No services are provided unless the statement is signed.

In addition, we expect these companies to adhere to the UN and OECD guiding principles on human rights.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to MP Oliphant.

You have five minutes.

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

My first thanks is to this committee for undertaking this study. I am already fantasizing about a unanimous report from this committee that shines a light on Africa and demands that our government do more. I am already hopeful that we can move on this as a committee and try to keep this study on track for the next several weeks.

I have a couple of questions. I feel it's unfair, partly because I think the committee could ask me to be a witness, since some of the questions from Mr. Bergeron would probably go right to me. I'm happy to have lunch and talk more about that.

You mentioned right at the start that "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" is not only an important document but also a living document. It talks particularly about rededicating to an "enduring Pan African vision". I'd like to know what the department understands that to be. I hear we still organize around and perceive North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa differently.

How do we understand Africa's request to have a pan-African approach?

• (1730)

Ms. Cheryl Urban: Even as we look at this at present, we are looking at it as the whole continent, not simply sub-Sahara or North Africa. We're looking at that as a whole.

I will turn to Sue to answer that question.

Ms. Susan Steffen: I think one of the most interesting trends and most remarkable things happening on the African continent is an increasing unity, partly driven by the African Union itself, partly driven by the dream of having an African continental free trade area and partly because of the increasing ability of African states to work with each other to solve African problems.

I think it's a real trend that needs to be supported, and it's part of why we are engaging with the African Union Commission the way we are.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Following up on that, there's been a decision by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to appoint the first full-time, permanent representative to the African Union. I like to think of him as the Bob Rae—or better—of Africa.

What is the implication of that, how is it being perceived and what is his role?

Ms. Susan Steffen: Our first dedicated, permanent observer to the African Union is Ambassador Ben Marc Diendéré. He's doing an excellent job for us.

For the last 15 years, we have had a permanent observer to the African Union. This is the first time we've had a dedicated permanent observer. Before, it was double-headed with the ambassador to Ethiopia. What this allows us to do is have, obviously, more dedicated attention to the issues—creating those networks based exclusively on this pan-African approach in our interactions not just with member states but also with the commission itself, and with the African Union as a political body, not just the technocratic body.

Our ambassador has spent a lot of time meeting with African member states and representatives to the African Union. It's allowing us to get a very in-depth view of what their perspectives are on the African Union as a body and political movement, and also what their individual states' issues are and how they would like to use the African Union to try to resolve some of those issues.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I want to focus a bit on the conflict.

The library has prepared—to the analysts, thanks for your notes—a couple of very excellent maps on the conflict region. I hope the department looks at them.

I wanted to give the major-general a chance to elaborate a bit more on the Elsie initiative. I was recently at the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa. One of the most moving moments I had there was when the Elsie initiative was celebrated in a way that I don't think most Canadians know about. I know that my colleague Ms. Damoff has also been doing that work in Ghana.

Could you expand a bit on that?

The Chair: Could you respond in 25 seconds, please?

MGen Gregory Smith: Chair, I'll speak very quickly, and I have a colleague here who would like to say something.

I agree. It's humbling to see these efforts to try to get more women into peacekeeping. I'll leave my colleague to give the statistics of how successful that can be towards returning to peace in times of insecurity; it's wonderful to see.

I'll defer to my colleague, who can talk more about it.

The Chair: Very briefly, please.

Ms. Caroline Delany (Director General, Southern and Eastern Africa Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I was going to touch on the example in Zambia, which is a partner for police peacekeeping in terms of increasing the number of Zambian police. They have very high rates of women in the police force in Zambia, but until the Elsie initiative had not had a lot of success in terms of having them pass the necessary exams to be able to participate in peacekeeping missions.

Their pass rate is now extremely high. Off the top of my head, I think it's close to 100%, and it has made a real difference in terms of the ability of Zambian policewomen to participate in peacekeeping missions.

• (1735)

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

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'd like to come back to the question that was asked by our colleague Mr. Epp.

I felt that you tried to convince us that Canada was very active in Africa. Yet, by your own admission, this is not the case. Indeed, Global Affairs Canada's discussion paper on the future of diplomacy states that “Africa remains the continent with the most promising prospects for economic growth and where Canada remains under-represented”.

In fact, only one of Canada's 10 largest diplomatic missions, in terms of size, is located in Africa, in Nairobi, Kenya. First, one might ask why Kenya was chosen, but also why there's only one in Africa and why there's so little diplomatic representation.

Also, in terms of economic co-operation, we have free trade agreements with North American countries, other countries in the Americas, European countries, Indo-Pacific countries, but none with a country in Africa.

What explains this apparent lack of interest in Africa?

[*English*]

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I'll start and then turn to my colleagues. I'll start with the second question with regard to trade.

I think the real name of the game at the moment in the region is the African continental free trade area, but it's kind of nascent. We need to give that some time in order to develop. There are important aspects of it, and there are countries that need to come along. That will provide promise for Canadians. I think that's the lens through which we need to look at trade: the continent-wide African continental free trade area.

