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Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi



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• (1555)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 109 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Before we begin, I'd like to ask all members and other in-person participants to consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. Please take note of the following preventive measures to protect the health and safety of all participants, including, in particular, the interpreters. Only use an approved black earpiece. Keep your earpiece away from all microphones at all times. When you are not using your earpiece, place it face down on the sticker that has placed on the table for this purpose. Please consult the cards on the table for guidelines. The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between the microphones and reduce chances of feedback from an ambient earpiece.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members as well as witnesses. Before speaking, please do wait until I recognize you by name. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available.

In accordance with our routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I'm informed that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of our meeting.

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

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses. We're very fortunate to have here with us three ambassadors. We have Mr. Michael Callen, who is our ambassador in Algeria. We have Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré, the permanent observer to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. As well we have Mr. Christopher Thornley, our high commissioner in the Republic of Kenya.

I should add, just for the benefit of the members, that we hoped that we could also hear from Ambassador Lorraine Anderson, from Cameroon, but unfortunately she thought she had the right headphones, but it came to light that they were not appropriate, so she will not be joining us today.

For the ambassadors, I understand that Ambassador Diendéré will be speaking on behalf of all three ambassadors. Subsequent to that, when there are questions put to you by members and you're running out of time, I will hold this card up, meaning you should tie things up within 10 or 15 seconds.

Ambassador Diendéré, welcome. The floor is yours, and you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[Translation]

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré (Permanent Observer to the African Union and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, I am honoured to appear before you today, even at this late hour for us. It is 11:00 p.m. for me and 9:00 p.m. for my colleague Michael Callan. We are nonetheless very happy to be here to meet with the members of the committee.

My name is Ben Marc Diendéré. I am Canada's Permanent Observer to the African Union, and I am the first person to hold this position full-time. With me this evening are my colleagues Michael Callan, Ambassador of Canada to Algeria, and Christopher Thornley, High Commissioner for Canada in the Republic of Kenya and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and to the United Nations Environment Programme.

Mr. Chair, we are testifying today just two days after World Africa Day. It is truly an honour to be here. I am sure that we have the support of the 25 other Canadian heads of mission on the African continent.

[English]

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, my remarks today will briefly outline the opportunity and challenges vis-à-vis advancing Canada's engagement with African countries and institutions. My colleagues and I look forward to answering your questions.

On the opportunity, Africa is forecast to be the world's second-fastest growing region in 2024, after Asia. It has one of the fastest-growing middle classes, providing a source of dynamics and vast market potential. The wealth gap remains deep, with 60% of the world's extreme poor living in sub-Saharan Africa.

[Translation]

The development gap remains deep on this continent. The continent's demographic youth bulge—70% of sub-Saharan Africa is under the age of 30—represents an opportunity, but also poses challenges. For example, the lack of adequate, market-relevant skills and employment opportunities is an impediment to their meaningful contribution to economic development.

[English]

The impact of climate change, peace, and security challenges heighten vulnerabilities, particularly among women and youth, threatening the well-being of African young people.

African countries and institutions are proactively exploring various options to address their national, regional, and continental challenges. They seek mutually beneficial partnerships that will meet their needs and empower them to address their own challenges.

They are diversifying and forging stronger relationships with global economic powers, like China and India, and partners like Turkey and the Gulf states. They are doing so bilaterally and through multilateral fora, such as BRICS and G20.

Within the rapidly changing global environment, and in response to calls by our African partners, Global Affairs Canada is redefining its engagement with this continent to better capitalize on mutual interests with African countries and institutions, and support win-win partnerships.

My appointment as Canada's first dedicated permanent observer to the African Union signals an intention to broaden and deepen Canada's engagement on the continent, and our interest in enhancing partnerships with the African Union and its organizations.

As the African Union is the pre-eminent organization on the continent, our engagement with it promotes our mutual interests in trade, investment, democracy, human rights and human development. Together, we are exploring new and better ways of working, including with the private sector, to address development challenges and other continental priorities like peace and security.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Canada's overall engagement with Africa is guided by the African Union's strategic vision for the continent as captured in Agenda 2063, the cornerstone of the continent's future. Agenda 2063 also introduces its continental free trade area pilot project. Our ongoing series of high-level dialogues with the African Union have proven to be a platform where our shared priorities can be discussed and common approaches can be established.

The most recent of these dialogues took place in Addis Ababa earlier this month. Canada's Minister of International Development co-chaired with African Union Commission leadership discussions on how to evolve our international assistance to better respond to the needs and priorities identified by African countries and institutions.

[English]

In April, Canada welcomed Bankole Adeoye, the commissioner for political affairs, peace and security in Ottawa. He met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly, Global Affairs officials, and appeared before the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

While our partnership with the African Union is important for the reasons I have described, we must always recognize that Africa is a vast continent made up of 54 different countries with diverse economies, cultures, and languages. African countries and institutions have been very clear about their interests and priorities.

At the continental level, the African Union Agenda 2063 outlines a long-term vision, focusing on sustainable and inclusive economic growth and good governance.

At the national level, as my colleagues can attest, national plans are in place. In-between these units of governance are the regional economic communities who have their own strategic plans.

[Translation]

African countries and institutions have been clear about their interests and priorities.

[English]

What I hear from country representatives at the African Union, and what our heads of missions hear through our vital bilateral relationships—

The Chair: I would ask that you wrap it up soon, because we're considerably over the time limit.

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: —is that African countries and institutions want more Canadian engagement, more investment, more dialogue and more partnerships based on mutual interests.

Finally, we have been following the proceedings of the Senate and House committees as they study these issues. Your deliberations are very timely and noticed. We look forward to the outcomes, and working with you to advance Canadian interests, including mutually beneficial economic prosperity.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

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

We will start off with MP Aboultaif.

You have six minutes, sir.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for appearing today.

Monsieur Diendéré, you took on your role in June 2023.

How would you describe the relationship between Canada and the African Union?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you very much.

My last 12 months have been dedicated to consolidating the Canadian presence on both levels, the African Union and the AUC. Our relations are very good with these two institutions right now. There is room for improvement, but we are on track to do something very good with the African Union right now.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: When you were appointed, you must have received a mandate.

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Yes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Would you be able to share that with the committee, please?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: The mandate was to strengthen the relationship with the African Union.

• (1605)

[*English*]

We need to deepen this relationship and engage with all the organizations in the AU. Part of the mandate will be to conduct the three dialogues we're working on right now and make sure that we connect with Agenda 2063 of the African Union and also to mobilize people here in Canada around the country around the strategic view of African development.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Which areas, in your opinion, do we need to focus on? Africa is a big continent with 54 countries and it's very hard for us to be all over the place. Which areas do we need to focus on, or in which areas do we need to improve our relationship to be as effective as we wish to be?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: The experience here is very different when you're sitting in Canada and watching what is happening in Africa.

