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• (1645)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting 103 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 here with us in the room today, as well as through the Zoom application.

Mr. Perron.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Chair, I just wanted to check whether the audio testing has been done with the witnesses participating in the meeting remotely.

Was that done?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, we have done the audio test. That is part of our preliminary rules of procedure here. Thank you for raising that, Mr. Perron.

Now I will make a few comments for the benefit of not only the members here in the room but also the witnesses, who are mostly appearing virtually today. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform us immediately.

In addition, I highlight that this room is equipped with a powerful audio system, but feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to interpreters and can cause serious injury.

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, whether they are participating virtually or are actually in the room.

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

I now welcome our witnesses. We have with us today Professor Thomas Kwasi Tiekou, who is a professor of international relations at King's University College at Western University. We also have Mr. Thierry Vircoulon, research fellow at the French Institute of International Relations. From the Center for Strategic and Interna-

tional Studies, we're grateful to have Mr. Cameron Hudson, senior fellow.

Each of our witnesses will be provided five minutes for their opening remarks. I ask that every once in a while you do look over. Once you're almost out of time, I will give you a signal, which tells you that you have approximately 10 to 15 seconds to wrap it up. That applies not only with respect to your opening remarks but also when members are asking you questions as well.

With all of that having been explained, we now go to Professor Tiekou.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Dr. Thomas Kwasi Tiekou (Professor, Politics and International Relations, King's University College, Western University, As an Individual): Thank you so much, honourable Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to contribute to this important study.

This study is a signal to me that our Canadian political system is finally catching up with realities in our classrooms. Canadians, especially younger ones, want a stronger Canada-Africa partnership. This study presents a great opportunity to encourage the Canadian government to meet this expectation.

Mr. Chair, I want to submit that a study should help transition Canada from the traditionally firefighting, risk-averse and follow-the-crowd diplomatic posture to a more systematic, proactive and strategic approach to Africa.

Let me briefly outline what a systematic, proactive and strategic approach to Africa may look like.

A systematic approach to Africa requires a bipartisan policy framework that leverages Canada's strengths and aligns Canadian interests with Africa's priorities. Luckily for Canada, many of the policy priorities that the African Union has identified in "Agenda 2063" align nicely with Canadian interests. I will recommend that the Canadian government study that document and its progress reports carefully. The Canadian government can then use the Canada-AU high-level dialogue to agree on the mutually beneficial quality priorities that reflect long-term strategic interests of Canada and Africa. One such enduring interest is the maintenance and protection of the rules-based international order that has served both Canada and Africa very well in the last 70 years. Canada needs to work with the AU to counter threats posed by illiberal regimes to this order.

A proactive Canadian approach to Africa means better reorganization and investment in Canadian field missions and the Africa branch. Our missions in Africa and the Africa branch are woefully understaffed and spread too thin in Africa. For instance, we have just one foreign service officer, plus the ambassador, in the Canadian mission to the African Union in Ethiopia. These two individuals are supposed to engage with over 1,700 AU staff and nearly 120 embassies in Addis Ababa. How are these individuals supposed to do it? Maybe they are magicians.

Understaffing like this is part of the reason we are generally perceived in Africa as very cheap on the diplomatic front. We need to invest in Global Affairs Canada and help it reform some of its outdated practices, such as the division of Africa into sub-Saharan Africa and Arab Africa.

Honourable Chair, a strategic approach to Africa entails identifying the policy areas where Canada can make meaningful impact on the ground. Allow me to highlight a few of these areas.

Number one, leverage Canada's linguistic advantage in partnership with the African Union to nurture a new generation of African leaders who embody shared Canadian and African values as outlined in "Agenda 2063".

Number two, utilize Canada's experience in conducting peaceful political transitions and multiculturalism to help African countries manage elections and diversity better.

Number three, leverage Canada's educational assets to help African states develop training programs that can transform Africa's youthful population into a demographic dividend.

Finally, capitalize on Canada's agricultural expertise and technological advancements and Africa's vast arable lands and young workforce to enhance food security and fight climate change.

Mr. Chair, it is my hope that this study marks the beginning of a new era, one where we act smartly, play to our strengths, stop hiding behind others and put our money where our mouth is to strengthen Global Affairs to do its best work.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to contribute to this study.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Tiekou.

We now go to Mr. Vircoulon.

You have five minutes. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry Vircoulon (Research Fellow of the French Institute for International Affairs, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting me today to speak to the political and security situation in the Sahel. The situation is critical. Since I'm not an expert on Canadian politics, but rather on Sahel politics, I'll keep to my area of expertise.

Geographically, the Sahel covers a strip of land stretching from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, in other words, from Sudan to Mauritania, or a total of seven countries. Over the past few years, there have been three major and quite alarming developments in this region.

The first is the expansion of conflicts in the Sahel.

Of the seven countries I just mentioned, only three are at peace, namely Senegal, Mauritania and Chad. In addition, there are two theatres of conflict: one in Mali, Burkina Faso and the western part of Niger, and the other in Sudan.

The jihadism threat began in northern Mali in 2013, and it has now spread to all of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger through two al Qaeda jihadist franchises: the Islamist State in the Greater Sahara, or ISGS, and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM.

However, the jihadi insurgency is not the only conflict raging in the area of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger or west of Niger. We can also see that there is a whole system of conflicts, and a number of them are interconnected. There is a secessionist conflict in northern Mali between the Azawad Tuareg and the central government. There are intercommunity wars that particularly target the Fulani in that region, where a number of massacres have taken place; finally, there are drug wars, since this is a major trafficking zone.

The other conflict raging in the region is the civil war in Sudan, which began in April 2023 and has rapidly spread through the regions, and even across borders, to the point that we can now talk about a Middle Eastern war unfolding in Sudan.

The second major development, which I think is very significant in the region, is a democratic backsliding. A series of military coups began in 2020 in Mali, followed by more coups in 2022 in Burkina Faso and, last year, in Niger. This wave of coups has installed military regimes that replaced elected presidents.

The Sudanese transition to democracy began in 2019, but failed in 2021. Again, this is the result of a coup, with the military replacing the civilian government. In Chad, there is also a military transition under way, which should be completed this year.

Four out of seven countries are grappling with military transitions. For three of those countries, namely Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, there are no prospects of an election on the horizon.

The third development, which I think is extremely important in the region, is the reversal of diplomatic and security alliances.

Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso have dismantled the security support measures that had been put in place to fight jihadism, specifically, the support provided by the United Nations, the UN, with a peacekeeping mission; by the European Union, with troops; by France, with troops as well; and by the United States, with a substantial intelligence apparatus.

They broke those security agreements and called these measures into question by demanding, as you know, the departure of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, or MINUSMA, for example. They have also accelerated efforts to come closer to Russia by agreeing to the deployment of Russian paramilitary groups in three out of seven countries and to their participation in combat in two countries, Mali and Sudan.

Finally, those three countries, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, have decided to break with the Economic Community of West African States, or ECOWAS, and exit the regional organization in order to create their own alternative regional bloc, the Alliance of Sahel States, or AES. This is obviously creating tensions with the other ECOWAS countries, which are complaining about the contagion of insecurity along their northern borders.

In addition to the conflicts I mentioned, there are internal tensions in the area. Obviously, this has created a tragic humanitarian situation, with over 38% of all soldiers being killed in action in 2022 and 2023. There are now 11 million displaced people, and humanitarian needs continue to increase.

I thank committee members for their attention.

• (1655)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Perhaps you'll have an opportunity to address all the issues once we get into questioning from the members of Parliament.

We next go to Mr. Hudson.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Cameron Hudson (Senior Fellow, Center for Strategic and International Studies): Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today regarding Canada's approach to Africa.

You are examining this subject at a critical moment in Africa's history. You have no doubt heard, but it bears underscoring, that the continent will be home to one-quarter of the world's population by

2050. Its natural resources, including 30% of the world's critical minerals that will power our modern world and help drive our economies, are found there. Moreover, it is situated at the geographic centre of our world—along major sea lines in the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Red Sea.

The region holds three non-permanent seats on the UN Security Council and it represents the largest regional voting bloc at the United Nations.

With its median age of only 18, President Biden was correct when he said that Africa will shape the future—and not just the future of the African people, but of the world. Today, the world is keenly aware of Africa's growing importance, which is spurring countries large and small to expand their political, economic and security engagement with African states.

Make no mistake, African nations and their leaders understand well their growing importance in the world. They are demanding a greater voice in the global decisions that affect them and are leveraging their diplomatic courtiers to obtain better deals for themselves and their people. This influx of new actors and this renewed assertion of African agency are creating a highly dynamic and increasingly difficult to navigate environment for the continent's traditional friends, donors and partners.

At the same time, the region itself is undergoing significant transformations in its own socio-economic, political and security landscape. That massive youth bulge is creating the greatest spread among the average age of leaders and the average age of citizens. This spread of nearly 60 years is a factor in the nine *coups d'etat* that African nations have experienced in the last five years. It underpins the declining democratic trends across the continent today, which see fewer people living under democratic rule than at any time since 1991.

These developments, however, have been blunted by the convergence of growing incidents of armed conflict and terrorism, which today see Africa as a global centre of jihadism, climate change—which Africans rightly highlight they did not cause, but which they are paying for—food insecurity, and COVID-19 pandemic-induced health and economic woes that have set back development gains on the continent by 20 years.

In this potent mix of forces and trends, the People's Republic of China sees the region as an opportunity. From Beijing's perspective, Africa is an untapped consumer market and a source for the commodities it needs to drive its expansion. Decades ago, it also saw in Africa an important arena in which to challenge the rules-based international order and advance its geopolitical interests.

China's engagement is not linear and it would be a mistake to view it as wholly malign. Indeed, while China is perhaps seen as a global adversary across a host of important political, economic and security sectors, the use of Africa as a chessboard only serves to undermine western efforts to strengthen and deepen our partnerships there.

Russia, too, in recent years has found in the region a permissive environment for parastatals and private military companies, often fomenting instability for strategic and financial benefit. Russia uses its security and economic ties, as well as disinformation, to undercut Africa's principled opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and related human rights abuses and to sow dissent against Africa's traditional partners. It portrays Moscow, in the historical image, as siding with Africa's independence-minded leaders against what many on the continent see as a kind of western neo-colonialism.

Many African leaders see their countries as victims of the post-World War II international order. In their view, western powers use international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank to advance their interests while imposing painful conditionalities on African countries. Russian propaganda efforts did not create these views, but they do underscore them today to great effect.

Similarly, the west's long-time support for African strongmen, from Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko to Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang today, as well as its willingness to topple those opposed to its interests—as in the 2011 NATO war against Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi—have hurt the west's credibility with African partners that it now tries to sell on an agenda of shared values.

• (1700)

Both China and Russia are effectively using this history to advance their agendas. Make no mistake: China and Russia have identified and seized upon an opportunity in Africa, but they did not create it. The African Union has defined, in its own strategic document “Agenda 2063”, that the creation of a multipolar international system is in Africa's interest. Multiplying its partnerships and requiring those partners to compete for African influence is a benefit.

Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.

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

We will now move to questions from the members. The first member up is MP Aboultaif.

You have five minutes.

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

Thanks to the witnesses.

Mr. Hudson, we know that China has invaded most of Africa without having to fire a single bullet. We know that it's a region that is rich in resources such as minerals, as you said, and population. How can we—Canada and the U.S., not just Canada—navigate our way through, with China and Russia well established there, specifically with the competition that comes from China? How are we going to navigate our way through? China hasn't fired a bullet, and they were able to do what they did.

What is the single recipe for us to be able to get through and establish ourselves for a future that is going to affect the world and is going to be shaping the world, as President Biden said?

• (1705)

Mr. Cameron Hudson: It's obviously a question that we in Washington are struggling with as well, and I think all of our Western partners and donor countries are struggling with it right now.

I would say a couple of things. Number one, it isn't so much what you can do, but what you shouldn't do. What you shouldn't do is withdraw from Africa. We are seeing budget cuts and personnel cuts. We are seeing a disengagement, not just of Washington, but of all Western partners, from Africa. That was certainly not the moment to step back. In fact, we need to be redoubling our efforts, as my colleague said, redoubling our embassy staff and our budgets.

In the process of doing that, one thing we need to be doing is treating African countries as equals. In the Western world, we're wedded to this lexicon of seeing ourselves as donor countries, but this donor-donee relationship is something that Africans are trying to break away from. There's a parochialism there that is not helpful to the relationship.

