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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Good morning. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our briefing on the situation in Mali will continue.

I just want to thank both of our ambassadors for being here this morning. We have the ambassador, Her Excellency Diallo, from the Republic of Mali. Thank you very much for being here today. We also have the ambassador from France, His Excellency Ambassador Zeller. Thank you both for being here.

I believe that Her Excellency Ambassador Diallo has agreed to start off and so we'll give you the floor for 10 minutes. We look forward to your testimony. After both of you have had a chance to give some testimony, then we'll go back and forth over the next hour just to ask some questions. Once again, thank you very much for taking the time to be here on such short notice. We welcome you and we look forward to your testimony.

Ambassador, I'll turn it over to you.

[Translation]

Her Excellency Traoré Diallo (Ambassador of the Republic of Mali to Canada, Embassy of the Republic of Mali): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, honourable members, Your Excellency Philippe Zeller, Ambassador of the French Republic to Canada, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by offering my deepest thanks to the organizers of this meeting and expressing my profound gratitude and appreciation for this opportunity to provide you with information on the political situation and on safety and security issues in the Republic of Mali since January 17, 2012.

Since the crisis erupted, Mali has never felt alone or abandoned. The whole world has rushed to its side to help put out the fire in the north. The international community's great concern for the Malian people is a token of friendship Malians can fully appreciate.

Your committee's invitation is no surprise to me, given the relationship of friendship, solidarity and co-operation between Canada and my country, going back to the early 1970s. Today, I am thankful that Mali is among the seven core African countries for Canadian assistance.

Honourable members, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to remind you that, in the wake of various rebellions, Mali signed several agreements with armed groups in order to restore peace, tranquility

and stability, including the national pact, in 1992, and the Algiers Agreement, in 2006.

With the support of development partners, including Canada, many development actions have been undertaken to narrow the infrastructure gap in Mali's northern regions and to restore a certain calm.

This period of peace unfortunately deteriorated with the Libyan crisis, the consequences of which have been catastrophic for Mali and its neighbours.

As you know, my country was one of the first collateral victims of that crisis owing to the mass arrival on its soil of armed groups made up of former mercenaries returning from Libya, who were soon joined by Tuareg deserters from the Malian army, terrorists from Ansar Dine, from the Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest, or MUJAO, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram, from Nigeria.

The January 17, 2012 attack on the city of Menaka by the Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad—a Tuareg movement demanding Azawad's independence—represented the breach used by all the terrorist movements to step in and take possession of Mali's three northern regions.

Those rebel groups' demands vary. While some of them are demanding Azawad's hypothetical independence, others are rather seeking to create an Islamic state covering the whole national territory by recklessly engaging in all kinds of traffic and terrorism—with the kidnapping of westerners as their key activity.

Honourable members, ladies and gentlemen, in order to restore its total integrity, Mali submitted to the United Nations a request endorsed by ECOWAS and the African Union seeking support for our armed and defence forces in deploying an international force to recapture the northern regions.

Today, my country is very happy to see that the whole international community has understood how complex the security situation in the Sahelo-Saharan region is, and that the Malian crisis is one of the most serious threats in that sub-region and Africa, but is also a threat to international peace and security.

Mali is pleased that the UN Security Council has unanimously adopted, under chapter VII, resolution 2085 (2012) of December 20, 2012, authorizing the deployment of the International Support Mission in Mali to help the country regain its sovereignty and the integrity of its territory, and to fight international terrorism.

That resolution was adopted based on a concept of operation developed by a group of experts from ECOWAS and the African Union, with the support of the European Union and the United Nations. That concept of operations, which was adopted unanimously, helped establish the guidelines for the deployment of the international force.

I would also like to remind you that resolution 2085 (2012) of December 20, 2012, was the third resolution with regard to the Malian crisis, following resolution 2056 (2012) of July 5, 2012, and resolution 2071 (2012) of October 12, 2012.

● (1110)

Honourables members, ladies and gentlemen, the Government of the Republic of Mali, in accordance with the Malian people's virtues of peace and dialogue, has always shown its willingness to establish a dialogue with its children who have lost their way in order to find a peaceful solution to the crisis, while respecting the integrity of the national territory, national unity, the preservation of the republic's secularism and the principle of pluralistic democracy.

It was against that backdrop that contracts were established between government representatives and MNLA and Ansar Dine rebels, under the authority of ECOWAS mediator, His Excellency Blaise Compaoré, of Burkina Faso. Those two groups officially declared, following the meeting held on December 4 of last year in Ouagadougou, that they were abandoning armed violence and would commit to a process of political negotiation. However, the Ansar Dine group said it wanted to continue to apply sharia law in the Kidal region only.

It was in a context of re-established dialogue and trust among the parties that the Ansar Dine group, with the support of MUJAO and AQIM, launched an extremely violent attack on the very withdrawn positions of the Malian army in the south, in Mopti, on January 10, 2013 and in the west, in Diabali, in the Office du Niger zone.

The very decisive intervention of the French army, on January 11, 2013, at the request of the republic's acting president, helped not only stop the advance of the jihadist terrorist groups toward the south, but also liberate the cities of Timbuktu and Gao in three weeks.

It would be a euphemism to say today that the French army's intervention in support of the Malian army has saved the state, the secularist and democratic Republic of Mali.

However, we should not be claiming total triumph. As the President of the French Republic said so well during his visit to Mali, last week, the terrorists have been driven out of the above-mentioned cities, but terrorism has not yet been defeated in northern Mali.

Moreover, the implementation of resolution 2085 was accelerated once France began to fight alongside the Malian army. Today, the deployment of AFISMA is moving ahead gradually, and its headquarters have been set up in Bamako, Mali's capital.

I would like to use this opportunity to address, on behalf of the President of the Republic of Mali and the Malian people, my deep thanks to the government of Canada for its logistical support in Operation Serval, but also for its generous contribution announced at

the AFISMA funding parties meeting, held on January 29, in Addis Ababa.

Honourable members, ladies and gentlemen, to overcome the political crisis, the Malian National Assembly adopted the governance road map, on Monday, January 28, 2013. That road map comprises two components: the restoration of the country's territorial integrity through the recapture of the north, and the organization of transparent and credible general elections.

According to the road map, a general election will be held by July 31, 2013, in order to permanently return to constitutional order.

The road map also contains a major component on national reconciliation through dialogue, an important virtue of the Malian people reconfirmed by the republic's acting president during the visit of the President of the French Republic, His Excellence François Hollande. His statement was along the following lines:

Our guiding principle is to accelerate and not to compromise national reconciliation—the reconciliation of northern communities, southern forces and the whole Malian nation. We see that as a historical duty, and there will be no complacency.

Let all those who have Mali in their heart come; we extend our hand to them! Let all those who are not part of separation plans, terrorism, drug traffic and organized crime join us, thus abandoning their fantasies to embrace a necessary and desirable unified existence!

Given the immensity of the needs that require significant funding, which is above the government's capacities, the road map recommends using the support of technical and financial partners through a round table in the future.

In closing, I would like you to agree with me that the situation in Mali is a manifestation of security issues in Sahel, and that it must therefore be subject to international involvement through the appropriate UN mechanisms. So taking action is urgent, to alleviate Malians' suffering and also to prevent a similar, if not much more complex, situation for the peoples of the Sahel region, even the rest of the world.

Taking action is also urgent because the criminal and terrorist activities in northern Mali and the security risks those actions pose for the whole sub-region are a serious threat to the rest of the world.

● (1115)

Finally, Mr. Chair, it is urgent to take action in order to resume the co-operation with our bilateral and multilateral partners and strengthen our republic, founded on secular and democratic values. With regard to that, the conclusions drawn at the meeting of the support and follow-up group on the situation in Mali, held in Brussels on February 5, 2013, are fairly encouraging. We hope that development co-operation will resume in the coming weeks.

Today, our people are experiencing great hardships. However, Malians have not lost hope, as they don't doubt the support of other nations, such as Canada, which you represent here.

Malians from both the north and the south legitimately expect your active solidarity in helping them weather this crisis. Malians know that you can help, and they expect you to take decisive and assiduous action. This is about the safety and stability of our sub-region, Africa and the whole world.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ambassador.

We'll now turn it over to the ambassador of France, His Excellency Ambassador Zeller.

[Translation]

His Excellency Philippe Zeller (Ambassador of the French Republic to Canada, Embassy of France): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, Madam Ambassador and dear colleagues, thank you for inviting me. Thank you for extending this invitation at the same time as the one to my colleague from Mali. We stand in solidarity and partnership during this period.

Mr. Chair, pursuant to the analysis, statements and illustration provided by President François Hollande, who, as Madam Ambassador of Mali mentioned, visited that country's cities of Timbuktu and Bamako last Saturday, February 2, 2013, I would like to remind you that France's role in the current situation alongside Mali has three components. The first two components were just perfectly explained and illustrated by my colleague.