I would also say that with our existing presence and the presence that we've had, there are examples of Canadian leadership. There are places where we've had a disproportionate impact. That includes, even, for example, if you look at the recent passing of the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney with Canadian interventions in South Africa, and how we played an important role.

We've invested in other countries as well and we've had a big impact. Perhaps I could turn to my colleagues to provide some concrete examples of how we have.

The Chair: My apologies, but you have literally 15 seconds. Thank you.

Ms. Caroline Delany: Because the member referenced Kenya, I would highlight that Kenya is an important regional player in east Africa and then also on the continent and with respect to global challenges like climate change.

One of the reasons we have a significant presence from a Global Affairs perspective is really recognizing that leadership role that Kenya plays and the opportunity to work with them, not just in the development realm, where we are engaged on things like ATVET training for jobs and skills like that and gender equality, but also on the job opportunities and the economic opportunities that exist for Canadian companies in areas like ICT and clean technology.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Ms. McPherson.

You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Char.

Again, thank you for the testimony. It's very interesting.

I have only two and a half minutes and I'd like a bit of context on how you respond to conflict situations. I'm going to use Sudan as an example of that, because it is one of the most pressing ones we have right now.

Ms. Urban, I know the minister promised \$40 million of humanitarian aid to go to Sudan, in June 2023, I think it was. How much of that has been delivered?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: Perhaps I will ask my colleague Caroline to answer. She is responsible for our Sudan questions.

Ms. Heather McPherson: How much of that is on the ground and has been disbursed?

Ms. Caroline Delany: Not being from the humanitarian sector, I would hazard to say that since that was a commitment for fiscal year 2023-24, which has finished, it would all have been disbursed at this point.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Could you just double-check that and let us know for sure that it has been disbursed?

Ms. Caroline Delany: Absolutely.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have another question. I'm not exactly sure who this would go to, but in terms of the sanctions and applying sanctions, we know that the Sudanese Canadian community has asked for sanctions to be applied to those who are causing the Sudanese conflict. Why have those not been applied? Why have we not used our sanctions regime in this instance?

Ms. Caroline Delany: We do look at all the tools that are available to us in terms of the response to a situation like Sudan. Sanctions are one of the things that are under consideration.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Could you tell me a little bit about how that happens? Frankly it seems as though we're very quick and very thorough at least in the naming if not the enforcement of sanctions in places like Russia, so it's very difficult to understand why these sanctions have not happened in Sudan. What does the process look like?

• (1740)

Ms. Caroline Delany: The process is led by other parts of the department. It is an extremely thorough process that requires the gathering of evidence and information to demonstrate that these are decisions that are within the Canadian legislation related to sanctions. So it does take some time in terms of identifying potential targets, squaring that information with what those who are like-

minded and others are doing, and then also making recommendations and ensuring that we have the evidence for the information that we're putting forward.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I certainly hope that work is happening, because I know many people have been asking for this and wondering why it appears that our foreign policy and our approach to Magnitsky sanctions and the sanctions regime are applied differently in different contexts, so it would be good to see that.

The other thing I wanted—and I know I'm running out of time—

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

We next go to MP Kurek.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witnesses here today.

Aid and support from other global players can often be used and, as someone suggested, weaponized for political purposes. Specifically when we look at Africa, we see Russia—in terms of aid and significant debt forgiveness to expand its sphere of influence there—but also China, and I would suggest that often includes strategic investments.

I'm just wondering if you can provide some context as to how Canada can make sure that is kept in mind in the larger conversation about aid and development in Africa in the context of the conversation we're having now.

Ms. Cheryl Urban: Maybe I'll elaborate a little bit on what the activities of Russia and China are on the continent and the ways in which those intersect with the activities we undertake.

We know that Russia has developing relationships with countries in Africa. There was a Russia-Africa summit, and a number of leaders attended that. Russia is providing arms and has carved out a role for itself in providing regime security services. It also is a source of disinformation, and there are a number of African leaders who are very concerned about the disinformation that is happening within their countries, which can sometimes lead to anti-western sentiment.

We also saw visits by Lavrov a number of times on the continent, and we have the influence of Wagner security services being used.

Canada has programming that is specifically addressing disinformation, for example, and we have that in recognition that this is a—

Mr. Damien Kurek: I apologize. It's tough when there's so little time, but it seems as though, especially with the dollars we're seeing invested in strategic investments by countries like China, our efforts seem to be dwarfed by a much larger series of players who certainly don't have Canada's economics and certainly don't have Canada's security interests at risk.

I do want to move on to something else, because there are three topics I hope to cover here.

In terms of humanitarian crises, I know there are a number of significant ones when you look at Africa, including unrest in Cameroon and the millions displaced in Nigeria because of the Boko Haram crisis. Maternal death rates are skyrocketing, even though there was, for a time, positive work in South Sudan, Chad, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and others. What is being done to help address some of those practical challenges and to make sure the support that taxpayers in Canada are paying towards the lives of those in Africa is actually helping those on the ground and having a direct positive benefit?