Right now they have their agenda. Agenda 2063 is one of their flagships for strategic planning for the continent. They have maybe 1,000-plus projects around agriculture, energy and education. I must also add the infrastructure project.

The focus for Canada has to be on the three dialogues we're working on right now. Education is one of them. Agriculture will be, for sure, one of the subjects we're following in these three dialogues. I will say that climate change is another focus, which means that we have to be very aware of all of these green projects and those projects that can leverage women and youth on the continent.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do we have any leads on any of these projects that you can share with us?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: It's too early for me to share the specific program, because we're leaning right now on Pan-Af and development programs. Some of them have been running for two or five years.

I must say that, on the women's side, we have a project to strengthen entrepreneurship for women. We're doing it with the pan-African countries, with three or four countries at the same time. We have projects in the energy sector also.

Right now I'm in Nairobi, because there is an annual meeting of the African Development Bank, and 20-plus Canadian enterprises are here in the energy sector and also the agriculture sector

I must say that agriculture, education and all of these projects on the green economy are very important for us. Some of our projects and partners here are doing very well. We need to focus—

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you feel that we need to focus our attention on certain countries? If so, what countries do you think we are the closest with at the moment, from your involvement and your experience in the region?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: I will ask my colleague to help me on this, but my first answer is that it's too early in the multilateral environment to choose one or two countries. We have a sense that some countries are doing very well right now, and they can be a pilot for us.

I'll let my colleague—

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I'll go to Mr. Thornley—I met with him in 2018 in Nigeria—to have him weigh in on this question, please.

Mr. Christopher Thornley (High Commissioner for Canada in the Republic of Kenya, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much, MP Aboultaif. I remember our meeting very well. It's good to see you again.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, please.

Mr. Christopher Thornley: In terms of focusing on countries, we know the ones that are doing well. I live in one of them, Kenya, right now. I could name a couple of others. There are models where the economy is more advanced, and I think that's where we can establish a foothold.

Thank you.

• (1610)

The Chair: Before we go to the next member, Madam McPherson, do you have your hand up? Is that a point of order?

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): I do. It's a point of information, actually.

Are we not hearing from the other two witnesses? Perhaps I missed that, but is there only one speech?

The Chair: As I noted at the outset, our ambassador to Cameroon was unable to join us. She thought she had the right headset, but it subsequently came to light that it does not meet the specifications.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Will Mr. Thornley and Mr. Callan not be providing comments?

The Chair: They will, but the opening remarks were for Mr. Diendéré alone. We can pose questions to all three ambassadors.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll next go to MP Oliphant. You have six minutes.

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

Thank you, ambassadors and high commissioners, for joining us today. I don't know where I'm looking, because you're all on the screen. It is really great to be with you today and to thank you for your work representing Canada.

I'll start with our permanent observer to the African Union, Monsieur Diendéré. What was your biggest surprise—I'm going off script here—in assuming your position in Addis Ababa?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant, and for your last visit to us. It was very helpful to engage with the African Union.

One of my big surprises was the bias that people in the African Union still have toward Canada. They still love us. They need us. They're really enjoying our presence. The brand is still there. We have a couple of things to do, but the brand of Canada is still out there.

They see us as an enabler. They see how we can be very interesting for them. I must say, yes, the biases toward Canada with all of my interlocutors are still positive.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: High Commissioner Thornley, it's good to see you here again as well. This isn't the biggest surprise, but you are really one of our specialist representatives on the continent. You've been in Ghana, Togo, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, and now you're in Kenya.

What do you see as the biggest challenge in deepening Canada's relationships with individual countries? I don't mean with the AU as such, but in individual bilateral relations. What are our biggest opportunity and our biggest challenge?

Mr. Christopher Thornley: Thank you, PS Oliphant.

I think our biggest challenge is probably developing more interest and engagement from Canada, whether it be from companies and civil society, or in government-to-government relations. There are many distractions in the world right now, and many challenges. It's very important not to lose sight that Africa is such a growing continent, with many countries that have tremendous potential and others that have serious need. I also cover Somalia, and that truly is a country in desperate need of continued humanitarian and development assistance.

We need whatever can be done to increase engagement. I have a background in trade development as well, and I was very pleased to see in the last fall economic statement—and, I believe, in the budget—measures to increase risk appetite, for example, from Crown corporations such as the EDC and CCC, which will help de-risk some commercial activities.

Of course, we have increased people-to-people engagement and all kinds of other engagement, which are so required to develop our relationships with African countries.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: You used my magic word that I use a lot: "de-risk".

I want to turn to Ambassador Callan.

You, in Algeria, are living in a difficult neighbourhood. It's a relatively calm country, but it's surrounded by Mali, Niger, and Libya and is not far from Chad and Burkina Faso.

Tell me a little bit about the security situation, both in southern Algeria and in your neighbourhood, and whether you are seeing any changes for the good or for the worse.

Mr. Michael Callan (Ambassador of Canada to Algeria, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): It's true, and it's an important observation that the security situation in the neighbourhood is deteriorating.

I think that's an important, objective observation that the trends are negative across the Sahel. They're alarming for us. They're alarming for our Algerian partners with the extent of the border that they maintain with Mali and Niger. They're seeing the direct effect of that insecurity through increased flows of irregular migration.

That's a concern for a number of reasons. There's the immediate potential to destabilize the political equilibrium in Algeria, as well as in some of our other North African countries. Also, I'd suggest that, in those insecure contexts, it creates new openings for other actors to try to pronounce themselves, and they have. That's been a concern that we and Algeria, for example, share very dearly.

• (1615)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I have one minute.

With regard to the regional economic communities, High Commissioner Thornley and Ambassador Callan, do you have any comments on how Canada should relate to ECOWAS, IGAD and the other economic communities?

Mr. Christopher Thornley: With the regional economic communities, we have to recognize that they have some strengths and many weaknesses. The parts are bigger than the whole, but there are opportunities to work with them.

For example, when Ms. Joly was here, she engaged with IGAD on Sudan. There are still opportunities where we may be able to carve out a little bit of a leadership role for IGAD to play in that area. It's the same with the east African community on issues around eastern DRC. There are areas where we can work with them and perhaps guide them to pinpointing and finding positive solutions. We also have to be realistic that they are generally not terribly strong organizations.

When I was in Nigeria, I dealt with ECOWAS. I could see them, for example, be quite successful in Gambia when there was instability there because they made a concerted decision to move forward on it. However, in other times, they can be underwhelming in their responses.

The Chair: Mr. Callan, I would ask you to respond to that question in subsequent rounds because we are out of time for this round.

We next go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

Thanks very much to our witnesses.

Thank you for being available and being here at such a late hour, and for your comments.