China sees Africa as, in many ways, where China was 30 or 40 years ago in its development. In China, Africans see what their future could be, a future of moving successfully from a poor, agrarian society to a more advanced, industrialized, urbanized society. We have to find ways to create common cause, not separate ourselves through language, and certainly not separate ourselves by painting China or even Russia exclusively as a malign influence whose only interest is preying on poor, susceptible African communities.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Were we caught by surprise in dealing with this issue? Time is not on our side, obviously, and we need to find a way. I believe the African Union is one of the representative organizations that carry on some business on behalf of the region. In the meantime, the African Union has been criticized for its inability to connect to and impact the lives of Africans directly in its action through better promoting Africa on the international stage.

We seem to be working mostly with the African Union. Is that correct? Is this the right strategy?

Mr. Cameron Hudson: I think the African Union has emerged as the preferred partner, but I think that what we're seeing now is the subcontinental level, the regional economic organizations, demonstrating a greater ability to organize themselves and a greater ability to impact their own region and to police their own region.

To the extent that it is possible, what we've seen with the African Union is that it tends to rise and fall on the quality of its chairmanship. When you have strong leaders from strong countries, when you have a President Ruto or a strong Nigerian or South African leader, or when President Kagame was the chairman of the AUC, the AU uses the reins and the secretariat of the AU to great effect, but when you have a president like the president of Comoros, the last chairman, or now the president of Mauritania, coming from weaker states, the quality of the governance that comes from AU leadership is not often there in the same way.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you recommend that Canada go on its own or go along with its G7 allies, especially the United States, Europe and Japan? Would that be a more effective strategy, re-entering Africa on a different ground, rather than what we have been doing in the past?

What would your recommendation or advice for Canada be?

• (1710)

Mr. Cameron Hudson: I can give you a window into how Washington approached it in part of the francophone African world.

Washington has been trying very discreetly to put distance between its policies and France's policies in francophone Africa. It has not served Washington particularly, and we haven't benefited from that distance. You saw just in the last month that Washington was invited to leave Niger.

I think Canada really needs to think about creating its own path in Africa.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to MP Zuberi next.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to start with Mr. Tiekou.

You talked about the AU's "Agenda 2063". You touched upon it at a very high level. Do you mind elaborating a bit on its strategy for us at this committee?

Dr. Thomas Kwasi Tiekou: For me, "Agenda 2063" is a very important document that opens up the window for anyone who really wants to engage with the African continent, because it's seen as Africa's strategic document.

Within Africa's "Agenda 2063", there are a few things that I think are very important for Canada to pay attention to.

Number one is the emphasis on education, especially if you read the second report. There's a clear emphasis on how they want to invite people to come and partner with them in providing good-quality education. This is what we have. We have some of the best educational institutions in the world—not just in Canada, but in the world. Africans who are educated in Canada, whether they are here or, particularly, when they go back home, underperform. You can

see it in the medical sciences, the humanities and everywhere. We can partner with them to be able to enhance that.

They emphasize the idea of transforming agriculture into a mechanized industry. We have the technology to be able to do it. It's roughly a hundred-billion dollar industry. We have the expectation to be able to leverage it and gain from it.

I could go on and talk about a number of other initiatives that are under "Agenda 2063". We just need to study that document and align it with our interests, and I think the Africans will welcome it.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I think that's really helpful. The point on education is really salient, especially since, from the testimony, we know that the average age on the continent is 18.

You touched upon "Agenda 2063". In terms of other strategies and frameworks—this is for all the witnesses—are there any that you want to highlight for us? Could you name them and identify salient elements of them, aside from what has already been mentioned in your testimony?

I open this up to all of the witnesses. We have about two and a half minutes, so I'll ask for brief responses.

Dr. Thomas Kwasi Tiekou: If I may go first, I just want to add a bit to it.

I've heard a number of other witnesses emphasize the importance of bringing the regional economic communities. I would also emphasize that for me, it will be very important to also have a permanent delegation to these regional economic communities.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: That's a very good way of looping into the testimony we heard last time.

Focusing on the five regional areas, do you think we should have a presence in each of them?

Dr. Thomas Kwasi Tiekou: We don't have enough. We're only present in about 17 of them, and we are spread too thin.

If we are strategically positioned in all of the regional economic communities and use them as a contact point for those countries, it will free us up to be able to then strategically position other missions in the areas that reflect our core interests. No one would complain about that.

With the way we have done it until now, everyone is asking why Canada is establishing a mission here, but not a mission there. We don't have the money to be everywhere. In almost 60% of African countries, we are not present. Strategic group positioning is the way to go.

Thank you so much.

• (1715)

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Mr. Hudson, you spoke about the challenges in the Sahel. Aside from what you already mentioned, do you want to add anything on how we can constructively contribute to addressing those challenges?

Mr. Cameron Hudson: I think it was Mr. Vircoulon who spoke about the Sahel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I'm sorry.

Mr. Vircoulon, do you want to make any comments?

Mr. Thierry Vircoulon: I think the three developments I talked about, namely the expansion of conflicts, democratic backsliding and reversal of alliances—

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: You've already given us that information in your testimony.

Do you have anything else to add?

Mr. Thierry Vircoulon: No, those are the three points I wanted to make about the region.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next, we'll go to Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. We appreciate it.

Mr. Vircoulon, we've seen a wave of military coups in the coup belt, which includes Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea.

What are the repercussions of these coups on the relations that western countries like France and Canada can have with these regions and on the influence that we can maintain or perhaps even improve?

Could you comment on that?

Mr. Thierry Vircoulon: When it comes to France and Canada, the impact on the two countries will be very different, obviously.

France has been very active, particularly on the military side, in the war against jihadism. As I said, diplomatic relations with Mali and Niger broke down and the French army left those countries.

With regard to Canada, I don't know what kind of relations it has had with those particular countries, but I think they have rejected France, the UN and the European Union. So we are seeing a rejection of western countries in general, including the United States.

I think that Canada obviously has to stand with its American and European allies in this situation. Therefore, they have to work together to define their position on the three military juntas we are talking about.

Mr. Yves Perron: Actually, that was the gist of my question, which I may have worded poorly at first.

To compensate in some way for this breakdown, Canada could perhaps play an auxiliary role as a third country that was not directly involved before the events.

You talk about coordination, but, in practical terms, should we try to have more diplomatic contacts, to increase our presence in the region?