I'm hoping for an answer in about one minute, and then I will have one more quick question.

Ms. Cheryl Urban: We have a number of tools in our tool kit. Some of this is through international assistance initiatives and some of this is through our engagement diplomatically.

I'll use Sudan as an example. We see that one of the critical factors in helping resolve the situation in Sudan is having the involvement of civil society. Canada is specifically focused diplomatically and through international assistance to support civil society.

I don't know if you want to add to that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: I'll be brief, Mr. Chair.

Last year, Canada allocated \$350 million to its trusted multilateral partners, so they could deal with these crises.

I'm just talking about humanitarian aid, but there are indeed other channels in terms of conflict prevention and aid—

• (1745)

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek: I hate to interrupt, but I want to get one more quick question in. I appreciate that answer, and feel free to follow up with more information.

You mentioned the priority being supporting democracy. I know Cameroon, as an example, has had the same president for 40 years. Those with knowledge of the region say elections there are a joke. We led a process, according to some reports, on trying for pre-talks on a peace process, in order to try to bring some stability to the region.

I'm wondering if we could get any comments on that. What work is being done to help bring democracy to a country that is desperate for it?

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: As it relates to Cameroon, Canada was indeed asked to intervene as a mediator. That was in 2022. There was a series of meetings held here in Canada between the opposition and government officials. Unfortunately, this mediation exercise went public at the beginning of 2023 and the Government of Cameroon backed away.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you.

The Chair: We now go to MP Chatel.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to return briefly to the African Union.

Before entering politics, I worked for international organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD. So I've seen for myself that the African Union is becoming an increasingly important player in international reform. I would even go so far as to say that it is now a key player.

I'm very curious to know how Canada can support this organization. I understand that we support its membership in the G20, which is very commendable. Finally, I know we've appointed our first permanent representative to the African Union.

Can you talk more concretely about how Canada supports this emerging force for the continent?

Ms. Susan Steffen: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

The member has put her finger on a very important element of the rise of pan-Africanism—not 1970s pan-Africanism but a new pan-Africanism through the auspices of the African Union. That is why the Canadian government is paying so much attention to the African Union right now.

We have supported their joining the G20, which they have done. We have offered to support them to figure out how they will participate in the G20, which is one of those behind-the-scenes things that are very useful. We have inaugurated a high-level dialogue, as I said, which we will repeat in due time at the upper levels of the African Union Commission. We have a development policy dialogue that we are engaging in shortly—hopefully in Addis Ababa—to talk about development policy issues of common interest between the African Union Commission and the Canadian government. We have a trade policy dialogue that is ongoing and that will speak to AU observership at the WTO, as well as to supporting them in their desire to improve their abilities to work on trade policy issues across the continent, particularly around the continental free trade area. Canada has quite a lot of experience with free trade agreements and we can bring that to bear.

In terms of specific support, we are currently on our third general grant to the African Union Commission to support their plan of action and their program. There is also support that we provide to organizations that support the African Union from the outside, one of which is very key to what we were talking about regarding basic building blocks for the new Africa. The African Trade Policy Centre has been supporting the continental free trade area. As well, the Global Green Growth Institute is supporting the African Union Commission to work better on being able to access climate financing more directly.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: You just mentioned the financing of measures to combat climate change, which is very important. I think the African continent will be one of the hardest hit by climate change, which will lead to further conflict and economic hardship.

How can we intervene to increase climate resilience on the continent?

• (1750)

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I'll answer with a few examples. I think we have some examples of excellent projects that we have under way to help African countries take leadership in climate change. Some of those we do through the partnerships with the African Development Bank. We have an African Development Bank Africa fertilizer financing mechanism, which we recently announced, and the African Development Bank disaster risk multi-donor trust fund.

When it comes to climate change, Canada recently doubled its commitment to providing climate financing. We are also doing more in a couple of very important areas that are important to our African counterparts. It's not only about mitigation, but about adaptation. I think that working with African countries on climate change should have a focus on adaptation, as well as on biodiversity. African countries are absolutely suitable for that.

The other thing I would say is that the just energy transition is a very important initiative, and there are initiatives under way, including in South Africa, for the just energy transition. It's absolutely critical in that context because of energy problems they have.

The Chair: We'll now go back to MP Epp.

You have another five minutes.

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

Nine out of 10 lowest-ranking countries on the human development index are in Africa. What are the key factors?

Why is the sub-Saharan so poor, and why has it been so poor for so long, despite the efforts not only of Canadians, but of many?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: There are many things, but I would say that one of the things that has been very challenging for African countries is having a colonial past. There are a number of implications presently that are a result of having been formerly colonized. It had a deep effect on their economy. For example, many of those countries, once they gained independence, ended up exporting raw material but were not in the business of production themselves, and they were not doing manufacturing, which was very limiting on their economy.