The first component has to do with Mali's political evolution. When it comes to that, France is pleased with the current democratic transition. The road map adopted by the Malian National Assembly on January 29 announces an election. President Traoré has said that the election will be held by July 31 of this year. That is great news. In the spirit established by the UN's resolution 2085 last December, a north-south dialogue will begin between, if I may use president Traoré's words, Malians and Sahelians, the river people and the dune people, and all signs and portents regarding that are extremely positive.

At this especially difficult and delicate time, France—like Canada and Mali's other partners and friends—is closely monitoring the human rights situation. President Hollande emphasized the role, presence and importance of a major institution like the International Court of Justice in those kinds of circumstances, alongside Malian legal institutions. As my colleague pointed out, there is an international support and follow-up group on the situation in Mali, which brings together all the stakeholders, major international organizations, such as the European Union, the United Nations, the World Bank, the African Union and ECOWAS. That group has already met on three occasions—in Abidjan, in Bamako and, two days ago, in Brussels—with 45 delegations.

That was the first component, the political one.

The second component has to do with the humanitarian side and the reinstatement of a policy on aid and development for Mali. Currently, two million people are affected by food insecurity in Mali and, overall, close to twenty million people are affected in the whole region. However, it is of key importance to help Mali and the Sahel countries acquire a new capacity that will allow them to reinstitute a policy on economic development and the fight against trafficking. France, through its development agency, and Europe, through the European Development Fund, have recently announced that

development assistance could potentially be as high as it was before the crisis, or about 250 million euros.

In addition, in order for those two components—the political component, perfectly described by my colleague, and the humanitarian and development assistance component—to resume over the next few months, the country's security and military situation must obviously become stabilized and clarified. In the second part of my introductory remarks, I would like to tell you a bit about the military situation.

● (1120)

That is also divided into three components. Obviously, the first component is French involvement. Operation Serval enables French and Malian troops to help Mali gradually regain its territorial integrity. I won't repeat the facts, as everyone knows them by now. The decision to launch an operation on January 10 and 11 of this year was based on the request by the Malian president and President Hollande. That operation is ongoing, and we can say today—as our presidents said in Timbuktu and Bamako last Saturday—that it is especially effective.

A series of air strikes have been launched since January 11. They are still ongoing. Since January 31, there have been 135 sorties of French airplanes or attack helicopters, but there have also been ground deployments. As of today, there are 4,000 French soldiers on the ground. That will be the maximum. The French minister of defence stated two days ago that we will not exceed that number. Obviously, 4,000 soldiers on the ground is a significant contribution. That has made it possible, with the support of Malian forces, to recapture all the cities along the Niger Loop, and as far as Kidal today.

Does this mean that military operations are completed? No, there is still some resistance, in urban proximity—as you have seen in the many media analyses currently available—but also in Mali's northern region and the extreme north. That's a mountainous region that has not yet been secured and is probably being used by narcoterrorists for withdrawal. President Hollande said that France's military intervention would go as far as securing that northern part of the country.

To carry out this engagement, we have received logistical support from a number of partner countries in Europe, such as the United Kingdom, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain, but also some countries outside Europe, such as Canada—and I will come back to this in my conclusion—and the United States.

Operation Serval, which also enables the Malian army to help recapture and secure the territory, is not a permanent operation. As my colleague mentioned, AFISMA, the International Support Mission to Mali and Malian forces will gradually take over. The deployment so far has been very satisfactory, as we are close to about 4,000 soldiers, of which some 2,200 come from ECOWAS countries—and we can come back to this if there are any questions—and 1,800 come from Chad. Those forces are now on Malian soil and are ensuring security. In a way, they are taking over for the French and Malian troops in cities where peace has been established, such as Diabali or Gao, which is currently being secured by Nigerian troops.

Finally, a third component is currently being implemented. I'm talking about the European component of support to Malian forces. We call it EUTM, or the European Union Training Mission. Once again, some things are currently taking place, as this European mission was officially launched two days ago. It will be implemented next Tuesday, February 12, in Bamako, with an initial staff of 70 military members. However, it should reach a total of 500 European soldiers, with just over 150 trainers. Of the 27 European countries, 15 will be contributing to that mission, including France as the lead nation, with about 200 people.

• (1125)

Obviously, that implies costs, which in turn imply commitments. For instance, the French minister of defence has stated that France has spent about 70 million euros in additional costs since the beginning of operations. As part of implementing resolution 2085, calls for contribution were launched to support the inter-African force, AFISMA, and to help rebuild the Malian army. We are talking about training and equipment. That was the objective of the donor conference for Mali held in Addis Ababa on January 29 of this year. According to estimates, that conference led to promises of support for both military operations and Malian armed forces, but it also resulted in at least 377 million euros in humanitarian support. The African Union has even estimated that the figure was about 450 million euros.

That is our action, as a coherent whole.

In closing, allow me to state that the French involvement, in support of Malian armed forces and with their assistance, put an end to terrorist sanctuaries that were a direct threat to the integrity and future of not only Mali and Sahel, but also Europe, as we are 1,500 km away from the Mediterranean.

Moreover, we have greatly appreciated the assistance of Canada, which contributed a C-17 aircraft. At first, it was for a one-week period, which has been extended until February 17. I want to insist on the fact that this contribution was key also because Canada got involved extremely quickly. On Tuesday, January 5—and I want to point out that the operation received the green light on January 11—the aircraft was leaving Canada, and it was ready for action on Thursday, January 17, which was exactly when we needed to send a great deal of equipment and troops from France.

To wrap up my conclusion, I would like to reiterate some of the statements President Hollande made on February 2 of this year. He said that what was at work was obviously assistance and support for Mali, as well as the rebuilding of Mali's territorial integrity, sovereignty and democratic life. In addition, beyond Mali, Western Africa and Sahel, the relationship between Africa and Europe, between Africa and all of its partners was at work to ensure the future of this Africa. We need the support of the international community to achieve that. I believe that Canada stepped up when its support was needed in the face of a challenge as important as Africa's future and development.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador.

What we're going to do is we'll start over on my left-hand side with the opposition—seven minutes, sir—and then we'll move over to the government and Mr. Dechert.

Mr. Dewar.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by thanking our guests for participating in our committee's meeting.

My first question is for Ambassador Zeller.

Ambassador, as you know and have mentioned, on January 15, Canada made a cargo aircraft available to France. How much longer will you need our support in that area?

• (1130)

H.E. Philippe Zeller: Mr. Dewar, the Canadian government decided to lend us the aircraft until February 15. The French authorities have found that date to be entirely suitable. That period has not yet expired, and it is very suitable for that aircraft to be placed at our disposal until that date.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Okay.

In what other areas do you want Canada to become involved? Would it be in the areas of human rights, the economy, refugee assistance? What you think the overall needs are? What specific needs could Canada's contribution meet?

H.E. Philippe Zeller: Of course, I don't want to speak on behalf of either the Canadian authorities or the Malian authorities. That decision comes down to the bilateral relations between Mali and France. I would simply like to say that Canada—and we have said so already—was one of the 70 countries and institutions in Addis Ababa and one of the 45 countries that announced \$13 million in assistance at that time.

Everyone had an opportunity to talk about the way they planned to help Mali. On that occasion, France announced that it would contribute 47 million euros to support both the Malian forces and AFISMA. That is our priority, and we especially appreciate that, in the current circumstances, other countries are announcing assistance to development or to humanitarian aid.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Madam, regarding the assistance we are providing, do you think that the respect of human rights is the most important priority, or is it rather refugee assistance? What kind of a role do you think Canada should play going forward?

H.E. Traoré Diallo: I don't really understand your question.

Mr. Paul Dewar: What do you think Canada's role should be in the future? Do you think our role should focus primarily on human rights?

H.E. Traoré Diallo: Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

Canada is already involved in that area, as part of another bilateral co-operation agreement. Canada has already done a great deal for Mali in the area of human rights.

That is all I can say in response to your question. Even before the war started, Canada was already supporting Mali in terms of humanitarian assistance, and our country appreciates that.

Mr. Paul Dewar: How do you view Canada's role when it comes to furthering democracy? Do you think Canada could play a role in the reconciliation between the north and the south?

H.E. Traoré Diallo: Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

The support of any country is welcome. As for national reconciliation, we are asking for the support of all the nations around the world. What does national reconciliation depend on? It depends on the development of northern regions as well. That has been done. That's a desert area. Mali is already pleased to be one of the core countries for Canadian assistance. We cannot ask for more. We are already among those countries.

Canada, as usual, can support us in any way it wants. That is a matter of a state's sovereignty. We cannot ask for more. We already have our bilateral co-operation intervention zones. That is very appreciated by both countries. The relationship between Mali and Canada is very good. If DFAIT wants to do anything else, that depends on Canada's sovereignty.