Mr. Thierry Vircoulon: The simple truth is that I don't think those regimes are asking for any of that. They are in the process of forging military co-operation, and they will try to build economic co-operation with Russia.

At the moment, their approach is focused on the rejection of westerners as well as ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States.

Therefore, to take a position as a mediator or a dialogue facilitator with people who, at this time, are unwilling to co-operate does not seem diplomatically realistic.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you for your honest answer.

We're looking at how we can help play a role in the region to try to encourage the potential return of democracy.

Could you tell us about the situation in Senegal, a state about which you noted some good news following the presidential elections?

Couldn't Senegal be a place from where we could build bridges to the difficult areas?

Mr. Thierry Vircoulon: Indeed, Senegal is the good news spot, since President Macky Sall's attempt to remain in power during last year's election failed.

However, given that this country's new government is still being set up, I think we have to wait.

This is a government with a pan-Africanist agenda. We will therefore have to wait a few months to find out whether the country will take the political path of the neighbouring military juntas or maintain a moderate approach towards westerners. At this point, no one knows.

We have to wait for the government to establish itself and take its first diplomatic steps before we know what direction it will take.

• (1720)

Mr. Yves Perron: Right, and I don't want to be negative, but couldn't we be proactive and act before things go wrong?

Wouldn't we have a role to play in encouraging this government to move in the right direction and perhaps maintain good relations with the west?

Mr. Thierry Vircoulon: All western countries must play a diplomatic role, but not necessarily by being proactive with respect to the new Senegalese government currently being formed. That would probably be a little too pushy.

We have to wait for this government to take its first steps and make overtures, rather than actively approaching it, which could be interpreted by the government as a form of pressure.

Mr. Yves Perron: That's fine, thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

We will go next to Ms. McPherson.

You have five minutes.

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

I would like to thank all of the witnesses today for being with us.

This is such a large topic. There are so many things we can discuss.

We've heard so much about Sudan, and we've heard so much about the devastation that's happening in Sudan right now. Mr. Hudson, I know you wrote about the situation inside Sudan being desperate, and that there has been a "virtual collapse of state authority". Could you talk a little bit about what could have been done to prevent what's happening in Sudan? What could the international community, and Canada in particular, do to help build peace? What lessons should we be learning from the conflict that we see in Sudan right now?

Mr. Cameron Hudson: The conflict in Sudan, I think, was entirely predictable. You have an army that has been in need of reform for more than a generation, and it has been attacked by a militia of its own creation, which carried out a genocide in Darfur 20 years ago. What brought them to this battle was an effort to reform both and incorporate them into one new national army.

We could have seen this coming, I think, from much further away. We didn't take the steps, because I don't think there was an appropriate diplomatic coalition underpinning the negotiations that were going on between these two parties. They were left, in many respects, to their own devices to negotiate a way forward. Then, when there was little recourse but to fight, there was no one there to step in and prevent them from taking this step. I think there has been a lack of diplomatic attention leading up to this battle.

Of course, once the battle began, we were all caught a bit flat-footed. Most western embassies, in the early days of this conflict when we could have perhaps steered it on a different course, were all far too concerned with getting their own nationals and their own diplomats out of Sudan in the first two, three or four weeks of the fighting. When that happened, we lost our footing in the country. We lost our ability to impact decision-making by those leaders, and we have been in a diplomatic deficit ever since this conflict started.

We are only now beginning to try to gain back some momentum. There was a conference in Paris earlier this week. We reached the one-year anniversary.

We now have a special envoy from the United States. When I worked on Sudan 20 years ago, there were a dozen special envoys. There was a diplomatic tempo that was maintained over the course of many months. That is missing. I think many western countries have allowed gulf state actors to take on a greater role in trying not

to mediate but to direct this conflict in ways that benefit their interests. We need to see a reassertion of western human rights values around this conflict going forward if we hope to see it come to a positive conclusion, not just for our own interests but for the interests of the Sudanese people.

• (1725)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Tiekou, I saw you nodding as well. Do you have anything you would like to add to that?

Dr. Thomas Kwasi Tiekou: I think he has it spot-on.

What I would add is that we could have proactively gone behind the scenes with the African Union, because it has been engaged in that particular discussion. However, it was isolated in the international system, because there were so many tracks that were put in place. Number one would have been better engagement with the African Union, which could have actually forestalled some of them.

A broader point is the fact that we leave African countries without the most important thing, which is leadership. We leave it to nature to devise it. Just imagine setting aside the \$3 billion that we spend on the African continent, for example, specifically for training the next generation of African leaders. You would see what a difference that would make in Sudan. We have to be proactive rather than reactive. That is the reason we have to move away from firefighting. It's too expensive, but because doing the long-term thing is not the sexiest thing, we don't invest in it.

What I'm saying is that we have to reposition ourselves to be more proactive and prevent some of these things from happening.

Ms. Heather McPherson: So it's very much about the investment in diplomatic efforts. I think the idea of the diplomatic coalition and the gap that was there is very key.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Your time is over, Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Then that's it for that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to the next round. For this round, we have three minutes for the Conservatives and the Liberals.

Mr. Chong, you have three minutes.

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

I would like to ask Cameron Hudson a follow-up question to Ms. McPherson's question.

You mentioned that the most recent conflict in Sudan might have been headed off if there had been an appropriate western diplomatic coalition and intensive diplomatic work in the early weeks of that conflict. I would like you take a step back from that particular unconstitutional change in power. You referenced in your opening remarks nine *coups d'état* in Africa recently, seven I believe in the Sahel since 2020. What is driving these unconstitutional changes in power?

Mr. Cameron Hudson: Thank you for that question. That could be a Ph.D. dissertation, so let me try to give you a couple of reference points.

As I referenced in my testimony, I think one of the trends we are seeing is this spread between many aging leaders and a young population demanding...and seeing online, on social media, what freedom looks like, what democracy looks like, and what human rights look like and recognizing that they don't have those things where they are. The world has become much smaller through social media and the Internet, so as you have these aging leaders holding on to power more and more, either through judicial and legislative means or through outright *coups d'état* and the like, I think one factor is the social tensions that exist in the country.

I think there's also, more globally speaking, a rise of illiberalism. It's the influence and the power of alternative models that are being presented by Russia and by China to these countries. As we talk about African countries increasing their partnerships, wanting to increase their partnerships and not being dependent upon these kinds of donor relationships that have defined much of the post-independence period for them, they see in China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey and all these new partnerships different political models that they can also use as reference points.