The other thing is that many African countries have governance models. It's actually relatively recent that a number of African countries have democracies, because they're post-independence. Post-independence, many of those democracies even began more as single-party types of democracies and then evolved to be multi-party democracies. They are trying to make development achievements in an uphill battle, when the past has not made that easy for them.

I would add that climate change has a disproportionate impact on sub-Saharan Africa, even though countries in sub-Saharan Africa are actually very minimal contributors to climate change.

Mr. Dave Epp: You mentioned that Canada's approach now with further and deepening engagement with the AU is reflective of the change you described, moving from a colonial past, and we're also

going to move our pattern from donor-recipient to more of a partnership mutuality.

Does that mean our channels of delivering—call it aid, call it development or call it whatever—are going to change? We have many different forms, including bilateral, multilateral, through the private sector and government-to-government. Is that forecast to change?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I'll start with a general statement. There is a utility to having multiple tools and multiple channels, because they each serve a unique role.

Did you want to continue, Susan?

Ms. Susan Steffen: I was going to say that.

There are some really exciting new tools that are available to governments to work government to government and to work with the private sector. We have a new development financing institute, FinDev, which has some really interesting tools in its tool belt to work with the African private sector, along with the Canadian private sector, to advance economic growth on the African continent.

Within Global Affairs as well, we have developed some interesting tools in innovative finance and blended finance that try to attract private finance with some support through our development assistance.

• (1755)

Mr. Dave Epp: I heard from CSOs and NGOs in Canada that have partners in various parts of the world but in Africa as well. They are calling for more aid, more development dollars and more of our programming to flow through our Canadian-based CSOs and NGOs to partner organizations for two reasons: efficiency reasons and—I'll come right out and say it—also less risk of corruption when it goes government to government down in the channels there.

The notion has been put forward that Global Affairs at times has preferred multilateral organizations rather than bilateral organizations or through our own organizations because that's less work, quite frankly, with regard to accountability. We're all in favour of accountability with regard to Canadian taxpayer dollars, but it's more work for our government to make sure that this accountability is there when it's not transferring that accountability responsibility to a multilateral organization.

How would you respond?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I would start by saying that our partnerships with Canadian civil society organizations are extremely valuable and absolutely important as part of our tool kit, and we really value them. However, they are not the only way in which it makes sense to do development in some of these contexts.

For example, working with international organizations allows us to go into very tough places. Sometimes United Nations organizations are those that have the infrastructure to be able to operate in conflict places. Also, with some of the international organizations, we can really leverage the funding of other donors or even if we.... For example, if we do development by investing and becoming shareholders of international financial institutions, they take the funds that we provide, put them on the market and make more money from them. Then you can do more development with those funds, so there are benefits to doing that.

The final thing I'll say is that sometimes we've learned—and this is an example from our women's voice and leadership program—that working with local organizations is a way to work with the grassroots and to stimulate change. It's just another effective mechanism in addition to Canadian civil society.

The Chair: We now go to Ms. Damoff.

You have five minutes.

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

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to go back to the Elsie initiative, because 30 seconds wasn't nearly enough time to give it its due. I went to the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial at the beginning of December in Ghana. I have to say, going outside of Canada to hear other countries talk about the Elsie initiative.... I don't think Canadians even know what it is, but other countries sure as heck do. It's been around long enough now that I noticed countries weren't even associating it with Canada. It was just a policy that was being put in place by a number of countries. Canada had a display that showed how a camp could be designed to best reflect the Elsie initiative, with washrooms close to where women are staying and very simple changes made to the layout of the camp.

Can you talk a little bit about what the Elsie initiative is and why it's so important for peacekeeping, especially for other countries? You didn't have enough time to properly respond before.

MGen Gregory Smith: I'll start, and maybe some of my colleagues want to jump in and say smarter stuff.

I'm at a disadvantage, because I never went on many of these visits that people make. At the same time, I have heard equally very good things about the idea of how we encourage more women in peacekeeping. As you can imagine, peacekeeping situations generally require interactions with the population. Hopefully, women make up at least 50% of the population. Rather than a bunch of people who look like me in big uniforms, who look scary, etc., we have women who can be approached. That's a very successful model. It allows dialogue. It allows interaction.

I agree with the questioner and the previous statement on some of the basic things we can do to encourage more women to be in peacekeeping in the armed forces. Allowing more women to participate in peacekeeping is a better model for successful peacekeeping.

Ms. Caroline Delany: I think the general covered a lot of it. Really, the goal is twofold. Partly it's with respect to the participation

of women in peacekeeping and increasing the number of women who are in peacekeeping. It is also to understand what the barriers are that might be preventing them from participating.

In your question you spoke about the camp layout. That is an extremely important element in terms of the safety and security of women. When it's not taken into consideration, it might be a barrier for women deciding to participate.

At other times, like the example I gave earlier with respect to Zambia, it might also be just a training and capacity issue. With some targeted efforts looking at gaps in capacity, training could be provided to close those gaps and ensure that the women have a higher capacity to be able to pass the exams.