I think in his remarks, Mr. Diendéré clearly illustrated the importance of Africa to Canada and the opportunities it offers. Canada still needs to organize its ideas in terms of what it intends to do. Following the publication of Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy there was discussion of an African strategy, which then became a framework and then a policy. When senior government officials testified here, no one really knew what it was. As a result, we have the impression that the government is governing or playing it by ear when it comes to Africa. According to the senior officials at Global Affairs Canada, a broad consultation has been held, in Canada and Africa, to learn more about opportunities for engagement on the continent. That consultation apparently ended on July 31 last year.

My question is very simple. Was the Canadian diplomatic corps in Africa asked to participate in those consultations?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

Yes, we participated in consultations. Personally, I was new to my position, so I was consulted about what I knew about these issues. I know that efforts are being made both here and there to complete the process quickly.

To be honest, the question at this point is more about whether we are keeping pace with Africa. Consider what is happening in the African Union. As you know, this is a time of great transition. The entire leadership there is changing. Canada is preparing to submit a favourable decision. The decision concerning the name might come up here and there in the discussions. I have followed that and heard it, but my observations on the ground tell me that we are not the only ones considering how we are going to define our engagement with this continent.

I have held discussions with very high-level diplomats from very well-informed countries who are nonetheless also considering how to position themselves and how to define the entire approach they want to undertake with Africa.

This is nothing new for us and it will not be the last time we find the appropriate tone. I am very pleased that we are taking the time to work on this, because this situation may give rise to a lot of disappointments or concerns, particularly regarding the present state of our relationship with the continent.

• (1620)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much.

In fact, a number of witnesses have given us to understand that there are high expectations in Africa. There seems to be disenchantment with the former colonial powers, France in particular. In some cases, there seem to be concerns about states that are tending toward wanting to occupy the ground left vacant by the countries—

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: On a point of order, Mr. Bergeron, I apologize, but there is no translation. I'm sorry to interrupt.

The Chair: Should we try this again? Do you want to resume?

Is it working now? Excellent.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I was saying that there seemed to be growing resistance on the continent to countries that are determined to occupy the ground left vacant by the western powers. Russia and China come to mind. So there are high expectations of Canada.

Do you think Canada has lived up to Africa's expectations so far?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

I can't answer for Africans. However, I can tell you about how they received Canada's decision to appoint a permanent observer.

So that committee members are aware, I would like to point out that only five countries have two representatives in Africa: one who is dedicated to bilateral relations and another who handles relations with the continent, that is, multilateral relations. In addition to Canada, they are the United States, Italy, Switzerland and Japan. So we are part of a very small contingent of people the Africans are observing who they think might make a satisfactory commitment to the projects they propose.

I still think, although I have not done a scientific survey, that Canada's reputation remains good. These people have expectations of us and they are aiming high, but Canada's experience covers a number of sectors, including the well-known ones of education and agriculture. I would even mention energy. It is very clear to people that Canada has expertise that it can apply on the ground. Personally, I am very confident in the relationship that is developing with the African Union at present.

When it comes to the countries with which Africa has become disenchanted, we have no role to play, apart from observing clearly and making sure we do not make the same mistakes as the other countries when they decided to work with the African Union and its institutions and with the continent itself.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Very good.

[English]

The Chair: You only have six seconds remaining, Mr. Bergeron.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: However, Mr. Chair, I would point out that I lost a few seconds because of the little interpretation problem.

[English]

The Chair: Sure, we will give you 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you. So right off, I am just going to outline the subject in anticipation of the next round of questions.

The francophonie is one of the factors from which we can see that Africa is a land of opportunities and holds great promise for the future. There is a belief that, thanks to Africa, French could be the language that experiences the strongest growth in the next few decades. However, Jean-Louis Roy told us when he appeared before the committee that in order for this to happen, schools must be built to match the strong demographic growth Africa is experiencing, and that without French schools, the languages learned will obviously be Arabic, Urdu, Wolof or Swahili, but not French.

Be prepared, gentlemen; I will be coming back to that question in the second round.

[*English*]

The Chair: We next go to MP McPherson.

You have six minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

I'd also like to thank all the witnesses for being here today and sharing their expertise with us. Thank you for your service, certainly.

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

You spoke about the power of the African Union. We know now that the African Union has increasingly recognized that, when they vote together and work together in multilateral fora, there is better opportunity. I am wondering, from your perspective, whether Canada has recognized that sufficiently. We've seen, for example, the Security Council seat. We were not successful, in part, because countries within the continent of Africa did not support our bid.

I'm wondering if our approach is somewhat dated in terms of how we interact with the African Union. I know this is a difficult question for you to answer, but it's certainly one I want to ask.

• (1625)

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you for the question.

I'll try to answer this in French to make sure I am—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes, please do.

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Yes, let me do that.

It is important to notice that, right now on the continent, it's not just about the influence. It's about who can bring something different to the table. Yes, things are changing.

[*Translation*]

Things are changing quickly when it comes to the francophonie, the Portuguese-speaking world and the Commonwealth.

[*English*]

All three groups are playing on the continent. You can add to this the Gulf States, India, China and Russia.

[*Translation*]

This is what is happening in Africa right now. These three language groups do not judge Canada. I have never been judged about anything. Things are actually changing very fast on the continent. Between the time I arrived and now, the African Union has joined the G20 and Ethiopia and several countries have joined BRICS.

Things are changing so fast that even the dynamic on the continent needs to be monitored constantly.

Has Canada recognized this? I think it has, because at the moment, all our efforts are directed toward the language communities. We will come back to this with Mr. Bergeron. All our discussions have strengthened our multilateralism and the rule of law. Those are how we will remain relevant.

Africa's influence does continue to be very strong.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I'm going to give you a bit of an example of something I could perhaps get some information on.

What we're seeing across many countries is increasing conflict. Obviously, everyone is quite worried about the conflict we're seeing escalating in Sudan and the impact on civilians.

How is Canada supporting the African Union in building peace in Sudan, for example? We know that Canada, in terms of peacekeepers, is not really present on the continent at all, anymore. How are we providing some of those services to the AU? How are we supporting that peace-building initiative?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you for your question, Ms. McPherson.

We are at all the discussion tables, in particular those in IGAD, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. We are around the table with our partners from the United States or Great Britain, to strengthen the message of peace. We have experts on the subject of Sudan who are monitoring and supporting the African Union authorities at present. Even the African Union has trouble organizing itself when it comes to Sudan. The subject has been allowed to slide from time to time, but the experts have come back to it.

I think a round table has been organized to find a solution with Sudan. That work will happen if and only if the belligerents want to end the conflicts.

We have partners at the United Nations whom we follow, including the person responsible for the Horn of Africa, who is an excellent ally of Canada. In fact, we have met with her regularly. When our senior officials arrived, they met with her to strengthen Canada's position with the aim of finding a solution for Sudan.