Mr. Paul Dewar: What other needs do you foresee? Would we be talking about humanitarian aid, assistance to democratic development?

H.E. Traoré Diallo: Mali has paid a high price to establish democracy, and that is why it knows its value. Any country—and not only Canada—that wants to help us in terms of democracy will be welcome in Mali.

Mali has not hidden the price it has paid to bring that democracy, in 1991. The whole world knows about that. I don't mean to brag, but before I came here, I was with the UN. Mali's democracy was used as an example there. It was an exemplary democracy, which was recognized by the whole world. I was a member of the UN advisory committee in charge of governance projects.

We would like to go back to how things were before terrorists sidetracked us. We want to go back to the beginning. Any contributions will be welcome.

• (1135)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I am going to turn it over to Mr. Dechert.

Sir, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Excellencies, for being here today.

Madame Diallo, I just want to say, on my behalf and that of my colleagues and the Government of Canada, how much we are concerned about the people of Mali.

Over 20 years, as you know, there has been a very strong friendship between our countries. Canada has been a significant partner with Mali in the tremendous democratic development that you spoke of. We send our deepest condolences to all those negatively affected by the violence there and to those who are displaced, and we hope that the assistance that we have been able to

provide is of some comfort to the people of Mali. We wish you and the people of Mali all the best in these difficult and trying times.

Can you, Ambassador Diallo, tell us a bit more about the dialogue that is happening now between your government and the Tuareg tribes and rebels in the north? I understand—I think you mentioned it earlier—that there are some peace negotiations going on. Can you give us an update on that, and can you explain for us the dynamics that exist amongst the various factions that are operating in the north of Mali?

[*Translation*]

H.E. Traoré Diallo: Thank you for the kind words you addressed to my country, my people and myself.

As for the ongoing dialogue, I have brought you the road map, which you can keep. Perhaps it could be photocopied and distributed to all members.

In northern Mali, or even in Mali's history, there was no issue between white people and black people. We were totally united. Historically speaking, that is the land of civilization, as its said in Africa. All races were welcome. We have lived together until recently. We were marrying Tuaregs. Some women were married to black people from the south, and Malian women from the south were married to Tuaregs from the north. That was never an issue.

Mali has agreed to hold a dialogue with the Tuaregs—or the rebels. They actually represent a small minority. As the Nigerian president said the other day in his speech on the RFI, the MNLA does not represent all Malian Tuaregs; it represents only a minority. The dialogue has already begun.

The Malian government said it would have a dialogue with anyone who does not have blood on their hands, who has not committed murder. In Aguelhoc, the throats of about one hundred soldiers were cut while their hands were tied behind their back. The case has been referred to the International Criminal Court. The government wants to hold a dialogue with anyone who is not part of that group.

I read to you part of my president's speech, but I can now discuss it further. Anyone whose hands are not bloodstained will be welcome to participate in that dialogue.

As for those cases, they have already been referred. That is now out of Mali's hands. The International Criminal Court will now rule on that. That is no longer in our hands. We have passed on the cases involving people who have cut throats or killed people, raped nine-year-old girls, whipped people, committed extortions or disabled young people forever. Those cases will be referred to the International Criminal Court.

The dialogue is open to the rest of northerners whose hands are not bloodstained, who were with us, who were Mali's prime ministers or ministers. There have been many Tuareg ministers and presidents of associations who have always benefited from positive discrimination. In Mali, people have to go through a competition to become members of the public service. Tuaregs can join the public service where they wish. They look for services that suit them, advantageous services where they can make money. They choose where they want to go, and that is where they are sent.

If they are lieutenants in the rebellion, they enter the Malian army with the same rank, without any training or anything like that. The Malian government has accepted all this.

They have been ambassadors. I have a friend, who is now part of the rebellion, who was a government minister in the past, while I was a simple analyst in charge of records within foreign affairs. She was already a government minister. She was neither more highly educated nor stronger than me. I was in charge of records and she was appointed minister simply because she was a Tuareg. All that has been accepted in the past.

The dialogue will continue. According to some rumours, international organizations have apparently said that extortion has been committed. Even the Malian president and the minister of defence have talked about this. All Malians are aware of this. It is part of the road map, a copy of which I will leave you. They said that anyone caught committing extortion against northern nationals will be taken to court in Mali. The army has already been informed of that, and it is taken for granted.

As for the Tuaregs, the positive discrimination they...

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert: Is it fair to say, Your Excellency, that you're optimistic about the peace negotiation and reconciliation process in the northern part of Mali?

[Translation]

H.E. Traoré Diallo: Of course I am optimistic—even very optimistic. By nature, Malians are a people with a passion for peace. It is known that we are a peaceful people. We have never had such problems in the past. We were united. These people are outsiders who represent only themselves; they represent nothing. The MNLA calls itself *indépendantiste*. However, Tuaregs account for only 3% of the northern regions, and MNLA members, who are calling for independence, represents only a small minority of that 3%. The great majority of Tuaregs want to remain with the Malian government. They consider themselves Malians. One Particular Tuareg has been the second vice-chair of the Malian National Assembly for 20 years, and every chance he gets—Strasbourg or elsewhere—he contradicts the MNLA. He has been vice-president of the Malian National Assembly for 20 years as a Tuareg.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bob Dechert: One short question?

The Chair: No, I'm afraid we'll have to catch you on the next round. Thank you, Mr. Dechert.

Mr. McKay, seven minutes, please.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you both for being here this morning.

My first question is to Ambassador Zeller.

France is faced with a very difficult enemy. The Islamists are difficult to fight at the best of times, have a different concept of what this conflict is all about, and it's clear to everyone that France would prefer to withdraw and hand this matter over to the African-led

International Support Mission to Mali, AFISMA, folks sooner rather than later, which is a goal with which we all agree.

Has France asked Canada to contribute to AFISMA?

[Translation]

H.E. Philippe Zeller: France has not exactly asked Canada to contribute to AFISMA. AFISMA is implemented pursuant to a UN resolution. I am talking about the famous resolution 2085. So an appeal was launched to all UN members in the context of that resolution. Those who could and were willing to participate were invited to help AFISMA.

[English]

Hon. John McKay: May I assume that it's in France's best interests that the AFISMA-led operations begin sooner rather than later, and that the more robust AFISMA might be via financing, training, equipment, or whatever, the sooner France can withdraw?

• (1145)

[Translation]

H.E. Philippe Zeller: I am not sure I have understood your question, but if you are saying that France would prefer to withdraw, allow me to correct that statement. The President of the French Republic was very clear: France will not withdraw until Malians have fully recovered the integrity and sovereignty of their country. That is why our French military effort is ongoing and will continue until that objective has been reached.

However, our country is allowing sufficient room for AFISMA's deployment, of course. AFISMA will be able to develop, probably even more significantly, over the next few weeks and months. Consultations will begin at the United Nations. Let's not forget that, in this area, we are operating under the UN umbrella.

Finally, AFISMA has been in effect for a few days. About 4,000 African soldiers are now on Malian soil. So there is an effectiveness and presence there. Obviously, any support of the international community is especially useful, given the additional costs of those operations for African forces. That was actually the objective of the Addis Ababa conference, which helped raise the funds I mentioned earlier.

[English]

Hon. John McKay: We have very limited time and so could you abbreviate the answers as best as possible?

What is France's definition of military success?

[Translation]

H.E. Philippe Zeller: Military success consists in enabling Malians to recover their country's territorial integrity and eventually helping them, through the road map, to engage in the democratic process my colleague mentioned earlier.

[English]

Hon. John McKay: Thank you.

Ambassador Diallo, the government, and indeed you, have spoken about this road map to democracy, and certainly it's a welcome initiative. It seems to me, however, that this road map to democracy is filled with potholes. Your own government had coup and counter-coup lately. There's a rather shadowy Captain Sanogo, who seems to be calling a disproportionate share of the shots. You have the Tuaregs, who at the best of times have a very strained relationship with Bamako, and you have three or four Islamist groups active in the north and who were on the way to the south. Even in the best of circumstances a return to democracy would be extraordinary. Is it your view that to return to democracy by July is ambitious?

[Translation]

H.E. Traoré Diallo: Thank you.

With the help of God and all our friends, that can be done. You see how easy it was to recapture all the regions that had fallen into the hands of terrorists. Since January 11, practically all the regions aside from the Kidal region, have been brought back under Mali's protection. And it is only February. The Malian government has set July 31 as the deadline. Since everything that has been accomplished so far took less than a month, we hope that, in less than two months, Mali will have recovered its territorial integrity. That's all.