I think we're seeing a dilution of our influence.

Hon. Michael Chong: Just quickly on this, does economic growth have anything to do with it? In the Arab Spring, the argument was made that contracting economies in the Arab world were responsible, but it seems to me that Africa is growing at a fairly rapid clip, at least most of Africa.

Does economic growth have something to do with it, or the negative growth that we're seeing in some of the African countries, like Libya, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea and some of the other countries?

• (1730)

Mr. Cameron Hudson: Yes. I think it's both the economic growth and the distribution of wealth in these countries. If you look at a conflict like the one in Sudan, what put people in the streets in Sudan was the failing economy.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go next to MP Khalid.

You have three minutes.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. I really appreciated what you all had to share with us today.

I really believe that with a post-colonial Africa the boundaries as drawn for all of these nations have a big role to play in how conflict is occurring and why that conflict seems to become more and more permanent, as Monsieur Vircoulon said when talking about the DRC.

I want to talk about the relationship of the global north with Africa and the multilateral partnerships. Canada, as I'm hoping you are aware, has a Canadian ombudsperson for responsible enterprise to manage humanitarian efforts and human rights while conducting enterprise.

Perhaps I would ask each of you to briefly comment on this. What role do you think Canada specifically can play to empower African nations and to find that balance of working with them, as opposed to being just a donor state?

We will start with Monsieur Vircoulon, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry Vircoulon: I'm not quite sure I understand the question when you talk about empowering these countries. I believe that these countries are not only autonomous, but also sovereign.

This is in fact reflected in the policy they are pursuing by multiplying partnerships; this is a rather disjointed policy that is not thought out in a very strategic way at the moment.

I think we need to refocus on converging interests and figure out what the converging interests are between Canada and certain specific African countries, not Africa, because Africa is basically 54 states. This convergence of interests is the basis on which we can open a dialogue and build a true partnership.

Right now I'm hearing a lot about partnerships, but I think there are many partnerships that lack partners. Building truly effective partnerships requires a real convergence of interests.

[English]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

Mr. Tiekou.

The Chair: Professor Tiekou, you have no more than 15 seconds to respond, please.

Dr. Thomas Kwasi Tiekou: Colonialism is part of it, but one single thing that is a major driver of instability and challenges on the African continent, apart from borders, is food. If you read the literature carefully, any time there's food insecurity, it's usually followed by political unrest, and political actors take advantage of it. If you fix food insecurity, chances are you are most likely going to have better stability.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, MP Khalid.

We now go to MP Perron.

You have a minute and a half.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Vircoulon, with respect to the Democratic Republic of Congo, or DRC, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or MONUSCO, has begun its gradual withdrawal from the country.

What is the final assessment on that, and what can we learn from it in terms of effectiveness going forward?

How is the problem in the Democratic Republic of Congo more a governance or security problem?

Mr. Thierry Vircoulon: MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping force in the DRC, does indeed have to withdraw at the end of the year or early next year. That's the timeline that has been set. We will see whether it is respected.

It is important to understand that this is part of a broader movement to end major peacekeeping missions in Africa, since the Malian government basically kicked out the blue helmets, and UN-AMID, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, came to an end in 2019.

There are now only two major missions left on the continent, that is, missions involving more than 10,000 men. One of these missions is in South Sudan and the other in the Central African Republic.

Both the Mali and the DRC missions are withdrawing at the request of these governments because they were very unhappy with the missions. I will not talk about the mission in Mali because it is a special case. However, with respect to MONUSCO, which was created in 1999, we are now in 2024 and there are currently seven million displaced persons in eastern Congo and about 150 armed groups.

So this is a negative track record. When you look at that record and you look at the cost, which is \$1 billion a year, you really get the picture.

• (1735)

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: For a final minute and a half, we go to MP McPherson.

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

Again, thank you to our witnesses for being here.

Mr. Tiekou, listening to your testimony today, I wonder if you could comment on the youth, peace and security agenda. It seems to me that having young people involved in peacekeeping is key here. That's what I'm hearing from you. Could you expand on that a little bit for us, please?

Dr. Thomas Kwasi Tiekou: I agree that having the youth in different aspects of African political life is going to be key. The median age is 18.8, for example, and yet the median age of African leaders is about 62. There's that mismatch. Having the youth in different aspects is going to be very important. Having them in peacekeeping operations can be very important. Especially having women in the peacekeeping operation can be very important. It can also be one way of distracting them from getting mobilized and joining armed forces or terrorist groups.

That peacekeeping piece can be very helpful, so I agree with you that getting the youth involved in that will be very helpful.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Certainly, we have a fantastic ambassador for women, peace and security, and it's been shown time and time again that peace is more stable and more likely to be maintained if women and young people are at the table. I think that's excellent.

Mr. Hudson, is there anything that you'd like to add in the very short time that I have left?

The Chair: Answer very briefly. You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Cameron Hudson: No, thank you.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

I think that's all I'll do, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Allow me to thank Professor Tiekou, Monsieur Vircoulon and Mr. Hudson. It was very insightful, and I know that all members of this committee are very grateful for your time and expertise.

We'll suspend the meeting for five minutes. We don't know when the voting will be taking place.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, before you suspend, there have been discussions among members from all the parties on this committee, and I think that, if you seek it, you'll find unanimous consent that the committee continue to hear from the next panel, that the committee suspend when there are five minutes remaining on the bells, and that the committee come out of suspension when Ms. McPherson has rejoined us virtually after she has attended to her duties as whip in the House of Commons.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's excellent.

The meeting stands suspended.

• (1735)

(Pause)

• (1745)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone.

I'd like to welcome the new witnesses. We're very grateful to have Professor Issiaka Mandé from Université du Québec à Montréal, and Mr. Landry Signé from the Brookings Institution.

Professor Mandé, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[Translation]

Mr. Issiaka Mandé (Professor, Université du Québec à Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you.

I would like to sincerely thank the committee for inviting me to come and talk about co-operation with the African continent.

As I said in my speaking notes, it is clear that envisaging co-operation with Africa means agreeing to deconstruct our vision of Africa and, above all, to take Africa as it is and not as it is not or as we would like it to be. This is very important. Otherwise, we have to deal with all kinds of prejudice.

The increasingly critical opinion of the west, in general, is also at play, as is an approach consistent with what can be called the opinion of the Global South.