Of course, ultimately, all of this is about the recognition that peace and security is for all genders. If we are going to have peacekeeping missions that are best able to support the needs of women as well as men, higher participation of women is extremely important for being able to understand what their specific peace and security needs are.

• (1800)

Ms. Pam Damoff: The other thing that struck me is that, really, it's not one size fits all. Each country, depending on their situation, does different things with the same goal. It's not like they all have to follow the same model, right?

MGen Gregory Smith: I can jump in here. The exact term is escaping me, but there's a study on the barriers to more women in peacekeeping. I agree with the statement that there could be cultural or physical reasons that are preventing that. We enabled some countries to do a study: What are the barriers to that greater participation and the attempt to remove them, and to therefore see more women in peacekeeping? As has been stated, it's a very good model for more successful operations like that.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Ms. Urban, I don't have very much time left, but in response to Dr. Fry, you were talking about women's health and the investments we've made. I had the opportunity to see one of the clinics when I was in Ghana recently. Why is it important to deal with women's health and women's reproductive health at these clinics?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: You can look at the statistics. The statistics are actually quite shocking when you look at women's health. Maternal mortality rates are sky-high. We know that the average birth rate in some countries in Africa is six: I just came back from Benin and Côte D'Ivoire, and the average woman had six children. This is really threatening for women. As well, 70% of global maternal mortality is in sub-Saharan Africa. That's a really shocking statistic.

Health is one of the priority areas for our investments. We invest greatly in health, especially for women and girls. This includes sexual and reproductive health and rights. It allows for family planning. It allows women to understand, even from a human rights perspective, what they are entitled to.

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

We next go to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Canada is privileged to have as official languages the only two languages that are spoken on every continent on the planet.

At least 22 African countries have French as an official language, and French is the language expected to experience the strongest growth over the next fifty years.

Is Canada preparing accordingly as part of its unnamed strategy, framework or approach to Africa?

[*English*]

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I think this is one of the most important people-to-people ties and cultural ties we have with the continent. I mentioned that we are a member of la Francophonie, but we also have very important relationships.... Part of that is because of our linguistic connections.

I will use an example. I mentioned that I was in Côte d'Ivoire. In Côte d'Ivoire, our ambassador is very active working with the Government of Quebec. The Government of Quebec has a lot of cultural as well as commercial groups that go and visit Côte d'Ivoire and that are interested in doing business. Our ambassador spends time helping those companies and individuals from the province, as well as working with the government to provide briefings and information. This is just one example.

There are very concrete ways in which we can leverage our linguistic ties in order to build stronger relationships.

I will turn to my colleague.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: Mr. Chair, I'd like to add that, yes, we're not just preparing, we're already implementing measures and working on this matter.

I'll give the concrete example of education. Canada works with the provinces. We have consultation mechanisms. We organize forums. Over the past 10 years, the number of visas issued to African students has increased by some 350%. That's huge.

There's still a lot of work to be done. Many visas are still refused. This influx of students is vital.

• (1805)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: This is particularly the case with French-speaking African students.

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: Yes. I recognize this fact, and I've seen a lot of newspaper articles about it. The figures tend to show it. I'll let my colleagues at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada answer that question.

That said, we note that many Quebec educational institutions, especially in the regions, depend on this influx of students to ensure their survival. Just think of the Université du Québec à Rimouski, the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi and the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. What's more, the Canadian government is

making a special effort to bring these French-speaking students outside Quebec, where the French fact is in the minority. So there's a targeted, specific effect.

I would add that, last year, the government announced the Canadian International Development Scholarships 2030 program, an \$80-million program spread over eight years. This program covers 26 countries. They are all African countries, with the exception of Haiti. All the beneficiaries are Africans. Through this program, we support not only the fellows—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm afraid, Mr. Bergeron, that your minute is over, so I'm going to have to cut you off. I apologize.

We now go to Ms. McPherson.

You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Two and a half minutes is very short, but perhaps, if you had more you would like to offer, you could submit it in writing for our committee.

Thank you.

I want to dig down on some of the questions Mr. Epp was asking. I was quite interested in some of those. They were excellent questions, Mr. Epp.

In terms of our ODA, I used to work within the sector. I have long been a champion of the 0.7%. I'm disappointed in Canada's level of ODA spent, overall. I think we're at 0.31%. Obviously, when I see increases in defence spending.... It's not just those increases. We're now hearing from the government—or they are signalling—that there may, in fact, be further cuts in this coming budget.

What percentage of our ODA is spent on the continent of Africa? Of that, could you give me a bit of a breakdown of how much of that goes to Canadian organizations, how much to multilateral or bilateral...and how much to FinDev or those private-public partnerships?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I will send information to you in writing that will give you the breakdown, but we have some stats here.

Ms. Susan Steffen: We can speak to overall official development assistance—including all channels—to Africa. The reason that we often speak about sub-Saharan Africa is just the way we're organized administratively, but for the purposes of this committee, this covers all of Africa. Sixty-four per cent of ODA is going to multilateral organizations, 26% to Canadian organizations and 10% to foreign organizations, which are local CSOs, governments trusted to do that kind of work or other organizations such as that global green growth initiative I mentioned.