The coup d'état you are talking about is what interrupted the election. The election was planned for April 29, 2012, but the coup d'état was carried out. All the elements needed for the election are already in place. However, we cannot have an election if even an inch of our territory is in the hands of terrorists. We have to wait for the whole territory to be liberated, so that all Malians can participate in the election and choose their leaders.

[English]

Hon. John McKay: Is—

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. McKay, that's all the time you have.

We have to move to the last round. We have time for one more intervention from both the opposition and the government.

Mr. Dechert has a quick question before he turns it over to Ms. Brown for five minutes, and then we'll finish with Mr. Harris.

• (1150)

Mr. Bob Dechert: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Excellency Zeller, thank you very much for being here today and for bringing this information to us. I want to express Canada's gratitude, through you, to your government and the people of France for taking the initiative, and to the French armed forces for moving so quickly to come to the aid of our friends in Mali and doing what I understand to be a superlative job in pushing back the rebels in the north.

Could you give us an update on the current situation with the rebels in northern Mali and share with us what the status of those rebels is? And what more do you think needs to be done in order to restore peace in northern Mali?

[Translation]

H.E. Philippe Zeller: I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his comments.

I'll say it again: we greatly appreciate Canada's support during this time, with the deployment of the aircraft, the announcement in Addis Ababa and the numerous telephone calls between the most senior officials of our two countries during this time.

As I just said, the operation, which we have named "Operation Serval", continues. First, there are air strikes, with targets like logistics depots, gas depots and training centres for the various terrorists that have been identified. This is particularly the case in the Kidal and north of Kidal, in the Aguelhok region and Tessalit region, where the tragic events my colleague just mentioned took place.

There are also patrols organized by our French and Malian troops around the various cities that have been liberated, because it hasn't been ruled out that certain terrorists are continuing to hide. For example, in those areas, there has been hostile firing of rocket launchers by residual groups in the Gao region. As the president of France said, operations must be pursued up to the northern mountains, so to Adrar des Ifoghas.

These are the objectives that the French forces are currently targeting. Where we are at now, we are in the air because there are still hostile groups that have been seen there. This remaining phase is delicate and difficult because the terrain is mountainous and there are still hostile elements in the area. The sooner this area is controlled and secure, the better it will be, but we aren't done yet.

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Ambassador Diallo, thank you very much for being here.

Canada for many years has had a connection with Mali. We announced in 2009 that Mali would continue to be a country of focus for us and we have been contributing substantial amounts of money to Mali to ensure success and progress.

I have a personal connection. I have sponsored a child through World Vision for the last 10 years. I've taken an active and personal interest in how Mali has been moving forward.

I wonder if you could speak to the historic investment that Canada has made, if you could talk about some of the governance strategies that have been brought forward, how they've developed, and if you could talk about capacity building and education, in a minute.

The Chair: Could you do that in a minute, please?

[Translation]

H.E. Traoré Diallo: Thank you.

Congratulations, Ms. Brown. Since you are sponsoring a Malian child, you are considered a Malian, as if you were part of Mali. That is the way it is in Mali: it's a brotherhood.

As I said earlier, the areas in which Canada intervenes affects other areas, including the ones you mentioned: mother and child health, good governance and democracy. Canada is very sensitive to that; everyone knows it. It is the largest project that Canada funds in Mali.

I am not the best person to answer your question. As I said, Canada is the one to say if it is satisfied. When a project is funded by a partner, the progress of the project's implementation with that partner is monitored. If the projects continue and Mali continues to be in Canada's aid concentration zone, it is because all these projects carried out between Canada and Mali are continuing to the satisfaction of both countries. I can tell you that. Canada is Mali's preferred partner. We are very appreciative and all Malians are very proud of this cooperation.

One day, I did a tour of all the departments in Mali that have projects under Canada's guardianship. All these people spoke about their complete satisfaction with Canada's contribution to Mali. I cannot tell you any more. If you want an update, it will certainly have to be with the Canadian authorities. From the Malian perspective, we are quite satisfied with this cooperation, which we find exemplary.

• (1155)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. I almost hate to cut that off, but we'll have to move across to the opposition for five minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both ambassadors for joining us this morning. I appreciate it very much.

I want to say to Ambassador Traoré Ami Diallo that we certainly appreciate what your country has been going through and have grave concerns about it, and we hope you can overcome this difficulty and crisis. We would like to provide what assistance we are able to in that effort.

First of all, let me quickly ask you two questions. How realistic is the prospect of dialogue with the Tuareg and the northern elements, given the history? What does your country have to do now that it hasn't done in the past 20 years, say, to effect this change?

Second, looking forward to an election sometime this year, do you require or do you seek the assistance of the international community in showing that the elections are recognized as being real, fair, and free?

[Translation]

H.E. Traoré Diallo: Thank you for your kind words.

What must we do that has not yet been done? We have done a lot. But what's unfortunate in the north is that it is a desert. Billions of CFA francs have been injected into developing this region of Mali. However, these projects were managed by the Touareg themselves. In that area, there are more black people than Touareg, but it's the Touareg who entrusted with managing all these development projects that were carried out with the assistance of our financial and technical partners.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: I don't mean to cut you off. We know that there's a long history of work being done, but we're talking about a dialogue that's supposed to solve a crisis right now. How realistic is that right now?

[Translation]

H.E. Traoré Diallo: The dialogue is very realistic because almost everyone in the north, even the Touareg, are with the Malian government. We're talking here about separatists. These people only represent themselves. But I want to talk about these people whose hands are stained with blood, people who have slit the throats of our soldiers, people whose files we've sent to the International Criminal Court. There cannot be a dialogue with those people until the International Criminal Court renders a decision in their case. But there is a dialogue with the majority of Touareg who remain and who consider themselves Malian, who are in the army and who are heads of all these Mali institutions. In fact, they help the dialogue.

The other day, I was very happy to hear the speech of the Nigerian president and his minister of foreign affairs on France Inter. They said that the MNLA was in no way representative of all Touareg, not even the Touareg of the north. I don't know how, but I will try to find the recording in Mali and send it to you one day.

The MNLA Touareg, the separatists, are a small minority of Touareg. The Mali government said that it was going to speak with those people if they did anything. Mali is willing to speak with the separatists. If we want to be democratic, we need to take into account everyone's point of view. A real democracy should not just make do with its own point of view. All points of view are welcome when we come to the table.

• (1200)

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

Ambassador, can you tell me whether the elections need international assistance or is that something that you feel will happen without any requirement of international observers or support?

[Translation]

H.E. Traoré Diallo: I did not understand your question.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: The question is about elections. You've been proposing to have an election. Is it something that you would expect or would you like to have international observers, support, or assistance to ensure acceptance of it as being legitimate, fair, and free?

[Translation]

H.E. Traoré Diallo: Thank you.

We have always had observers during elections in Africa. Independent observers from all walks of life are necessary to ensure the elections are transparent and credible. We have always asked for that in Mali. That has always been the case. It was like that even before these incidents. All elections in Mali have been covered by international observers.

All support will be welcome. We want the elections to be clear, transparent, to everyone's satisfaction, and that everyone acknowledges that the winner is really the person who won.

There is no plan. All support will be welcome.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

To our two ambassadors, thank you very much for taking the time once again on short notice to be here.

Ambassador, I see that you have given us the road map in French. We'll have this translated and then get it out to the members as soon as that's done. Thank you very much.

With that, I am going to suspend the meeting so we can get our new witnesses up.

I want to thank our ambassadors once again for being here.

● (1200) _____ (Pause) _____
● (1205)

The Chair: As we start the second hour here, I want to thank our witnesses once again for being here and coming on such short notice as well. I'm going to start over here. We have Jessica Thomson, who is the director of humanitarian assistance and emergency team with CARE Canada. Welcome, Ms. Thomson. We also have Kevin McCort, who is the president and chief executive officer of CARE Canada. Mr. McCort, thank you for being here today. Next to him, we have Bart Witteveen, who is the director of humanitarian and emergency services of international and Canadian programs with World Vision Canada. Next to him, we have Elly Vandenberg, who is also with World Vision. Thank you for being here. On the end, we have Mark Fried, who is with Oxfam Canada. Thank you very much.

Some of you are familiar faces back at our committee. Why don't we just get started? We will start with CARE Canada. For your opening remarks, we will give you 10 minutes for each one. We will try to keep you right on that so we can get some questions in, if that would be possible.

Mr. McCort, thank you for being here. We'll turn the floor over to you. The floor is yours for 10 minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Kevin McCort (President and Chief Executive Officer, CARE Canada): Thank you very much. It is an honour to be here to give a presentation on Mali. This is a major crisis. Thank you for the invitation.

[English]

As mentioned, my name is Kevin McCort. I am the president and chief executive officer of CARE Canada, and CARE is one of Canada's largest international aid and development agencies.