Talking about co-operation with Africa means engaging in a strategy that is mutually beneficial, both for the northern countries and for the African countries.

There is also another very important factor. I think the previous speaker talked about it. It involves having a multilateral policy that takes into account the choices of the African continent, which are implemented as part of a global agenda, a comprehensive strategy known as Agenda 2063. It contains very clear objectives and expectations. We can come back to that.

As I said, this co-operation with Africa is rife with prejudices. We think of Africa as the continent of disasters, where there is little innovation and a lack of empowerment, a continent that always has its hand out for assistance at all levels.

As a result, little attention is paid to the expertise and wishes of African populations, even though there is very strong expertise on the continent.

Similarly, little attention is paid to the opinions and desires that are being expressed and increasingly measured, quantified, and captured through the tools offered by the Afrobarometer research network, among others. The network manages to conduct surveys in 39 countries, with a sample of 50,000 people, for example. In the case of Mali, I would say there are strategies in place to take public opinion into account.

That said, what can we focus on?

It's important to recognize that the medium and longer-term economic and social development challenges outlined by the country concerned must remain at the forefront of Canada's foreign policy. They must not be marginalized by security issues. Increasingly, the African continent is being viewed exclusively through that lens, when other policy areas, such as social policy and economic policy, also need to be considered.

Also, there's this tendency to isolate, I would say, regimes that emerge from coups d'état. They are being marginalized. Marginalizing a political system also means marginalizing populations. What these people are asking for, instead, is support with a view to effecting change in the medium term so they can keep the political space open. This is very important, because those behind the coups want to hold on to power at all costs.

Let's take the case of a country I know a little more about, Burkina Faso. In that country, there are two million internally displaced people. Very little is said about it. More than 4,500 schools have been closed.

How are people coping with safety and security problems? They're not souls; they're not waiting to be delivered. To tackle security issues, we have to adopt what we call in our jargon a bottom-up approach.

Taking a bottom-up approach means looking at how citizens perceive or experience security problems, which include armed attacks, organized crime and food insecurity.

Take Burkina Faso, for example. According to Global Terrorism Index estimates, 25% of terrorist acts worldwide in 2023 took place in Burkina Faso. That is a quarter of all terrorist acts.

There is also the work being done to consolidate the economic fabric of African countries. This also means reviewing bilateral treaties, for example. These favour private investors, through predatory agreements.

• (1750)

Bilateral investment treaties, for example, have direct political impacts in developing countries—when it comes to goods and services procurement, for instance. They also have long-term repercussions on the emergence of economic development policies.

Another element that provokes debates in Canada-Africa relations is the way in which Canadian mining companies conduct themselves on the continent. There is an African mining code, for example, but it is not always adhered to. Everyone knows that.

Canada has an ombud to make sure that mining companies are held accountable—

• (1755)

[English]

The Chair: Professor Mandé, I'm afraid that we've hit the six-minute mark, which means that you will have an opportunity to raise all the issues you meant to raise during questions from the members.

Prior to going to Mr. Signé for his opening remarks, I just want to inform you both that the bells are ringing, which means that the members need to cast a vote. We will suspend for approximately 12 minutes, and then we will resume with Mr. Signé's five minutes of opening remarks.

Thank you.

• (1755)

(Pause)

• (1815)

The Chair: We now resume.

Mr. Signé, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Please do look over every once in a while, because once you're very close to the five-minute mark, I will give you a signal, which means you should be wrapping things up within 10 to 15 seconds. The same applies when members are asking questions, because we have minutes allotted to each party. By the unanimous consent of all members, after we hear from you, Mr. Signé, we will open it up to questions, and each party will be provided five minutes.

Mr. Signé, please do proceed.

Prof. Landry Signé (Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution, As an Individual): Greetings, and thank you very much.

Chair Ali Ehsassi, Vice-Chair Michael Chong, Vice-Chair Stéphane Bergeron and distinguished members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, I am incredibly honoured and grateful for the unique opportunity to testify on Canada's approach to Africa.

I'm Professor Landry Signé, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, but also executive director and full professor at the Thunderbird School of Global Management and co-chair of the World Economic Forum's regional action group for Africa.

It is time for Canada to claim the place it deserves in Africa as many traditional and emerging global powers are racing to capture Africa's tremendous economic potential—the next world growth market.

I would like to share a few key trends. By 2030, the combined consumer spending in Africa will exceed \$6.7 trillion U.S. for 1.7 billion people. By 2050, Africa's combined consumer and business spending will exceed \$16.12 trillion U.S. for 2.53 billion people, and by the end of this century, Africa will have about 40% of the global population. In 2024, 12 of the world's fastest-growing economies will be based in Africa. Their continent is the second-fastest growing region in the world.

Another trend is expanding the global and continental partners of Africa. With the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area, Africa is now home to the largest free trade area in the world. The AfCFTA could lift about 30 million Africans out of poverty, increase the income of 68 million other Africans, increase exports by at least \$560 billion, and generate more than \$450 billion of potential gains for African economies by 2035 as per the World Bank study.

Canada has sustained a competitive advantage to partner with Africa and advance Canadian trade and investment with the continent, while meeting the majority of Africans' prosperity, thus achieving mutual prosperity.

I will be happy to expand on specific sectors during the conversation, but let me just finish by sharing a few specific recommendations.

It's important for Canada to develop a new type of commercial diplomacy, identifying and disseminating the tremendous African potential sector by sector. Canadian corporations deserve to better understand the dynamics in Africa and the opportunity present on the continent. Canada can also leverage its higher education to provide technical training and re-skilling to bridge the digital gap. Similarly, it is possible to capitalize on the African diaspora.

I was born in Cameroon, but I'm also proud to be Canadian. I was a recipient of the Banting fellowship for the best and brightest post-doctoral scholars. Canada has given me a phenomenal opportunity, and most Africans from the diaspora are grateful and willing to give back to Canada.

In conclusion, by acting promptly and forging transformative partnerships aligned with African values, Canada has the opportunity not only to advance its own interests, but to contribute to the transformation of Africa, whether in transport, logistics, pharmaceuticals, agriculture or automotive industry, among others.

I will pause now. I'm looking forward to a lively conversation.

Thank you so much again for offering me this opportunity.

● (1820)

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

We now go to MP Epp.

You have five minutes for your questions.

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

Thank you to our witnesses today.