Ms. Heather McPherson: If you could provide all of that in writing, that would be fantastic for us to have as part of our report.

Very quickly, if in fact we do see cuts in the budget, I would assume that would have an impact on our funding in Africa. What might some of the impacts be on our programs in Africa?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I can't speculate about what they would be.

At the moment, the Government of Canada has a commitment to have 50% of its bilateral international assistance directed to sub-Saharan African. It has been increasing. In the past four years, there's been a 54% increase in the amount of development spending in sub-Saharan Africa by the Government of Canada. The trend is positive.

Ms. Heather McPherson: If you could submit all of that in writing, that would be great.

The Chair: I'm afraid you're out time, Ms. McPherson. You're 30 seconds over. Thank you.

Before going to the final two questions, is it the will of all committee members to do one last round of three minutes per party?

Yes? Okay. We now go to Mr. Aboultaif.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair.

We've heard the word "focus" a lot in this first session, and we do have big competition.

Russia and China are not knocking on the door: They're already inside. They're doing business, they're doing development and they're focusing a lot on the region for all the strategic purposes that we all know of.

In this case, Canada's role cannot be limited, but with what we are providing and what we have in hand, we must focus on certain things regionally or country by country, or in a historical relationship that we believe can give us a way in, in order to at least be effective and make a difference in light of all the activities and the different players in the region.

If the department is to choose, what do we choose? Do we choose a country, a region or an industry? What do we do to make sure Canada is effective in Africa?

• (1810)

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I think the most important thing when we're considering how Canada can have the greatest impact and achieve its interests is to do the analysis that is currently being undertaken, which is to examine Canadian strengths and then intersect that with Canadian interests and see where that leads us.

The other point I would make is that when we think about Canadian engagement on the continent, we should be thinking of it from the lens of a partner with other G7 countries. There's much we can do as a member of a broader group.

I'll give you an example. Working with the G7, Canada is a member of what's called the "PGII", which is a working group on investment and infrastructure. You spoke about the influence of China. One of the ways in which China has influence in Africa is that they are investing in a tremendous amount of infrastructure, but G7 countries are countering that by offering their own value

proposition for quality infrastructure, and Canada is a part of that initiative.

It's initiatives like that in partnership, and then looking at Canadian strengths, that will allow us to determine the best approach.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: In light of that, how do we come to be impactful again if we know the geopolitical situation is not great? Security is a factor in doing any development or in doing any business. How are we countering—or going to counter—China and Russia at this point to be able to do the business that we need to do with Africa? What I mean there by "business" is from development to an economic and business approach.

Ms. Cheryl Urban: think it's through strategic partnerships. Maybe I'll turn to my colleague to talk about the Sahel, because I think that's a good example of where we can turn our focus to countries that would give us the most leverage in the region.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: As far as the Sahel is concerned, when we think of Russian interference, we immediately think of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, where the mining sector is of great economic interest. So we're very concerned. We've seen this influence through the Wagner Group, which is now Africa Corps. The services and choices in these countries are the result of coups d'état. These are undemocratic governments.

However, Canada has decided to maintain its presence in these countries, notably to help those most in need. Humanitarian aid programs continued, as long as we were certain that financial flows did not transit through the government. Budgetary aid to these governments was immediately suspended, in the case of Mali and Burkina Faso. We are continuing to implement the projects that had already been approved, but these are essentially aimed at helping the poorest sections of the population. In some cases, these are internally displaced people. The bulk of the project portfolio, since we're talking about places where we can make a difference, is related to the provision of health services and humanitarian aid, and we carry these out through our feminist international aid policy.

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Let me help you a little. Let's take Nigeria, which will be doubling its population by 2050, if the numbers we have are correct.

Can Canada focus on Nigeria, for example? It's a French- and English-speaking country, I believe.

Is it a plan on the agenda of the department to say, "We'll focus on one market"?

• (1815)

Ms. Cheryl Urban: Very briefly, we have a diplomatic presence in the capital, as well as in Lagos. Lagos is more focused on commercial...in the capital, it's more diplomatic and relationship....

We also work with Nigeria in the context of dealing with regional situations and eco loss, but I'll turn to my colleague to add to that.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: Very quickly, I would add that—

[English]

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

Thank you.

Now we'll go to Mr. Alghabra. You have five minutes.

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

To the witnesses, thank you for being here.

Over the last few years, Africa has had some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Ms. Urban, you mentioned in your remarks how there are many opportunities for Canadians, Canadian companies and Canadian workers.

When I was the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of International Trade, I went to South Africa and I met with some businesses. One of the business people I met with was a steel manufacturer who was starting, at that time, a business in Canada.

I asked him about the process by which he went about selecting this business and the investment in Canada. He had a simple answer. He said, "I was looking at the U.S. and I was looking at Australia, but I picked Canada." It was mostly because of the trade commissioner service and how it was able to answer his questions, and how it was able to provide information quickly and efficiently and in an attractive way that helped the business owner make that decision.