As part of the CARE international federation, we are present in 84 countries, including some of the most volatile areas of the world. Last year we delivered close to 1,000 poverty-fighting projects and helped more than 83 million people worldwide, and we are, as CARE, one of CIDA's largest independent non-governmental organization partners.

A year ago, as you know, a severe food crisis enveloped the Sahel region of Africa, including Mali, affecting close to 18 million people. At the same time, Mali, which was once one of the most stable countries in the region, witnessed a rapid escalation in violence in the northern part of the country, ultimately leading to the

recent military actions. Both the food crisis and the increasing violence and insecurity left many vulnerable households in Mali in crisis. Now some 4.3 million Malians are in need of humanitarian assistance. In January alone 18,000 new refugees fled to the neighbouring countries, and another 12,000 internally displaced people were forced to flee within Mali. Many sought refuge within households and communities already overwhelmed by chronic food insecurity. These new displacements are in addition to some 370,000 people who were already displaced due to conflict.

Our colleagues who recently concluded needs assessments in Ségou say that the internally displaced people have nothing and need access to food, water, adequate shelter, and other essential items such as kitchen utensils, blankets, mats, and soap.

The number of people affected in Mali can be overwhelming, but behind them there are individuals such as Rokia, a mother of four who told CARE she had fled her home with her four children. Months before, her husband had to escape from their village in the north after being attacked, and she had not seen him since. She worries constantly about how she will support her children without him, far from home and with only the clothes on her back. She is worried as to whether she will ever be able to return home. CARE recognizes the particular needs of women and girls in times of crisis, which is why we focus much of our response on women like Rokia.

In the last three weeks alone, CARE has distributed food to 54,000 people in two of the five worst-affected regions. CARE supports both internally displaced people and host communities still recovering from last year's food crisis, with programs such as Cash for Work and the provision of tools and seeds to ensure a decent harvest. CARE is also responding to the needs of refugees in neighbouring countries, with support from CIDA, to meet the needs of newly arrived Malian refugees in Niger. Soon CARE and our partners will begin distributing food supplies provided by the World Food Programme to over 130,000 people in Timbuktu.

● (1210)

[Translation]

The consolidated appeals process for Mali was launched two months ago. This appeal summarizes the humanitarian needs across the country, given the current crisis, and is based on assessments by United Nations agencies and international NGOs. In two months, only 2% of the \$373 million needed has been received. CARE itself has launched an appeal for \$6 million to respond to the most urgent humanitarian needs.

Last week, at the donor conference in Ethiopia, \$450 million was given in support of military operations in Mali. We know that the international community is able to mobilize support rapidly. CARE, and other humanitarian agencies working in Mali, is calling on donors to ensure a similar level of commitment, mobilization and attention to respond to humanitarian needs as well.

[English]

Also, the importance of principled humanitarian action and safe and unhindered access to those in need must be emphasized. CARE is a signatory of, and holds itself accountable to, accepted international humanitarian principles, standards, and codes of conduct including the Red Cross and Red Crescent and NGO code of conduct. CARE adheres to the principle of impartiality, so that we provide assistance on the basis of need, regardless of race, creed, or nationality, and is committed to addressing the rights of vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, in times of crisis.

Assistance is targeted at the individual level and seeks to reach those most in need with all necessary steps taken to avoid misappropriation in the delivery of this essential assistance. Ensuring that humanitarian actors are able to uphold the principle of working independently of political, commercial, military, or religious objectives will be of fundamental importance in the coming months.

Humanitarian organizations continue to face significant challenges in accessing areas of military operations and must be permitted safe access to areas where conflict has occurred, in order to assess the needs of civilians and urgently provide humanitarian assistance. French, Malian, and all the other armed actors operating in Mali must coordinate with humanitarian agencies to ensure neutral, independent, and impartial access and assistance is available to vulnerable communities in northern Mali and basic supply routes are not disrupted.

Accessing humanitarian assistance must not be conditional on participation in or support for military operations. A clear separation of humanitarian and military objectives must be ensured, avoiding risks of blurring lines between military and humanitarian actors, which can ultimately put humanitarian actors at greater risk.

All armed actors in Mali must ensure the safety of civilian populations. CARE is urging all forces to take every possible precaution to ensure respect of international humanitarian law and that military operations do not cause further harm to already distressed civilian populations, particularly women and children.

In line with the key provisions of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women and girls, CARE is encouraging all parties of the conflict to ensure that attention is given to the specific protection needs of women and girls in conflict, and a gender perspective is part of the training of military actors.

In conclusion, I just reiterate that Mali is clearly an example of a country where aid has saved—and can continue to save—lives. Even if Mali seems like it's a world away from Canada, we must act now, as it is our humanitarian imperative.

Thank you.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCort.

We will move to Ms. Vandenberg for 10 minutes as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Elly Vandenberg (Senior Director, Policy and Advocacy, World Vision Canada): I am very pleased to be here.

My name is Elly Vandenberg. I am the senior director of policy and advocacy at World Vision. I would like to introduce my colleague, Bart Witteveen, director of humanitarian and emergency affairs.

[English]

We really appreciate the invitation to appear before the committee. We will tell you briefly about World Vision in Mali and what our experience in the country, as well as in numerous other complex humanitarian environments, leads us to recommend to you as parliamentarians to consider as you discern the best way to respond.

World Vision Canada is a child-focused relief, development, and advocacy organization. World Vision as an international federation first responded to drought in Mali in 1975. Currently World Vision Mali works in six regions with a team of over 300 staff, including technical specialists in agriculture, food security, disaster risk reduction, water and sanitation, health, nutrition, emergency response programming, and particularly child protection.

Last month, World Vision Canada was awarded a \$1 million CIDA IHA grant to improve livelihoods of internally displaced persons and to improve access to safe water supply, appropriate sanitation, and knowledge of hygienic practices. We intend to reach over 11,000 people with this grant.

We are also working in partnership with UNICEF and other child-focused agencies to train UN and NGO staff to provide immediate psychosocial support when we come across cases of violations against children. However, much more needs to be done and child protection remains one of the most underfunded sectors.

Canadians feel proud when we commit humanitarian aid. It touches our hearts, it expresses Canadian values, it's direct and has an immediate impact, and has its own complexities. World Vision and our other NGO colleagues here have key learnings from our decades of experience of working in humanitarian situations of conflict. To address this particular crisis in Mali we urge you as parliamentarians to benefit from these learnings and consider five key recommendations, which will be outlined by my colleague, Bart Witteveen.

Mr. Bart Witteveen (Director, Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs, International and Canadian Programs, World Vision Canada): Thank you, Elly.

First, increase support for humanitarian assistance to meet urgent needs. Funding pledged for the 2013 United Nations consolidated appeal process for Mali is far too low at just 2% of allocated funds. Donor countries, including Canada, need to commit urgent funding to support the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance, both to the UN's appeal and to NGOs operating in Mali.

Priority must be given to the most critical sectors, such as food security and nutrition, health, water and sanitation, and child protection in both the southern and northern parts of Mali. Many affected children in Mali are at risk of acute malnutrition and lack access to basic education.

Second, ensure children are protected from exploitation and abuse in line with the relevant UN resolutions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Conflict significantly increases protection risks for children and thus particular attention must be paid to assessing such risks and heightened vulnerabilities.

In recent weeks World Vision has heard reports from displaced communities of forced marriage, rape, and forced recruitment of children into armed groups, corroborating previous reports from other actors. Children are also particularly vulnerable to the effects of displacement, including increased chance of separation from parents and disruption to education. Broad protection concerns regarding their safety must be taken into account with proactive steps taken to monitor and mitigate these protection risks. We should ensure adequate presence of child protection specialists on the ground. Donors, including Canada, should urgently fund critical child protection capacity gaps and interventions.

All military forces, police, and civilians deployed to Mali should receive specialized child protection pre-deployment training, which includes the capacity to prevent and monitor violations against children. Efforts should be made to ensure that child protection concerns are raised early and consistently in ongoing mediation efforts and adequately reflected in an eventual ceasefire and peace agreement. This includes dedicated initiatives for the demobilization of child soldiers, ensuring they receive appropriate assistance.

The alarming reports of sexual violence against women and girls in Mali also call for pre-deployment training of all armed forces, police, and civilians in addressing sexual violence in all phases of the operation, including the earliest mediation and ceasefire efforts. Armed groups must immediately cease recruiting children under the age of 18 and release all children previously recruited into proper care provided by humanitarian agencies.

Third, ensure free and unimpeded humanitarian access to the affected populations as well as free and unimpeded passage of all civilians out of the areas of military engagement and preserve the independent and civilian-led nature of humanitarian access and neutrality of action.

Despite improvements of access to areas in the north of Mali to assess the needs of affected civilians, the ongoing insecurity has forced many humanitarian actors to continue working with a reduced presence on the ground.