Our country still has a lot of credibility at the discussion tables, and so, people listen to what we have to say.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Maybe I'll just pass it on. I'm sorry I've been monopolizing your time, but Mr. Callan, perhaps you'd like to offer something as well, considering your region, in terms of how Canada can support peace negotiations, peace-building and peacemaking within the region.

• (1630)

Mr. Michael Callan: Thanks for your question.

There's a wide range of ways we can and do. There is all kinds of peace-building support that's funded directly by Ottawa for grassroots organizations that are working to bring communities together to address the real divides at the grassroots level. Even offering mediation support, even if it's not frontline mediation—there's track two, track three—but more subtle, less overt efforts often can be instrumental in bringing people together and just enabling conversations that perhaps some of the tier-one mediation efforts would not bring as much attention to.

Relating back to a point that was made earlier, our brand is still very strong, so the avenue for Canada to play that role in bringing parties together is unique and special. Because of that uniqueness that not many countries can bring to the table, it's an area that we've doubled down on.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much. I believe that's my time.

The Chair: Thank you. We now go to Mr. Chong.

Mr. Chong, you have four minutes.

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

My questions are for Ambassador Callan and High Commissioner Thornley. As you know, this committee is studying the Government of Canada's approach to Africa.

My question is simple. What key advice, what key two or three recommendations, do you have for this committee?

Mr. Christopher Thornley: I think we're not sure who goes first. Go ahead, Michael.

Mr. Michael Callan: One thing to take note of that surprised me, but has become part of my daily reality, is just how competitive the space is right now. It is competitive in commercial terms. It's competitive in diplomatic terms. It's competitive with some of our adversaries and, for some reason, also with some of our like-minded countries as well on the commercial side. That's not to speak negatively of that sense of competition, but it's serious business.

As geopolitical shifts continue, we just need to be serious about how we're bringing all of our tools to the table to advance the interests and values that we all care so deeply about. We're doing this in many ways, but I think the North African context sometimes can be helpful because it's a very distinct presence of a non-aligned position.

Nobody wants to be in one camp or the other, but I do see some of our competitors really bringing everything they can to the table. I know that we're doing everything we can with our tools as well. I encourage the committee to approach some of these questions in the spirit of really being serious about what's at stake at the moment.

Mr. Christopher Thornley: Thank you.

I could follow on, if that's all right.

I would agree that it's a highly competitive environment. Kenya is a more advanced country. We see very active involvement, for example, from a country like Turkey or from the Gulf states. They're very present and their presence is known.

Turkey has been opening embassies in almost every country on the continent. I'm not saying that we should open a lot of new embassies or representation. What I am saying is we have to be aware of our competition, be willing to act and also be willing to work with them where it might be possible.

I think we need to be thinking very carefully about people-to-people linkages and about our diasporas. There are many in Africa. They're a great asset for us.

We need to be thinking about how we conduct immigration. We've been working very closely with Kenya, for example, on orderly and...let's call it demand-driven immigration. They will be working more closely with provinces and industry associations to identify gaps, provide training and have people go to Canada who are set up to succeed. It's a bit of a win-win situation.

Finally, I think it's just to be agile. We were asked, for example, to play a role with Kenya. We asked Kenya to step up on Haiti. There are those third-country opportunities to work with Africa. We shouldn't always view Africa as an aid recipient, but also as a partner that can help us, including in our own neighbourhood, in that example.

I'll finish on the United States' designation of Kenya—I'm just talking on my own neighbourhood—as a non-NATO ally during President Ruto's visit. It was the only one in sub-Saharan Africa and it speaks to the potential for developing very strong relationships.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to MP Chatel.

You have four minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today at this late hour. We are very glad you are participating in this study, which is very important to us, and to you as well, I hope.

Mr. Diendéré, this committee has heard many witnesses refer to Agenda 2063 and the strategic plans. Some witnesses have also spoken about the aid that Canada is prepared to give.

You talked about four important sectors: agriculture, energy, education and infrastructure. You also talked about climate change and infrastructure resilience and about the knowledge that Canada can bring in this field.

You did not have time to finish your remarks earlier, but you talked about major projects proposed by Canadian companies.

Can you give us some concrete examples of the knowledge, mutual assistance and economic development measures that Canada can bring to Africa?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you, Ms. Chatel.

I can give you some concrete examples. I have seen Canadian companies propose rechargeable solar panels. I have also seen Canadian companies come in with solutions in agriculture, particularly in connection with fertilizers. Others have come in with nutritional products, such as vitamins, for children. Things are happening. I would like to tell you about it somewhere other than in this forum, where I can give you the names of all the companies that have to be memorized. Good work is being done and there are good leaders on the continent right now.

The work done by Canadian mining companies is recognized, but there are others. You know, our country is made up of small and medium enterprises, and some of them are very dynamic on the ground. What is valuable is that our businesses bring a development-oriented approach. Because they come in with expertise and a clear intention, for example, to support businesses owned by women, young people or members of other minorities, they are very well regarded. There are also local investment fund programs that support the non-governmental organizations. So there are great things being done on the development front by Canadians.

To come back to the question your colleague asked earlier, directing the things we do toward very specific fields would be a major asset. Agenda 2063 is a great document that we need to become familiar with. The African Union has a virtual university, an airline company, and pan-African telecommunications systems to build. It is in the process of developing the biggest free-trade zone you can imagine on this planet.

There is room for Canadians and Canadian initiatives, if we really get going on it.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you. That is all very interesting.

I am going to turn to Mr. Callan and Mr. Thornley to find out—

• (1640)

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Chatel, I'm afraid you're out of time. It's four minutes now.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: If you have examples in your region, it would be—

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me, Madame Chatel. You're over time, I'm afraid.

Thanks.

Mr. Bergeron, you have two minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I am going to continue the preamble to my question.

We have seen the countries in the Sahel expel France, if I can put it that way. We know that the Government of Canada has worked very hard, for example, to get Algeria to join the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

We will recall that in 2004, Mr. Saada went to Algeria on behalf of the Government of Canada, as the minister responsible for the francophonie, to try to persuade it to join that organization. We know that Algeria, like several other countries that are former French colonies, is trying to expand the presence of English in the country. Rwanda also comes to mind.

Is Canada still trying to get Algeria to join the organization?

Are relations between the governments of Canada and Algeria conducted in French or English?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Callan: That's a good question. Thank you for it.

You can take the irony of me responding in English, in view of the late hour.

We engage exclusively in French, entirely, with the Algerian government, and you're right, you've touched on a very sensitive point for the Algerians. With their fraught history with the French presence, it's part of their culture. It's part of their identity, but it's one that they are deliberating making a move away from. Just recently, they switched. The second official language being in taught in schools is now English, so there's a deliberate move away.