I would like you to tell us about the work and the roles that our trade commissioner services are conducting right now in supporting businesses, and the opportunities that lie before them.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: Thank you for that question; I like it very much.

I worked with companies for 20 years, as a sales representative.

[English]

I kind of belong to the corporation here.

The service was established over 125 years ago. Our presence in Africa is relatively small.

[Translation]

We have offices in the most important countries—Ghana, of course, South Africa, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, but also Senegal and some East African countries.

Essentially, we want to ensure that Canadian companies have access to quality distribution networks and suppliers, and that they are aware of the law and our expectations regarding corporate conduct.

When it comes to Africa, most of our investments are in the mining sector, which in itself is a challenge. There are many challenges

related to this sector here in Canada, but also internationally. When it comes to relations with local communities, we work a lot on the issue of corporate social responsibility.

The investment aspect is less important in Africa, because the latter exports very little capital. That said, we're happy to work with any African investor who would like to invest in Canada.

To conclude, I'd like to talk about a pillar that has received very little mention: the agreements that enable the creation of a favourable business environment for Canadian companies. We don't have many free trade agreements, but we are putting in place investment protection agreements. In the short term, we will be negotiating such agreements with Nigeria. In addition, there are several other countries where we invest heavily in the mining sector.

[English]

Hon. Omar Alghabra: As a follow-up to that answer, is there an opportunity for you to provide us with input?

We will provide advice to the government. What kinds of recommendations should we make to government to emphasize trade commissioner services in Africa?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: As part of our consultations, we had extensive discussions with the private sector. Ultimately, we want to prepare a document that will be presented to our political leaders. We've received a number of comments, for example about partial market coverage. The Canadian presence of the Trade Commissioner Service in Africa is partial. We don't have trade commissioners in all our embassies. If more resources are made available to us, we'd be happy about it.

However, it's not just that. There's also the whole question of funding. I know the committee and the Standing Committee on International Trade talk a lot about the roles of other agencies, like Export Development Canada as an insurer and as a financial element.

Also, there's been a lot of talk about our role with multilateral banks, such as the African Development Bank. In the past, this was an important market for our companies, but it is less so today. We've always had a managing director based in Abidjan, at the African Development Bank, who represents our interests and those of other countries, if I'm not mistaken.

FinDev Canada will be able to support the Canadian private sector.

● (1820)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Lebleu.

We're now going into the final round, with three minutes per member. If anyone goes over three minutes, we're going to have to cut them off.

We will start off with Mr. Aboultaif.

You have three minutes, sir.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

China is more economically desirable to do business with in the region. It is more aggressive. It is spending money in different directions. Whether its dollar diplomacy or its economic strength is our real competition in the region, what are we doing to be able to, if not counter, at least keep our market share at all levels?

There is a magic that is needed here. I'd like to hear the department's direction on this, and how it is going to achieve at least some of what I call our market share.

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I think Canadian companies are desirable in African countries. Canadian companies have a reputation that is known in those countries, and I think African countries welcome Canadian investment. That is one of our strengths and opportunities.

I have quite a stunning statistic about China. A 1% decline in China's GDP leads to a 2.25% decline in sub-Saharan African growth within a year. There are strong ties.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Can you name a single program the federal government has to help the private sector going into Africa and doing business and making investments there?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: My colleague was just mentioning that we have a range of tools that we use in order to help Canadian businesses go in. We have our trade commissioner service, which provides information. There is a role for government in talking to the Canadian private sector about what the risks of going in are and what the opportunities are.

Also, as I mentioned, in collaboration with our G7 partners, we are engaging in initiatives that are investing in infrastructure.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: How much indirect business do we do in Africa through the G7?

Ms. Cheryl Urban: I don't have that statistic on hand, but we can try to find that and provide that.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: That would be great.

In the past, we had the PEMD program helping a lot of companies do business overseas. Do we have something similar these days, in the last eight years, that can at least give us some hope that we're going to achieve something or penetrate the market?

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: Yes, we do have a program that will support Canadian companies' expansion abroad.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Can you name it, please?

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: It's CanExport.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: We will now go to MP Chatel.

You have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I was very pleased to learn that Ben Marc Diendéré, a graduate of the HEC school in Montreal, has been appointed

Canada's representative and permanent observer to the African Union.

This brings me precisely to the presence and influence of the French language and culture in Canada, particularly in Quebec, but also in other regions, such as New Brunswick. It's an absolutely essential asset if we want to build bridges with French-speaking African countries.

How do we use cultural and linguistic diplomacy to facilitate trade and investment with African countries, particularly in sectors where we can offer our expertise in renewable green technologies, security and education?

For my part, I find this appointment quite central. It's part of a strategy of cultural and linguistic diplomacy.

• (1825)

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: Of course, it's a tool in our tool box.