We call on all armed and military actors and regional governments to take appropriate steps to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and supplies, unhindered access for delivery

of aid to persons in need, and free and unimpeded passage of all civilians out of areas of military engagement in accordance with international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law.

We call on all military actors to maintain a clear separation of military and humanitarian objectives. This requires clear instructions to forces to not engage in humanitarian action unless requested by the UN emergency relief coordinator. Military forces must adhere to the military and civil defence assets guidelines. It is also critical that any military response respect the humanitarian operating environment for independent, neutral, and impartial humanitarian actors to provide assistance to communities and to ensure the right of civilians to receive life-saving assistance. This must apply to all actors, including ECOWAS.

Fourth, continue to strengthen mechanisms for facilitating coordination between the growing number of military actors and organizations providing humanitarian assistance. The increasing presence of multiple military actors in Mali and the speed with which they have been deployed has led to a lack of strategic clarity. This must be urgently addressed to ensure both the safety of civilians and adherence to applicable international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law.

• (1220)

World Vision welcomes the timely deployment of a civil-military coordinator to Mali by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the establishment of a civil-military coordination cell in Bamako.

World Vision calls for two things: UN member states contributing towards the military intervention to urgently establish an appropriate and effective military-to-military coordination mechanism for all international forces and the Malian army; and development of country-specific civil-military guidelines through a signed agreement to set boundaries between civil and military operations, promote an understanding between the actors, and provide a means of accountability.

Finally, World Vision does not see a military solution to the crisis in Mali. We acknowledge the Malian road map for the transition put forward by the Government of Mali. We advocate that it include real provisions for wide civil society consultations and representation as part of the peace process and recovery efforts. We urge Canada to help support the implementation of this difficult process through diplomacy and ongoing support. Canada needs to promote an inclusive process that adequately takes into account the voice and genuine grievances of all communities, including the unique vulnerabilities of children.

Thank you again for inviting World Vision to present. We welcome the opportunity to share with your our experience and recommendations, and will be pleased to take any questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move over to Mr. Fried from Oxfam Canada.

The floor is yours, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mark Fried (Policy Coordinator, Oxfam Canada): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure to be here.

I will make my comments in English, but I will be pleased to answer your questions in either official language.

[*English*]

Oxfam is present in over 90 countries in the world, and has been present in Mali for many years, Mali being one of the most vulnerable populations in the world as I'm sure you know. We follow the developments there closely, and we're concerned primarily with two things: that the swift escalation of fighting could heighten existing restrictions on humanitarian access, that is access for humanitarian actors such as the organizations you have here; and that it's going to increase the humanitarian needs of the population across the country and in neighbouring states.

I'll tell you a little bit about the situation in Gao in northern Mali. I'll give you details. Food is already quite scarce there. Stocks are likely to be depleted in a few weeks if the Algerian border remains closed and the roads to the south remain closed. Staple foods trade from the south of the country was severely disrupted over a year ago in October-November of 2011, and staple cereals such as millet have not been available in local markets for nearly a year. They've been replaced since early 2012 by rice, couscous, and wheat flour coming from Algeria. Oil and sugar are also imported from Algeria, but with the new fighting that is also disrupted. The main road to the south is closed, and the Algerian border is closed. There is very limited cross-border trade with Niger.

Many of the traders have fled the region with the advancing French troops. When they left, whatever stocks they had left were looted. Right now for the first time all of the major traders in Gao seem to have left the country.

In the main markets in Gao town three-quarters of the shops selling food are now closed. These shops supply rural markets in the area and are crucial for the survival of the rural population not just for the town, particularly for the herders, the pastoralist communities who are the vast majority of northern Mali's population outside of the main cities along the Niger River.

As is natural when food is scarce, food prices have risen by about 20% since the military intervention began in early January. Before the intervention a 50-kilogram bag of rice cost about \$34 U.S. Two weeks later it rose to \$41 U.S.

At the same time there is very little money around for people to buy these things. The banking system has been shut down since last year. Traditional methods of bringing cash into the country and to the

northern part of the country, including remittances from family members, have all been disrupted. The herders whose only source of income is to sell their animals really have nothing to rely on.

Gao was already classified as one of the most food-insecure areas of Mali before the military intervention began. It's one of the areas with the highest rates of malnutrition. Malnutrition among children under five before the intervention was at 15.2%, which is the emergency threshold set by the World Health Organization. As we say, families mostly buy most of their food, but their income has been disrupted, and their coping strategies such as selling off their assets or going into debt have really been exhausted.

So there's the essential role of humanitarian relief in a situation like this. And sadly, as with many conflict situations, access for humanitarian organizations has been restricted. There are security risks for our organizations. We've had to pull our staff back into safer areas, and so a major ask we would have of the Canadian government is to use your diplomatic clout in order to encourage the Malian government and all the active parties of the conflict to allow access for humanitarian relief.

Oxfam is currently providing humanitarian assistance in northern Mali as well as to Malian refugees in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania. We provide basic food, clean water, public health-related assistance, and we're reaching about 60,000 people in Gao and nearly 150,000 refugees outside the country.

I think one of my colleagues mentioned that nearly 350,000 people have been forced from their homes since January 2012 last year, and additional thousands have had to flee their homes in the last few weeks because of the renewed fighting.

• (1225)

Most of the people who are internally displaced are living in extremely overcrowded and difficult conditions in urban centres with host families who are already poor also. Overseas, it's a similar situation. They're in host communities that are still recovering from the food crisis of the past year.

Of course, the economy is in a terrible situation. With the freeze in aid to Mali that most donor countries put in place after the government changed, overall government expenditures have been cut by 38%. That includes the education expenditure, which is down by 17%, health spending, which is down by 35%, and investments in water and sanitation, which are down by 94%.

We're concerned that the impact of the suspension of bilateral aid and some development aid has caused a shortfall in funding for social services and could have a serious impact on the local population, not only in the conflict area.

As far as recommendations go, certainly we second the recommendations made by World Vision and CARE regarding respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law, and we'd be happy to get into details in the question period. We would ask that Canada communicate this desire to France and other allies that are actually fighting on the ground.

Canada's diplomatic efforts could focus on ensuring access for humanitarian assistance and ensuring that neighbouring states keep their borders open for refugees to flee and also for commerce to occur with an unhindered passage, particularly in trade in food.

As far as overall funding goes, Canada could make a key contribution. As my colleague mentioned, until very recently, less than 1% of the UN consolidated appeal had actually been fulfilled by donors. The European Union came through with 20 million euros just last week, which brought it up to under 2%, but there's still a huge shortfall in the needed funds.

In the longer term—we don't want to lose sight of the longer term before I finish—even if an intervention is successful and the integrity of the country is restored, there's still the major challenge of creating the conditions for a lasting peace. Any military intervention cannot take the place of a longer-term political strategy, a broader political strategy aimed at building social cohesion and inclusive governance with all communities across the country. I hope we won't lose sight of that.

I would be pleased to answer your questions.

• (1230)

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

We will start with the opposition and Mr. Dewar, please.

You have seven minutes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I thank our guests for their presentations today.

All of you had a similar message with regard to humanitarian assistance and the fact that the world in general has not stepped up to the plate. As Oxfam has suggested, just recently we met the 2% threshold. Before the EU intervention, it was 1%.

What are you looking for in terms of amounts? Just give us a dollar amount.

Mr. McCort, maybe you can tell us what is the actual amount of what's missing, or in other words, the 98%. What dollar figure is needed right now that hasn't been committed to?

Mr. Kevin McCort: The appeal was for \$373 million, as I understand it. I'm not exactly sure. Maybe my colleagues have the total that has been provided through the consolidated appeal, but \$373 million was the amount that I saw as originally requested by the UN for the consolidated appeal. We can work backwards and find 2% of that. There's a substantial gap remaining.

Our general estimation usually is that Canada covers about 4%. That's a rule of thumb that we use, so Canada's \$13-million contribution is within the range, but there are some technicalities in terms of what's in the consolidated appeal and what's outside. So there's the \$13 million, plus Canada has been a very good supporter of Mali over the years, and we encourage Canada to do as much as possible to meet the appeal or even exceed it.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I want to follow up quickly on that.

On the \$13 million that was committed, your understanding is that it is separate from the funds that were committed to Mali before, but is it coming out of the money for the region? Do you know?

Mr. Kevin McCort: I don't know the specifics. My understanding from reading other people's testimony yesterday is that it's within the humanitarian budget of CIDA for the year, so it was unallocated money that has now been allocated to the conflict.

Mr. Paul Dewar: That is an important point because we know that there was a freeze on bilateral direct aid. Moneys had been committed prior to Mali. We're running up to the end of the budget year. We'd want more clarity from the government on that so we could understand how much has been committed and how much was coming out of money tagged for Mali.