We do try to encourage closer links with the Francophonie, for all the good reasons that you know well, and we mention some of them. We do so more from an operational vantage point: that it just presents another network and another community for them to have influence at and to benefit from. There's a bit of a polite reception for that, but you can't stress enough the trauma within the culture that remains and how much of a hot-button issue it is to suggest that they ought to retain a part of the culture that many Algerian authorities are doing what they can to push away from.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Madam McPherson.

You have two minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Callan and Mr. Diendéré, you both spoke about how Canada's brand is strong, and I'm going to push back on that a bit. I don't want to put you in a bad situation, but in the Senate study, there were witnesses who said that Canada is becoming increasingly irrelevant in Africa. I was on the parliamentary group that was just in Tanzania. They asked, where is Canada? The parliament of Tanzania asked where we were. From their perspective, we were missing.

We know that there has been a lot of support for multilateral development in sub-Saharan Africa and less support for Canadian organizations, so I'm going to put this to all three of you: What could Canada do to make itself more relevant in the African continent? I understand that you've said it is very relevant or the brand is strong, but we have heard as well that's questionable. I'm wondering if there are things that we could do to strengthen that brand.

Mr. Thornley, I haven't asked you a question yet. Why don't I start with you?

Then I'll go to Mr. Callan.

Mr. Christopher Thornley: Thank you, MP. I'll try to be quick because I know time is short.

One always has to work on a brand. You can't take it for granted. I think that in order to strengthen our brand we have to find constant ways to engage and to be listening—which I believe we are—in terms of what our African partners are looking for. A big part of that—and I'll go back to what I spoke about earlier—I think is engagement at a commercial level. They are looking for investment.

I'm very pleased, for example, with the work that FinDev is doing here in Kenya. Their biggest and first investment is in Kenya, with an organization called "M-KOPA", which provides very innovative microfinance, starting in the solar sector and now in transportation.

As a result of that investment, drivers of motorcycles who provide transportation are driving electric bikes and are able to finance them on a daily basis. That kind of engagement ups our brand incredibly.

There is always more that we could be doing in those kinds of areas in a creative way.

Thank you.

• (1645)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Callan.

Mr. Michael Callan: Just building off that, then, I think you're also very right that the brand—

The Chair: Very briefly, please.

Mr. Michael Callan: —is still present and still strong.

Sometimes we hear that African partners need Canada. I'm not sure that's any longer the case. Many do want Canada, but there are other options now. We can be a preferred partner because of the quality of our products. Often, the caricature of us being a moral value-based player...that does count. It still does count, but they don't need us, if they ever did.

I think that if there's one thing we could do—it sounds a little bit cliché, but it just matters—and we can't get [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] so maybe it's just the value of investing in relationships with high-level authorities. Relationships matter.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to Mr. Epp. You have four minutes.

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

Thank you for all the testimony thus far.

I'm going to continue on the same vein that Ms. McPherson was on.

Last week, a number of us attended the Global Cooperation Caucus. Stanley Achonu, the Nigerian director for ONE, actually stated that Canada has been breadcrumbing African countries: offering just enough for a connection but really avoiding the true commitment. We've all heard the calls from NGOs, from diaspora commu-

nities and from all of us around this table and other groups, that we want a clear approach, a strategy. Call it what you want.

I'll start with you, Monsieur Diendéré.

Do we not need specifics? We've heard much general testimony and over the last half-hour have gotten more into specifics, but to get to something that actually has a deliverable component to it, in a strategy, do we as Canada not need to focus and make some hard decisions on priorities?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you very much for the question.

I agree with you: Yes, we need to focus a little bit, but we're having two dialogues. The last one we did in just one month has a true component for focusing on stuff that's very great for Canada and Africa. The development dialogue we just launched has a component on TVET, which is vocational education. There are components on agriculture, there are components on women entrepreneurship and even research and development on it.

[*Translation*]

What we are doing upstream, through these three policies, gives us opportunities to achieve the result you would like to see, which is to have things be very focused.

Yes, brands are brands. Ours is strong, because, as we know, people want to come to Canada. I have never participated in a meeting where someone did not already have a connection with Canada, whether through their family or their education, and did not have good memories of it. It is always very important to consider how we see ourselves in the world.

[*English*]

Yes, we need to focus on various themes, but I think we're getting there with the relation we're building with the African Union Commission.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

Let me test out some specifics. In our trade relationships, we now have you as the permanent observer at the AU.

Should Canada pursue a free trade agreement with the free trade bloc through the AU, or should Canada pursue specific free trade agreements with countries where there's a fit, a synergy? Then, within some sort of a focused strategy, let's put some deliverables like 10 countries, if we choose a second row. What would be your comment on that?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: I will start, and I'll leave the floor to Chris on this.

You know what? I come from the private sector. My last job was in the private sector. I know the importance of trade, the importance of having pilots and strategic planning.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

I understand the idea of having a free trade relationship with Africa very well. That being said, Africa consists of 54 countries. As well, it is so volatile that we have to be careful not to put together groups that will not hold up. It is important to focus on certain pilot countries or certain relationships and solidify the existing relationships. Kenya is a good example. Algeria is also a good example, when it comes to wheat and grains. In some countries in southern Africa and west Africa, there are mining companies.

[*English*]

I don't know if free trade with Africa is one of the ways to do it. My sense right now is to be more cautious, because everything is volatile on the continent, and we need to keep our energy in the right place for the benefit of some countries and Canada.

Mr. Dave Epp: I know my time is up, Mr. Chair, but I would love to hear from Mr. Thornley on that.

I'll just put that out there.

The Chair: Mr. Thornley, do you want to provide a 20-second response?

Mr. Christopher Thornley: I think I would agree that you have to focus. There are countries where we can achieve success and a platform and where there are building blocks for trade. We have to start with things like foreign investment protection agreements and double taxation agreements and then work towards free trade agreements and also look at tools that are another step towards a free trade agreement like the U.S. model of a trade and investment framework agreement, which is really just the stage below a full FTA.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to MP Alhabra. You have four minutes.

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today.

Perhaps I'll start with Mr. Diendéré.

If you were to assess or evaluate expertise on Africa within GAC, what's your evaluation of the expertise within GAC?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Oh, thank you. This is one of my favourite topics.

Coming from the private sector, coming from outside, I have the privilege to see the expertise inside now.

[*Translation*]

If you had told me six months ago that I could have identified the expertise...

[*English*]

I would say that people are very knowledgeable.

[*Translation*]

We have to organize ourselves and organize what we are doing.

I don't like talking about things that I don't like or I don't understand.

[*English*]

However, having all these knowledgeable people at Global Affairs Canada, during my nine months there, is so valuable. With the transformation we're doing right now at GAC, we're going to be more focused on things. There's a lot of good stuff there.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I guess I'm trying to read between the lines. Are you saying there's adequate or proper expertise, or do we need to strengthen...?