As has come out from several sectors, this testimony is showing that Canada is definitely behind. Just using one measure, trade, the U.S. has 1,800 deals in 49 countries and about \$85 billion in trade. China has \$257 billion—these are all 2022 numbers—and Canada, I believe, has around \$9.4 billion in trade, so we have to play catch-up. This study is timely.

I am concerned—and I'm open to being challenged—that in our attempt to develop a strategy, we will become too broad-based.

I'll start with a question to both of you. Should Canada, as we develop this strategy, be focused and strategic or be much broader, trying to get to 54 countries and multiple sectors? There's trade, security and development. Where should we go for an overall approach?

Let's start with Professor Mandé, and then we'll go to Professor Signé.

[Translation]

Mr. Issiaka Mandé: That is a very interesting question, because Canada's expertise is recognized in certain African regions. It would be good to have a strategy that would take into account the investments made in certain regions, especially since Canada's expertise in certain industrial sectors is recognized.

I believe that a combination of both strategies would be the best approach. Obviously, spreading across 54 states is not the best way to go because that would spread resources too thin.

I go back to the fact that Africans already defined what they consider to be priority areas in Agenda 2063. Agenda 2063 sets seven expectations with clearly defined targets, including regarding infrastructure and roads.

Canada can take an interest in the road between Dakar and Djibouti or in rail lines, but we have seen that China, for example, has chosen to—

[English]

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt, but before I go to Professor Signé, I am going to ask one follow-up question. Where is that sweet spot, that intersection between the AU 2063 document and Canada's expertise? We have expertise in agriculture and the extractive industries. Where is that intersection with what Africans want?

Give a very short answer, if you can, so I can give Professor Signé an opportunity as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Issiaka Mandé: The intersection is in infrastructure and mines, which we know very well. For example, the Inga hydro dam is considered to be very important to meet energy needs and for the self-sufficiency of not only central Africa, but southern Africa as well.

Canada has expertise in that regard, with Hydro-Québec and Hydro One. That is a very high priority sector.

There are other elements—

- (1825)

[English]

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you. I'm sorry, but my time is limited and I want to be fair.

Go ahead, Professor Signé.

Prof. Landry Signé: Thank you so much.

It's an extremely important question. I think the focus should be trade and investment. African countries need more trade and investment, and I think that is what provides the best mutual interests between African and Canadian corporations, but also citizens.

Let me give a very specific example about the sector. The African Continental Free Trade Area is creating a single market, so now we are not speaking about 55 countries; we are speaking about one single market. As of now, 54 of the 55 members of the African Union have signed the African Continental Free Trade Area, so that's one dimension.

To be specific about some sectors, in the automotive industry, for example, Africa will need between four and five million vehicles by 2035, which means that about 20 additional full-size manufacturing plants could be created on the continent in the automotive industry only. Speaking about agriculture or the agri-industry, here, too, the market is projected to reach \$1 trillion U.S. by 2030, and Canada also has a phenomenal advantage there. On transport and logistics, the continent will need, for African trade, approximately two million new trucks, 100,000 rail wagons, 250 aircraft and more than 100 vessels by 2030.

Those are areas where Canada has a sustained competitive advantage and where it is possible to start today, not tomorrow. It is possible to engage in deal engagement today. As long as we respect the rule of origin, starting in a given country means that the entire continent could deliver it.

I'm happy to expand on those. My latest book, *Unlocking Africa's Business Potential*, shares many of those trends.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to Madame Chatel.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

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

Welcome to our committee, Mr. Mandé and Mr. Signé.

Mr. Signé, I will continue along the same lines.

In your book *Unlocking Africa's Business Potential*, you indicate that agriculture is a sector of interest for those who want to increase commerce with the African continent. You also talk about risks.

Can you tell us about the risks related to the sectors that you mentioned?

Please be brief, because I have to more questions for you.

Prof. Landry Signé: Several risks have to be acknowledged when it comes to Africa. One of the most important ones is the political risk. In many countries, even those where it was least expected, there have been coups d'état and disruptions in the constitutional order. Risks of that nature must be taken into account when engaging in economic relationships in Africa.

There is also the issue of the cost of doing business, especially when it comes to infrastructure and transportation. These costs are variables that have to be considered. There are also administrative delays. The amount of documentation required to import or export anything is also a risk to be factored in.

Finally, there is the risk of default. There are possible solutions to these types of risks, however, like country risk insurance, that can address situations like these.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: You mentioned the African free-trade zone, stating that it had the potential to lift more than 30 million people out of extreme poverty. The World Bank even talks about 50 million people in its 2022 report. You also said that the free-trade zone could increase revenues.

What impact would increasing people's economic security have on the future of the continent regarding peace and security?

Would Africa become an environment favourable to prosperity?

Is that free-trade zone a solution that we should all support more strongly?

Prof. Landry Signé: Yes, absolutely.

First off, thank you. I am impressed that you have read some of my writings before this meeting. It is a great honour.

One of the founders of the Thunderbird School of Global Management said:

- (1830)

[*English*]

“Borders frequented by trade seldom need soldiers.”

[*Translation*]

That means that trade between two countries reduces the likelihood of conflict. I share that opinion.

On the one hand, to successfully implement a free-trade zone, it is important to have peace and security. Otherwise, investors will be less likely to participate.

On the other hand, strengthening relationships through trade reduces the likelihood of war or conflict, which is lowest when common interests are at stake.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I am nearing the end of my time and I wanted your opinion on another topic.

You have a wealth of experience in sustainable development. You have advised world leaders.

How would you qualify the impact of climate change on geopolitical stability in Africa?

Prof. Landry Signé: Climate change, if not a direct cause of geopolitical instability, has a major impact, especially in the Sahel region.

One of my colleagues and I published a paper on this in the Brookings Institution. I am also the main author of the recent report by the United Nations Development Programme, or UNDP, which explains the links between climate change and the sustainable development solution.

It is true that solving issues related to climate change will reduce the risk of conflict, among other things, because climate change has direct impacts, including on well-being and the availability of resources.

Thank you.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Signé.

We next go to Mr. Perron.

You have five minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I wish to thank both witnesses for being with us today. Thank you for making time for us.

Professor Mandé, you mentioned equal relationships and exchanges that would be beneficial to both parties. You also mentioned African immigration to Canada. We know that it can often create a disadvantage for one of the parties. Right now, for example, we are recruiting health care workers in Africa at a time when Africa is sorely lacking in these types of workers.