Our assistant deputy minister gave a few examples of activities carried out by our colleague Ambassador Anderson Blanc, who is stationed in Abidjan and works closely with the Quebec Office.

However, this outreach is not limited to Quebec. Mr. Blanc told me that, in September or October 2023, he hosted a mission from New Brunswick, led by the Minister responsible for la Francophonie, Mr. Glen Savoie.

Also in October, we received a mission from Ontario to Côte d'Ivoire. The mission was led by Dominic Mailloux, president of the Fédération des gens d'affaires francophones de l'Ontario.

We also worked closely with organizations from la Francophonie. A large gathering of francophone entrepreneurs, led in large part by Mr. Karl Blackburn, was held in Quebec City last year. We helped promote the event.

In my region, I'm more attached to la Francophonie than to the Commonwealth, where there are possibly examples of this kind.

I'll close with a brief example of cultural diplomacy.

My colleagues in Lagos, which is a great cultural capital, but English-speaking, told us that, on International Francophonie Day, they showed a Quebec film with the support of the French and Swiss. They were a great success in a very competitive market.

These branding initiatives are useful to us not only in French-speaking countries, but also in other countries.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next we will go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have three minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I just want to point out, Mr. Lebleu, that you don't have to convince me of the importance of foreign students for educational institutions. I myself was secretary general of the Cégep de Rimouski, and I know a thing or two about that. In fact, I'm worried about the federal government's decision, supposedly to combat unbridled population growth, to simply reduce the number of foreign students. That is the end of my aside.

General, the Hill Times reported that the Department of Defence and Canadian Armed Forces' departmental results for 2022-23 demonstrated a continuing decline in the navy's readiness, when only 51.2% of its fleet elements were deemed usable to meet training and readiness requirements in support of simultaneous operations.

Is this why Canada decided not to participate in Operation Projection, which is aimed at promoting peace and stability in support of the rules-based international order?

Also, is it possible to find out whether the navy will be participating in Exercise Obangame Express, in which it has been involved since 2018 and which involves 28 other countries, including the United States?

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, I don't know the exact details, but, normally, we participate in the Phoenix Express and Obangame Express exercises.

Yes, we have a problem with the readiness of our ships. However, we usually participate in these activities.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: According to the information we have, this year Canada has chosen not to participate in Operation Projection. Is this due to the limited operational capability of our fleet?

MGen Gregory Smith: Mr. Chair, I don't know.

In my opinion, we are prepared to participate in this activity, but I will be able to confirm this by providing a written response to the committee.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. McPherson, we'll go to you for the final question.

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

Again, thank you to the witnesses for being here today and sharing their expertise with us.

I have some questions. We talked a bit about Sudan. We talked about other regions on the continent. I'd like to ask a bit about the DRC, as well.

Of course, eastern DRC is another area where we're seeing unbelievable humanitarian emergencies happening. The use of sexual violence is shocking, as are the levels we are hearing about. We know cholera is present. We know malnutrition is present. Yet, we haven't seen any more humanitarian dollars announced, despite the fact that many organizations have asked for that.

Is there a plan for more humanitarian aid to go into that part of the continent?

• (1830)

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lebleu: Generally speaking, the size of the humanitarian aid envelope for Africa is constant. The sums it contains can be redistributed, but there is no increase. Recommendations for the current year must be made by the minister. This is his decision, and he bases it on the recommendations of his departmental officials. I can give you figures for the last year.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC, is one of the countries that receives the most humanitarian aid from Canada, all forms of aid combined, i.e., humanitarian aid, displacement aid, etc. You mentioned the victims of the conflict in the east. We work with Dr. Mukwege's foundation, the Panzi Foundation. Dr. Mukwege is world-renowned and won the Nobel Prize for Medicine. This is the country that receives the most—

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to interrupt. You'll understand, as I have such a small amount of time.

I want to bring something up. We look at conflicts around the continent and see that there are a number of places where there's a potential for terrorist organizations, or organizations identified as "terrorist entities", to be in charge or to have some role to play within certain regions of the continent.

Bill C-41 was the bill that came forward intended to be used with regard to Afghanistan, in order to make sure we could get aid into Afghanistan. We still have not had any documentation or guidance provided for Bill C-41.

I'd like to hear what impact the bill could have on organizations working in Africa.

Ms. Susan Steffen: Bill C-41 is an important bill for looking at ensuring that humanitarian assistance can get to populations that need it, even if they're in places where terrorist activities do happen.

That's the extent to which I wish to pronounce on it here because we're not responsible for that piece of—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Do you have any idea when—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. McPherson, your time is up.

At this point, on behalf of the entire committee, I want to thank all our witnesses: Ms. Kumar, Mr. Lebleu, Ms. Delany, Major-General Smith, Ms. Urban and Ms. Steffen.

Thank you very much for your time, your insights and your expertise. You've ensured that our first session on Africa is off to a great start. We're very grateful for it.

Before the members depart, I want to make sure that everyone has received the budget for the Africa study. It was circulated to all of you.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the budget?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This meeting now stands adjourned.

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