What we're looking for as a committee is to issue recommendations to government. One of the things that I'm curious about is this: Given the evolving dynamics in Africa, given the changing world, do we have enough expertise, or do we need to increase our focus or enhance our skills that exist within GAC? Also, I'm curious about the footprint in Africa.

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There's always a place for improvement, but right now if we need experts in finance, we have them. If we need experts in investment, we have them. If we need experts in agriculture, we also have them. In development and humanitarian assistance, have all of this expertise. It has been built over time.

[*Translation*]

International Development has been working on these issues for a long time. Yes, things are changing.

[*English*]

We can add more expertise on this. There is AI right now, artificial intelligence, which is starting to be something very important in Africa.

In this continent, people are leapfrogging. We need to cope with all of these things. I guess we need improvement in some places, but I'm adamant that we have the expertise. We need to reorganize, and we are doing that with the transformation of the department.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thornley, do you want to add something?

[*English*]

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Thank you for that.

Mr. Thornley, I think you're the one who mentioned engaging the diaspora. It has almost always been an issue trying to figure out how to operationalize that. How do we systemically benefit from the knowledge, skills and expertise that Canadians of certain backgrounds have to help Canada further strengthen and advance its interest in a certain region?

Do you have any advice or recommendations? How do we ensure that we benefit from the expertise of Canadians of African origin to enhance or advance our relationship with Africa?

• (1655)

Mr. Christopher Thornley: Thank you, MP.

You understand this very well even from a personal level. It's very important to work with and identify individuals probably in every large Canadian corporation. I was talking to somebody who happened to be from Kenya, who was quite senior in one of our big banks, for example. You can identify some of those individuals and they can identify others. So there's no magic solution.

We do have organizations such as the Canadian chamber of business, which has lots of members of the diaspora, who have stepped forward, because they want to promote better and stronger relations between Canada and African countries in universities. I think we're reaching a critical mass where, honestly, it's not too hard to find really solid people, and it's a matter of working with them.

I'm quite proud of a good program we have—I believe the name's changed, and I apologize that I don't have it—that we were developing in the trade commissioner service to have mentors for experienced business people both in Canada and abroad to help smaller companies get into markets. I think it's about that kind of work, to develop those mentoring relationships, because let's face it: Africa has tremendous potential, but is a more difficult market than some others, so we need to provide pathways for people where we can make it as easy for them as possible.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you all.

The Chair: We now go to Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Hoback, you have four minutes.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, and thank you to the witnesses.

Historically, we've had lots of students come from Africa to be educated in Canada. How is that helping or hurting in regard to moving forward, and seeing people doing business back and forth between Canada and Africa with these students when they go home?

Mr. Michael Callan: May I take that one?

I think there's a link that can be made with the previous question as well, and it's less on the diaspora per se, but it's with Africans who have Canadian experience.

In terms of what more can be done, I think there's probably some room to help organize alumni groups. I know my colleagues will know many well-placed people within the governments they are accredited to, governments that have a number of Canadian graduates well placed in them. I'm not sure we always do everything we can to organize them, to cultivate and maintain those Canadian connections and Canadian experiences. I think there could be some interesting work to be done there.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

Mr. Michael Callan: I think there could be some interesting work done there.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay. You'd say, generally, that it's been positive, then.

We see restrictions on the number of students allowed to come into Canada now. How is that going to impact us in the future?

Mr. Michael Callan: That's a good question.

It's difficult to predict exactly how it will pan out. I know one thing: It's not necessarily the volume of exchanges. There's a quality dimension there. If we work with those who get the chance to study earnestly, there's still a lot that can be done to capitalize on those exchanges.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Make the best of it. That is what you're basically saying, then.

The other question I have is this: Where are the opportunities for Canadians to work with other countries in some of those countries, instead of us trying to do this all by ourselves? Is there an opportunity where we could—instead of trying to take on a project by ourselves—work with France, the U.K. or other countries to enhance the project and make it more successful in those types of partnerships?

Have we had any experience doing that?

Mr. Michael Callan: Yes, I'd say it's probably more often the norm that we work hand in glove with like-minded partners and multilateral organizations that have their own expertise in-house and their own networks, as well.

More often than not, we're collectively working and pooling resources and knowledge to maximize the impact of every dollar we invest.

• (1700)

Mr. Randy Hoback: When it comes to the business side of things, I know Europe has been very aggressively investing throughout Africa. We've seen Russia investing in security and being very involved in the region.

Wouldn't we be better off working with our European allies to look at where we can fulfill what's being left out, considering they're so far ahead of us compared with where we're at today?

Mr. Michael Callan: I'd say yes. I'd agree with you.

In terms of focusing on areas where we can have the greatest impact.... I know "focus" is a word that has come up a number of times. I believe strongly in concentrating on our comparative advantages. Canada has many of them, which opens a lot of doors for us. We need not compete with our European partners head-to-head, but there's often room.... We've mentioned some of the sectors, whether it's agriculture, education, ICT, mining, certainly—

Mr. Randy Hoback: I don't mean to cut you off. I just don't have much time.

Right now, we have an Asia-Pacific plan. There's a plan laid out. It's written out, documented and published.

Do you see something like that forthcoming for Africa? Do you see us putting together a document like that, in order to have a game plan so everybody knows what the goals are, and everybody understands what our objectives would be? Is that something in the works at this point in time?

Mr. Michael Callan: Absolutely.

Ben Marc, do you want to take that on—the approach to Africa more generally?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: I must say yes. I'm confident we're going to have something very comprehensive for Africa.

I don't want to mirror the engagement, or whatever we're doing for the Indo-Pacific.

[Translation]

These are two completely different regions, two regions where circumstances are completely different. The document may not be enormous, in terms of the number of pages, for example, but it will be relatively exhaustive. We are working very hard on finding ideas and developing a strategy that will last.

[English]

Mr. Randy Hoback: Do you know when we can expect to see the plan?

The Chair: Thank you. We're a minute over time, Mr. Hoback.

We will now go to Mr. Zuberi.

You have four minutes.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being here, especially at this late hour, which it is for many of you.

I'd like to start with Ambassador Diendéré, in order to know about the priorities Canada has with respect to the African Union's Agenda 2063.

What priorities do we have, and can you elaborate on them? What does Canada have to offer?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you, Mr. MP.

We have, right now, two dialogues. One is on trade and the second one is on development. We can provide you with the content of these two dialogues we're having with the African Union.

The two dialogues are very in line with Agenda 2063 objectives, and we're trying right now

[Translation]

to make sure we have clear avenues for action.