How could immigration policies be adjusted? Is that situation creating frustration in Africa?

How would you define a win-win immigration policy?

Mr. Issiaka Mandé: Thank you for the question. I also happen to be a “migratologist”.

Immigration and development, as we understand them today, should be wins both for the immigrant and the state that they are migrating from, because it has invested in the immigrant's education, and for the state that they are migrating to, because it is interested in the expertise brought to the community. That is how a win-win strategy should be considered.

As for the mobility of health care personnel, I would refer you to studies conducted by the World Health Organization that show that the answer is not to displace populations trained for the country of origin's community, but rather—as was done in Ghana and Zimbabwe—to have schools dedicated to training nurses for northern countries.

African countries and southern countries in general have their own public health strategies. People who are displaced from their home country have to be retrained when they come here. We need to have a strategy for training health care personnel destined for northern countries. There is no shortage of young African candidates.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

Regarding training and students in Canada, I want to talk about a specific issue with delivering student visas or study permits for francophone students from African countries. The refusal rate for these students is unusually high, which the government has actually acknowledged.

What has been the impact of this in Africa? Was this poorly received and did it create tensions, or have people adapted to the situation?

• (1835)

Mr. Issiaka Mandé: Yes, it has created frustration.

Personally, I took an interest in this issue at the university, and I was very involved with the education commission. The frustrations also come from the image of Canada.

In my opinion, there is an opportunity to seize, to the extent that African students are disaffected with France, which is the traditional host country for these students. The francophone students were ready to come to Quebec.

The narrative that we often hear also needs to change. These international students are not taking anything away from anyone. Foreign students pay \$2,500 per course at UQAM, whereas Quebec students pay \$400, which is normal because they pay their taxes here.

That said, the difference also makes it possible to give scholarships to Quebec students. That is—

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you.

I am sorry to interrupt. We agree on that, and we too were very shocked by the situation.

At the same time, there has also been a decrease in Canada's investments in the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

Ultimately, by investing less in the francophonie, are we not sending the message that we are gradually withdrawing from it and that we do not really want more francophone students? How is it all perceived?

Mr. Issiaka Mandé: It is not well perceived.

In addition, there is a governance problem within the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. Quebec and Canada have published reports on this subject, following the successive departure of secretaries general—I believe that is what they are called. Otherwise, Canada was indeed a leader in the francophonie. I would say there is a role for Canada to have.

Mr. Yves Perron: It is a good way to be present in Africa and to have some influence.

Mr. Issiaka Mandé: Yes, for sure. There is a problem.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We now go to Ms. McPherson.

You have the final five minutes.

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

Thank you all very much today for being accommodating for me to run down and be part of the voting.

I also wanted to thank our witnesses for being here today. It's been very interesting.

Mr. Signé, I'm going to start with you. I want to give my greetings to my colleague John McArthur. I know you have an opportu-

nity to work with him. I appreciate your wearing the SDG pin today as well. It's lovely to see.

One of the things you have written about, Mr. Signé, is the idea of fragility: how we identify fragile states and how we respond to fragile states. One thing that was very interesting to me is that you have observed that some of the fragile states are among the lowest recipients of aid. Why is that? Should it be that way? How do we fix it? Canada has an ODA act. Our dollars are meant to go to helping those most in need.

Prof. Landry Signé: Thank you so much for the opportunity to engage. I will say hello to John. His office is not far from mine.

That's an extremely important question, because the most fragile countries are also the ones where we have the highest concentration of poverty, especially extreme poverty, and where extreme poverty is also likely to grow in the coming decades.

Not providing resources to those countries is quite alarming. Part of the reason is lack of awareness. There is less political momentum and fewer consequences of inaction, because the broader public typically cares less about those. I like to use the Kingdon approach to public policy around the agenda where the problem, the policy and the politics are aligned. The problem, the solution and the awareness of the public align. That's one point.

In terms of solutions, in the book chapter you are referring to, I propose a city-based approach versus most of the approaches that consider the country from a central dimension. Many of the problems are based either in the city or in specific regions, and this allows more effective targeting. I also propose a business-based approach to solving fragility, because by focusing only on public players, who are also often part of the challenges, we leave behind citizens, especially entrepreneurs, younger people and women, who represent about 80% of cross-border trade, among others, and who are also the most affected in those areas. Those are the two key dimensions.

The third one is to focus on implementation. A lot of policies are developed and typically copied from one country to another or from one program to another without sufficiently taking into consideration the complexity of the context, including in the same country or in the same region. What will work in Mali may not work in Burkina Faso. Let's say in Cameroon, what would work in the northern part of Cameroon may not work in the southern part, in Bamenda. What works in Douala might not work in Bamenda. It's important to contextualize, not just at the continental level or the country level but also within the country level.

• (1840)

Ms. Heather McPherson: I think one of the things to keep in mind as well is that failing to meet the needs of fragile states makes them much more likely to descend into conflict in many circumstances, which of course then spirals and spreads to other parts of the region.

From the Government of Canada we had heard, and we had been excited, that there was going to be a strategy or a policy for Africa. Then we were told there was going to be a framework. The Global Affairs Canada staff, earlier in this study, told us it is now an approach.

Does that worry you? Does that degrading of what we're looking at from the Government of Canada worry you?

Prof. Landry Signé: I think it is extremely important to have a clear policy for the Africa strategy, with a specific timeline, specific goals and indicators of success.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

I think that's my time.

The Chair: On that note, I will thank Professor Mandé and Dr. Signé for their valuable time and expertise. We're very grateful you could join us. In particular, Dr. Signé, it's great to have your Canadian voice emanating from south of the border. Thank you very much.

We will be sending you the report as soon as it is ready.

I want to inform all the members that the deadline for the upcoming study on the current situation in Iran is April 22, 2024. Should all of you agree, we want to extend that to April 29. Do we have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The second thing I wanted to inform you about is that Nutrition International has requested a meeting for His Excellency Dr. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, former president of Tanzania, and Dr. Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, who is the former prime minister of Niger. The two of them will be here in Ottawa from April 29 to May 2. If anyone is interested in being part of that meeting, please do send me an email.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: On another point, I'm wondering if you could task the analysts with preparing a work plan for the Iran study.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Is that okay?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The meeting stands adjourned.

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