I want to touch on the way in which aid can be provided. One concern we've had on this side is that our capacity has been lessened in Africa, and in this region. Recently, there was some confusion with the government on whether we had closed our embassy, our desk, our office, in Niger. The bottom line—and they'll get their stories straight at some point—is that we do not have the same capacity in the region.

Mr. Fried, what does that mean in terms of your being able to deliver to the people on the ground? As mentioned, this is a regional issue. This was a major food crisis before this most recent conflict. If we have more capacity in the region, what does it allow us to do? Conversely, when we take capacity away, what challenges do we face in helping people on the ground?

• (1235)

Mr. Mark Fried: As you know, Canadian diplomats are not in the business of delivering humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian agencies do that, and United Nations agencies in particular.

Mr. Paul Dewar: The government tells us that the CIDA office was closed in Niger. We also hear from the government that it was an embassy, and that's theirs to sort out. But when we take away the capacity on the ground and in the region, such as an office in bordering Niger, what are the challenges that people face to helping in the region?

Mr. Mark Fried: Certainly, if we're coordinating—your own intelligence and understanding of the situation would be limited if there aren't Canadian personnel providing that to you. We're doing our best to bring our partial understanding of the situation to you today.

I don't know exactly—and perhaps my colleagues could help—what it means that there's no CIDA office in Niger for this particular crisis. Certainly, if CIDA is going to be distributing assistance and making connections for assistance, it's always helpful to have CIDA personnel in the field.

Mr. Paul Dewar: We'll go to World Vision Canada on that question.

It's really a question of access. You're having challenges, for obvious reasons right now, in terms of the access under the present circumstances. What kind of support from our government do you need to do your work on the ground? If we have infrastructure on the ground, obviously it helps you with access. When we have a presence on the ground, be it in Mali or Niger, how does that help you to do your work?

Mr. Bart Witteveen: In responding to the crisis evolving before our eyes, our key concerns are, on the one hand, resources, and, on the other hand, access. I think Canada can play a role in both of those. For resources, we're talking about funding so we can develop the humanitarian response adequate to the situation.

In terms of access, political engagement can be helpful, underscoring that the message provided facilitates independent, neutral, and impartial access to the vulnerable populations. I would assume Canada could play a role in that.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Absolutely. In fact, in the past we've had resources on the ground throughout the continent of Africa, particularly in Sudan, where we trained women to help with peace and security issues. We had policewomen here go to train women in Darfur. My point is that, for all of the things you've asked for, particularly civilian military oversight, it's hard to just climb in. It's better when you have a presence on the ground. From what we're hearing from you, my appeal to the government is that it's one thing to react to a crisis when it happens and put foodstuff in the region, but it's another to commit in the long term to the humanitarian crisis, the food crisis, and the political crisis. To do that, you need to do more than just write cheques when a crisis happens.

What I'm hearing from all of you is that this isn't a crisis to be dealt with by simply sending more food aid. I guess my question—

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You're just over time, now.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'm just over time. I'll follow up, but I've left my appeal to the government to put more infrastructure on the ground to help you do your work.

Thank you for your presentation today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

We're going to move over to Ms. Brown, please, for seven minutes.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to each of you for being here. Elly, it's nice to see you. Kevin, it's nice to see you. Mr. Fried, welcome. I don't know that we've had the opportunity to meet, but I'm delighted to have you here.

I'd like to do a little bit of math here first, just to help the opposition out. First of all, Mr. McCort, you said that about 2 % of \$373 million has been received out of the call for funding. Mr. Fried, you said that the EU has just committed 20 million euros last week. If I do the math on the number of people who live in Europe and the fact that Canada has committed \$13 million of new money—please opposition, hear that, it's new money—on a per capita basis, Canada is punching way above its weight on this.

One of the things that Canada has a history for under this government is that we pay what we pledge. When we have said that we are going to commit the money, we've given the money, and that's part of the problem that the international community has to come to grips with. When they say they're going to come to the table with money, they need to put the money on the table and not just sit there and spout off all kinds of dollars because that's not what really helps. It's getting the money in hand. We've put our money into the global fund. We've increased our contributions there. We gave to the

GAVI Alliance. In fact, we increased our contributions to the GAVI Alliance.

All of this is real money that Canada has contributed, and the fact is that Canada is not new to the scene in Mali. We've been there with \$110 million per year since 2009. That's money that your organizations have been using to put in place the kinds of programming that needed to be there to ensure safety for girls and women, to ensure opportunities for education, to ensure good governance, and to look at the food security issues.

On top of that, Canada came to the table before the Sahel problem became a global issue. We were there, and we put \$56 million into the Sahel in order to ensure that food security would be available. I wonder, first of all, if you can talk about pro-active food security? What kinds of programs have been put in place to help? Nobody saw this conflict coming. This was not something that was on the radar because Mali has had a history for 20 years of good governance and stability. This is kind of out of the realm of what anybody anticipated happening.

Can you talk about proactive food security? What programs are you working on to ensure that Mali, given its history of recurring drought that's been ongoing for decades...? This is not new. What were your organizations doing to help with that? If you talk about the success of the Sahel contribution, what projects were undertaken? That was a specific initiative outside of the other projects that humanitarian agencies were undertaking.

I put that on the table.

• (1240)

Ms. Elly Vandenberg: I'll let Bart speak to your specific questions around the proactive food security programs and also the success we've had through the Sahel contribution.

I do want to respond to the points about the 2 % and the needs. We welcome Canada's role and the leadership role that you've played. We would like to see you as a lead donor to encourage others to come to the table and respond to that pledge. Yes, we acknowledge the Canadian government's commitment. We think there's a further role that you can play as a lead donor to encourage others.

Bart, could you speak to the other specific issues around food security programs?

Mr. Bart Witteveen: Yes. Unfortunately I can't give you an easy answer to that. We've been engaged in conventional development assistance, as Elly mentioned in her introduction, for almost 30 years in Mali. A lot of this is being undermined by this escalating conflict. We're really facing a complicated challenge in terms of trying to address the immediate needs and at the same time build on the development work that we've been engaged in for so long.

As some have already mentioned, all of this is taking place against the backdrop of recurring drought and a severe food-insecure environment. We try as best we can under the circumstances to continue our development engagement, which is a range of interventions brought together in terms of trying to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable in Mali and at the same time trying to address these new needs that are coming up on top.

The simple answer is we continue those developmental activities as best we can but recognizing that the priority at this point is the humanitarian response.

•(1245)

Mr. Kevin McCort: If I may, I can give you some specific examples of the kinds of programs.

We have, as an example, a \$1.6-million contribution from CIDA through partners with Canadians branch, and one of the things it is doing very specifically is trying to improve the access of women to agricultural-related investments. It's based on evidence that if you can narrow the gap between men's access to agricultural production and women's, in many places you can double the amount of food that is produced.

So we are working to ensure that women have equitable and equal access to seeds, agricultural credit, land, and agricultural extension services so that they can improve their production. Women are usually very much involved in household-level food production. So we're very specifically focusing on improving women's access to the means of production around household food security. That's a very specific example of what agencies like ours are doing with funds that we receive from CIDA directly or through the Sahel fund that you mentioned.

The Chair: Okay, thank you. That's all the time we have.

We're going to move over to Mr. Eyking, sir, for seven minutes.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for coming today. Most of our study so far has been on the military action and I think it's good that we're switching channels because you are on the ground and dealing with what's now and what's in the future.

I was in Mali five years ago and even though it's a poor country—I visited the farms and some of the communities—there was a transition and optimism going there. It's a shame that it's into a bit of a civil war, and civil wars bring out the darkness of human beings. As somebody mentioned, there are over 4 million people in need there right now. I think some of the recommendations that have come out so far are, of course, that there has to be more aid money and that we should have a CIDA presence in Mali.

Also, I think the whole UN was alluded to. The UN is going to have a key role here and their present government should have a better relationship with them as we go forward.

I have a couple of questions first for World Vision, and then I'm going to go over to you, Mark.

I think, Elly, you mentioned this \$1 million the government provided to help work with World Vision. Can you just give me a quick description? Is that for Mali or is that for Africa? Or what's that \$1 million for?

Mr. Bart Witteveen: That \$1 million was allocated in this last round of funding. It's part of the \$13 million that's been previously mentioned and that's meant to provide immediate humanitarian response to the current context, in particular related to food

insecurity, the provision of cash and food, as well as water and sanitation projects.

Hon. Mark Eyking: It's part of that \$13 million, and you would use that \$1 million to buy food and get it on the ground.

Mr. Bart Witteveen: Among other things....

Hon. Mark Eyking: The other part is you mentioned this civil-military oversight. Give me a little description of what you would like to see there and how we could be part of that.