[English]

We are just beginning all of these dialogues, and after nine months—that's how long I've been here—we now have all the dialogues out. We want to focus on the next step of guiding whatever action we have to take on the engagement with Africa.

[Translation]

We have to establish very clear actions that we can bring to you, but we are already seeing recurring subjects emerging.

[English]

On this continent, having electrical energy is a big deal. Climate change and green energy are big deals. Agriculture is a big deal. We cannot shy away from those subjects.

[Translation]

We are already seeing some of the framework of our strategy taking shape.

[English]

Vocational education is another thing.

[Translation]

We already have potential avenues that are certainly going to be confirmed with the African Union over time. Its members are not in a great rush. They want to see very clear strategies.

[English]

They want to renew their own partnership there.

[Translation]

They do not want partners who are going to abandon them after two or three years. They want to consolidate their relationships, and the new leadership of the African Union will certainly be launching a second ten-year implementation plan for Agenda 2063.

[English]

They just finished the first decade. They're starting the second one, and I think we will be well positioned for the next decade with our plan.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

I would now like to read my notice of motion.

[English]

My notice of motion has already been sent to all members. I'm just reading it into the record for everyone's awareness.

[Translation]

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and Canada's work to strengthen state-to-state, people-to-people, and business-to-business engagement in the region, as outlined by the Strategy's five priorities:

[English]

- (a) promoting peace, resilience, and security;
- (b) expanding trade, investment, and supply chain resilience;
- (c) investing in, and connecting, people;
- (d) building a sustainable and green future; and
- (e) fulfilling Canada's role as an active and engaged partner in the region;

That the study include an examination of Canada's continued engagement with India and China, as well as:

- (a) efforts to strengthen ties across the North Pacific with Korea and Japan;
- (b) the opportunities created by increasing people-to-people ties between Canada and the Philippines as a result of the significant growth of the Filipino-Canadian community;
- (c) the Strategic Partnership between Canada and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN);
- (d) the place of Pakistan — situated at the nexus of the Indo-Pacific, Central Asia, and the Middle East — and other countries on the periphery of the Indo-Pacific region within the Strategy; and
- (e) the importance of strengthening relations with Pacific Island nations as they face existential threats of climate change;

That such a study consist of a minimum of six meetings;
 That the committee report its findings to the House; and
 That, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request a government response.

The Chair: Thank you. We will go to Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair. Thanks to the member.

We don't have a copy of this motion. I'm not sure if it was distributed or not.

The Chair: It was distributed—

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: It was sent to the clerk, and I believe it was distributed to all members several days ago.

The Chair: Yes. I was just advised by the clerk that it was distributed on May 8.

Okay, Mr. Bergeron, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: If I understand correctly, Mr. Zuberi has simply submitted the motion and he does not necessarily want us to discuss it today. So we will certainly have an opportunity to come back to it, and maybe even agree on an amalgamated version. You will recall that I have submitted a motion that the committee study relations between Canada and India, myself.

I think we will also have to reconcile how we coordinate with the work done by our colleagues on the Special Committee on the Canada–People's Republic of China Relationship, which is also examining Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy. That way, we will avoid duplication and will be able to work efficiently.

We will have an opportunity to come back to this, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. We will have an opportunity on Wednesday, actually.

Next we go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have two minutes for your questioning.

[*Translation*]

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

I am first going to address the question of the economy. Canada has signed foreign investment promotion and protection agreements with nine African countries. It has signed free trade agreements with countries on every continent except Africa. As we know, a broad economic agreement was signed in 2023 between Kenya and the European Union—with which we had so much trouble developing the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which has not yet been ratified. We also know that an agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area was signed in 2019 among the members of the African Union.

Why are we not seizing the economic opportunities that this great continent offers us?

• (1710)

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: Thank you.

I think that is what we are doing, but maybe we are not doing it as fast as others are. That being said, we may also have been lucky: Those who have signed agreements did so in a context that is changing very rapidly. Before May, we did not know that the situation would deteriorate in the near east and Middle East to the extent it has. That changes the entire dynamic at present. We have to consider the concrete results of these agreements.

In any event, I think we do have to sign agreements. We cannot do anything with the countries of Africa if we do not clearly establish common ground. Now, will they be agreements in the classical form? My experience tells me that at this stage, Africa does not need us to be mimicking other mechanisms that exist now or things that once existed. What the African countries want today is creativity. We have to do things differently if they are to benefit everyone: those countries as well as any country that wants to do business with them. Yes, there are agreements, but we need to see to what extent they are just on paper rather than real. I am not saying that the African Union does not have a good agreement, but it is the African Union. It consists of 23 or 24 countries together, while Canada is all alone on its side.

In my opinion, the agreements—

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Diendéré, we're considerably over time. I will have to cut you off.

MP McPherson, you have two minutes, please.

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

I would like to follow up on a question from my colleague Mr. Hoback that I don't think got answered. It was in terms of the time frame of when we can expect to have some sort of road map, whether that be a strategy like the Indo-Pacific strategy or whether that be a framework or approach or whatever. I'm wondering when we can expect to have something formalized.

Perhaps, Mr. Diendéré, I could ask you first. Do you have a timeline for when that might be ready?

Mr. Ben Marc Diendéré: It could be very pretentious for me to say that it will be in one month or two months or something, but I'm pretty sure the team is working very hard to have something very soon. We are already a part of the discussion right now.

[*Translation*]

I would like to be able to tell you it will be tomorrow or in one month or three months, but I have confidence in the team working on it because they are very familiar with the requirements.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Realistically, then, we're looking at months, not years. Of course, we were first informed that there would be this policy with.... You know, it's been over a year since we were first told that there would be a framework or a strategy in place, but if you say months, then that's what we'll go with.

Mr. Thornley, when I asked you a question in my last round, you talked about FinDev and the value of some of the projects that are being done by FinDev. Now, I have a big concern with FinDev, because I don't believe they have the same accountability mechanisms that we see with regard to, for example, development projects. What we expect a small or medium organization to provide in terms of accountability for Global Affairs projects is not the same for FinDev.

Can you comment on that?

Mr. Christopher Thornley: I'm not really an expert on FinDev's accountability structure, but I guess, as a semi-autonomous organization, it would not be the same as a development project. But what—

Ms. Heather McPherson: That's even though they are taking development dollars to do their work.

Mr. Christopher Thornley: Possibly.

I think in Africa and with some African countries, whether FinDev is a solution or others, you need greater flexibility. I also talked about EDC de-risking and allowing more money to flow to support commercial transactions.

I won't really answer your question directly. I apologize for that. I don't know about the direct accountability structure for FinDev.

In a country like Kenya, there is a need for the more traditional aid that we have. We also need more innovative financing and support structures where we work in partnership to develop an economy that has a lot of innovation built into it.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Absolutely. I would just suggest—

The Chair: I'm afraid we're 40 seconds over time.