Mr. Bart Witteveen: The crucial issue is that the humanitarian actors need to be able to operate independently of the military action, that it should not be expected to take place in support, that it should not be hindered, and that we can develop our response purely on the basis of need. Similarly, we are advocating that the civilian population have the freedom to move in response to the evolution of the conflict for their own protection and their own safety. It's as simple and basic as that. What we're asking for is any effort, any voice that can impress upon, in particular, the military actors, but also in terms of the UN and their leadership within humanitarian coordination to ensure that this can take place.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Of course, the ambassadors were here and everybody is very optimistic that this is going to settle down fairly soon and everybody is going to get back to some sort of normality, but the reality is that after civil wars, there are scars and deep wounds and there are still animosities. I think, Mark, you mentioned how this is going to spread. Were you alluding to refugees on the move? What did you mean by the spread to other countries and to other parts of Africa?

Mr. Mark Fried: I'm referring to how the conflict itself has an impact on neighbouring countries. The most direct, obvious impact is when people cross the border and have to be taken care of. We have hundreds of thousands of people who had to flee their homes, who are now living in neighbouring countries. If they have some people to stay with, they're staying with people who are equally as poor as them or they're staying in camps. Oxfam and other agencies are providing them with basic survival services, but it's a burden. Until they can return safely home once the conflict is over, it's going to be a long-term burden for those neighbouring countries that are very poor to begin with.

•(1250)

Hon. Mark Eyking: Are those camps set up by the neighbouring countries? Are we involved in monitoring those camps and getting aid to those camps?

Mr. Mark Fried: Well, Oxfam certainly is providing assistance there. I believe I met colleagues with CARE—

Hon. Mark Eyking: NGOs are, but is there a government involved with these other countries in helping deal with this?

Mr. Mark Fried: I believe the Canadian government provides support via the United Nations agencies.

Hon. Mark Eyking: The other part is, my interest is a lot with food—because I'm a farmer—and in food aid, and I've seen the farmers there. I don't think Mali was really self-sufficient in food, but there was a lot of trade going on. You alluded to that whole disruption. Let's assume that in our best-case scenario things settle down. How can we, as our government, help the NGOs bring that back to where it needs to be so we don't get to where we're just bringing food and dropping food off? How can we get that whole economy going back to trade and food coming back and forth to other countries? How can we do that to install that quicker than just dropping off food to keep them going?

Mr. Mark Fried: Once the conflict is over, when people are no longer killing each other, there will be a phase of reconstruction, of rehabilitation.

Hon. Mark Eyking: But they would have left their farms and left their land.

Mr. Mark Fried: Most people actually are pastoralists; they herd goats or other animals. So it's not exactly a farm, and many of them are nomadic. They will have lost many of their assets, which are their animals, because they don't have anywhere to sell them now and there is a shortage, of course, of pasture, as there always is. So, you have to keep selling your goats in the market and the markets are disrupted. There likely will have to be a period where we'll be restocking—

Hon. Mark Eyking: Micro-financing could be helpful for them to get back into the game.

Mr. Mark Fried: That may have a role. We've provided animals to people, veterinary services. That's something that Oxfam does regularly when people are recovering from a drought or a conflict. Once they've recovered, it's important to make sure that the markets are actually functioning, that is, keeping borders open so that food can be traded across borders, making sure that there are traders who can actually operate. That's where the micro-finance may come in for those who may want to become traders, since the traders have fled, those who buy the goats and then resell them as meat. People have to actually perform that function, which is now almost entirely disrupted in Gao.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Our government could play a big role in helping that happen. We have to get on the ground and help you people.

Mr. Mark Fried: I would hope so, thank you.

The Chair: We have less than 10 minutes left, and I know we're going to start the next round in five minutes. What I'm going to do, Mr. Williamson, is give you about three minutes, and I'll give the NDP one final question just to wrap up with the witnesses today.

Mr. Williamson, the floor is yours.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you. It's been very interesting. It's obvious that the need in Mali is great and resources are being deployed, but not enough. It's hoped that more will come.

I want to flip back to something that was brought up that deals with security. We're in a situation now where we have both a military as well as a humanitarian crisis as a result of border security that wasn't adequate, and even domestic institutions in Mali weren't adequate for the task at hand.

Putting that aside—I don't want to look back at the past; the past is the past and we can move forward—I am curious to know how your work will be affected should the French pull out. What are your concerns on the ground for the protection of your people and people who deliver aid? Is there a concern that, if the French pull out, domestic and African soldiers will be able to secure the peace? I'd like quick answers from all of you because I think it's important that we don't revert to a situation that is again traumatic on the ground, or continues to be traumatic or lawless.

Mr. Bart Witteveen: I don't think there's a simple answer to that. I would find it very difficult to anticipate exactly what's going to happen. I think our key concern is, as I stated in my opening remarks, that we don't see a military solution to the conflict. There has to be some type of process of consultation throughout the country that takes into consideration the interests, the needs, and the grievances of all the parties that are party to the conflict to come to some longer-term solution. What we are advocating for is that those avenues are found in the most constructive way.

• (1255)

Mr. John Williamson: Let me ask you, because I think that's quite a statement...I jotted that down. You don't see a military solution as the solution. But you would have to concede that it is part of a solution. You have to have peace and stable institutions for a normal functioning democracy to take root and for humanitarian needs to be addressed. Would you agree that that's part of the solution?

Mr. Bart Witteveen: It could be, yes. I'm not a military expert so I'm not going to....

Mr. John Williamson: I'm a bit confused. Is it easier to provide aid in an environment where there is peace or where there is fighting?

Mr. Bart Witteveen: That's a rhetorical question.

The Chair: Mr. Fried, do you have a comment?

Mr. Mark Fried: I'd simply add that obviously we need to have peace in a country in order to provide the stability so that people can work their way out of poverty, and that there are serious concerns about whether the African forces can provide that sort of security you're talking about. Canada could play a role in ensuring that they have the human rights capacity, the capacity for understanding their role as protectors of civilians, as protectors of communities. And indeed, the United Nations should be deploying human rights monitors at this point, even during the conflict itself, so that we can begin that process of healing between communities and military forces, which will be essential for building the peace.

Mr. John Williamson: Right.

Mr. McCort, any comments?

Mr. Kevin McCort: What I would add is that in these contexts what's important to us is that the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian actors are built up as opposed to brought down. So we're asking anyone.... Even whether there's fighting or no fighting, humanitarian actors who are deemed impartial and neutral by the parties to the conflict can often deliver assistance even in the context of fighting. So that's the piece we're really emphasizing, that our actions need to remain apolitical and depoliticized to enable us to reach populations in need.

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

We're going to move over to Mr. Dewar and then Mr. Dusseault who's going to finish up with one quick question.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I just have a quick comment and then over to my colleague.

Based on the government's own numbers, we have about \$20 million that was committed for Mali that was not spent, from when the budgets froze. So I think it's important for people to know that the \$13 million, albeit welcome, is not in total in keeping with what the commitment was for Mali. I think it's important people know that, as welcome as that \$13 million is.

So the government was sitting on \$20 million for this fiscal year and there's still money there.

I'll turn it over to my colleague for questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I only have a few minutes left, and I have a very specific question to ask the representatives from World Vision Canada. We know that this organization works more specifically for the well-being of children in countries where there are needs. We know that children are often the most vulnerable in the vast majority of conflicts.

My question is about child soldiers in Mali. What is the situation at this time? Is this a real problem? What are some possible solutions? What role can Canada play in this regard?

[*English*]

Mr. Bart Witteveen: I think it's fair to say that it is a problem. It's very clear that some parties to the conflict are recruiting children, either by force or other means. As such, it's a critical issue. I think what's important is these are events that are very difficult to prevent. What we advocate is for an understanding of the legal ramifications

in terms of international law. In that sense we would encourage Canada to raise this issue internationally with a focus on the actors in Mali.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: I would like to take the little time I have left to address the representative of Oxfam.

How do you see the upcoming elections unfolding? Will this be a source of conflict? What do you see happening after the elections?

Mr. Mark Fried: We are always working with hope that everything will be peaceful and that the conflict will be resolved. As a foreign player, we cannot make comments on the elections in another country.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: To our witnesses, thank you very much, as I said, for being here today on short notice to discuss Mali.

I just want to read into the record a letter I've received from Minister Fantino. It says:

Dear Mr. Allison,

I'm writing in follow up to my appearance Tuesday, December 4, before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

M.P. Paul Dewar raised a question regarding the number of projects I have approved since taking on the International Cooperation portfolio. As of January 23, 2013, I had approved 35 projects.

Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to have your office contact Jennifer Cooper, Ministerial Services....

We will scan the letter and have it sent to all of the offices. That's just for the record.

Thank you once again, ladies and gentlemen. We really appreciate it.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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