Thank you.

Next, we go to Mr. Chong.

You have four minutes, sir.

• (1715)

Hon. Michael Chong: Ambassador Callan indicated that it's become a lot more competitive in Africa and, in addition to that, that we need to therefore more effectively use our resources to further our interests and our values.

High Commissioner Thornley built on that by saying that we should not just view Africa as a recipient of international aid, but also as a region that is willing to work with Canada on areas such as security and defence, and on issues such as two-way trade investments.

My question is in that framework.

Just last week, an Aframax tanker filled up with oil from the TMX pipeline—with 550,000 barrels of oil in a single tanker. It is the first shipment that is headed toward China. It's a shipment of 550,000 barrels.

I think it was Ambassador Diendéré who mentioned in his opening statement that this year Africa will be the second fastest-growing region after Asia this year. When I put all of that together, it

seems to me that Africa has an immense need for oil and gas in the coming decade.

Currently, Africa is a net exporter of oil. It produces about seven million barrels of oil a day. It consumes about four million barrels. It has a net export of about three million barrels. If Africa is to catch up with the rest of the world economically, it seems to me that it would at least catch up to the developing world's standard, which is three times the oil consumption that it currently has. It only consumes about a third of the oil per capita compared to the developing world. That would mean that it would grow from about four million barrels of oil a day to 12 million barrels, thereby becoming a net energy importer.

My question for all three witnesses is, what discussions you have had about exporting Canadian energy, particularly oil and liquefied natural gas, to Africa?

What potential is there for that region of the world to be a destination for Canadian energy exports?

Mr. Christopher Thornley: I could jump in first.

Thank you very much. It's a really interesting observation.

My last posting was as high commissioner to Nigeria. I saw the tremendous amount of oil production that they have there and the fact that there's very little value added. I think that speaks more generally to an area where Canada can work closely with African countries that have a multitude of natural resources—a wealth of it—but do not add value for their own use.

In Nigeria, for example, the richest man in Africa, Aliko Dangote, is building one of the biggest refineries in the world. I think it will be the biggest refinery, which could be a game changer.

There are so many unknowns around that, including governance. If you have countries that, for example, are weak in the rule of law and where corruption is heavy, this is fraud. It's very difficult.

The other observation I would make with regard to our production of oil and gas as a potential export is that we're seeing African countries leapfrog. That word was used previously.

About 90% of the grid in Kenya is from renewables, with geothermal, solar, etc. It'll be 100% in a few years. I think that, along with protecting our interests and the potential exports of Canadian resources, we have to think about supporting the green growth that is taking place on the African continent and encouraging that kind of development. There is a lot of Canadian involvement in those kinds of projects.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to MP Chatel for the last question. Mrs. Chatel, you have four minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I am going to pick up where I left off. I wanted to ask you to give me your answer in writing, but now I have the chance to have another turn to speak, so you can give it to me in person.

Do you have concrete examples of companies that it would be worthwhile to develop, concrete examples of Canadian businesses that are already making a noteworthy difference in the major sectors referred to in Agenda 2063?

Mr. Callan can speak first, and Mr. Thornley can answer afterward.

• (1720)

[English]

Mr. Michael Callan: Absolutely. There are many examples to choose from. Staying with the agricultural sector, it makes up the vast majority of our exports across north Africa, and, certainly, Algeria, as well. One special thing about how we export is the way we do it, and the relationship we develop. It's less of a commercial transaction where we just make a sale and move on; it's an exchange and partnership. There's some knowledge transfer. There's some governance training that comes with it, and it's something that really distinguishes our approach.

Even if other companies can sell at a cheaper price, the quality of the products we provide and that sense of partnership and accompaniment over the medium term that we provide to help the Algerian government develop its own competencies in that same sector are examples that I've seen of Canadian businesses really distinguishing themselves and bringing pride to Canada as they do it.

Mr. Christopher Thornley: If you want specifics, I can name a few off the top of my head. We have a Canadian company here, Solar Panda, that's doing great work on solar panels. It's doing extremely well. It had some ups and downs on the energy side in west Africa, as well as central Africa and the DRC. Manitoba Hydro International was actually running the transmission grid in Nigeria for some time. It had to deal with a lot of governance and corruption issues, which is always a challenge, but it stuck with it. Cold Water International does a lot of work, as the name suggests, in water management in other areas.

The CPCS, which is a transportation consulting company, works with governments throughout Africa in developing master plans, both in terms of transportation and urban development and mining companies. The name keeps changing, but there's an organization called CESO, Canadian Executive Service Overseas, where Canadian business people go and provide short-term consulting. That's actually funded through our development programming, and others where we provide assistance through our technical transfer programs. We embed experts, for example, in government ministries here to help them develop their various planning processes and economic development.

Mr. Christopher Thornley: That's just a quick list.

[Translation]

Thank you.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I know you are very busy, but if you have the time, would you be able to provide us with a list of the ten biggest sectors, such as agriculture, energy, education, infras-

tructure and climate change, for example, where you have seen a contribution by Canadian companies? I don't want to pressure you, but it would be useful for us to have that information. It would add value to the study.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Be very brief, because we're over time.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, but it would be good if we could get that answer in writing to include in our report. Isn't that a good idea?

[English]

The Chair: That's brilliant. Thank you, MP Chatel.

That concludes our questions from the members.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank you all. I know it's particularly late in your time zone, but we're truly grateful for your time, your insights and expertise.

Thank you all very much.

Mr. Dave Epp: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Each one of us, as MPs, in our role as an employer is actually exempt from the Employment Standards Act in relation to the hours we put on our staff members. In that light, this committee passed some time ago a desire to have our Library of Parliament reports circulated 48 hours in advance, and I note that this meeting's report came out at four minutes to four on Friday.

On behalf of the staff, whom we all appreciate, I believe the 48 hours' notice was 48 business hours, not 48 running time hours—

• (1725)

The Chair: Fair enough.

Mr. Dave Epp: Therefore, if possible, could we have the reference materials for our meetings in a more timely fashion?

The Chair: Absolutely. We will make a note of that. We'll discuss that with the clerk. We'll make every effort to make sure that is the case going forward.

At this point, allow me to thank Ambassador Diendéré, Ambassador Callan and High Commissioner Thornley. We're very grateful for your attendance here today.

An hon. member: After midnight.

Mr. Dave Epp: They're not subject to those hours either. Exactly.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I am obviously very aware of the late hour for our guests, but I just wondered about one thing. Mr. Chair, since we started the meeting late, is there a reason why we are ending it early?

[*English*]

The Chair: There are several reasons. First of all, because there was only one person providing opening comments, that saved us

some time. Second, we didn't have two different panels, so we were able to do three rounds, and that seemed to be sufficient. That's why.

Thank you very much.

The meeting stands adjourned.

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